

# WebMemo



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## U.S.–Czech Agreement Is a Model for Visa Reform

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Ivan Langer, Interior Minister for the Czech Republic, and Michael Chertoff, Secretary for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), today signed a memorandum of understanding paving the way for Czech participation in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The agreement demonstrates that international partners can forge agreements that improve security and facilitate travel in an age of global terrorism. This initiative should serve as a model for Congress and the Administration in moving forward on additional visa reforms.

**Visa Waiver Program.** Under the VWP, the United States and 27 countries have agreements that permit citizens to travel among them for 90 days using their passports without getting a visa. The VWP is a boon to tourism and business, bringing into the U.S. an estimated \$75 billion–\$100 billion per year. It also saves tax dollars and bolsters security by allowing the State Department, which issues visas, to focus resources on the countries of most concern.

The VWP has not been expanded since 9/11 because of concern that terrorists, criminals, or immigration violators might exploit the opportunity to enter the U.S. and remain unlawfully. Last year, Congress passed legislation promoting reform of the program. These reforms included adding more countries, requiring additional bilateral security agreements, and ensuring that visitors do not overstay or violate U.S. immigration laws. The Czech Republic will be the first country to be brought in under the reformed and improved VWP.

**Moving Forward.** The advantages of the new VWP program include the following:

- Better sharing of information, such as data on lost and stolen passports, will improve the ability of law enforcement to counter malicious visa activity;
- An electronic travel authorization system will allow the DHS to conduct more effective checks against terrorist and criminal travel;
- Implementation of an “exit” system will monitor whether visitors are complying with U.S. immigration laws and not remaining in the U.S. unlawfully;
- Reaffirming that the United States is an open and welcoming nation will improve its image abroad; and
- Facilitating travel, tourism, business, and academic exchanges will strengthen the bonds between free nations.

**Next Steps.** The Administration should actively seek to engage in bilateral agreements with other free nations qualified to participate in the VWP. Congress should seek other opportunities to encourage visa expansion and reform by adding secu-

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ity, respecting sovereignty, and promoting trade and travel.

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