



## **Giving America's Central and Eastern European Allies Fair Treatment on Visas**

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America is strongest and safest when we work closely with our allies and friendly nations who share our values. This is a lesson that too many people in the Bush Administration have forgotten in recent years. As President, I will be committed to rebuilding America's alliances, especially with our allies in Europe. Few nations have been better friends of America than the new democracies of central and eastern Europe, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Most of these nations are now our allies in NATO and our partners in the European Union.

I am disappointed to see that our relations with many of these countries, too, have deteriorated in recent years and to see America's standing with their people falling. It is time that we rebuild our close relations with Europe in general and with these proud nations in particular.

Millions of Americans have family, business, and educational ties to the people of central and eastern Europe. I have heard from many Americans, as well as foreign leaders such as former Polish President and Nobel Laureate Lech Walesa, about the importance of removing artificial barriers that make it too difficult for many citizens of these countries to visit their families in the U.S., to trade with their U.S. business partners, and to study in our universities.

Today nearly all of our western European allies enjoy access to our visa-waiver program. We need to work toward the goal of creating the same access for all of our European allies. I support current bipartisan efforts that will make it possible for some but not all of our central and eastern European allies -- citizens from countries like Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Hungary -- to come visit their family and business partners in the U.S. by making it possible for them to qualify for our visa-waiver program.

But we can't stop there. It's time to extend this same partnership -- stronger travel security standards and passport controls and visa-free travel for law-abiding citizens -- to the

homelands of Americans of Polish, Romanian, and Bulgarian descent as well. These nations are also strong allies of the United States. As President, I will work closely with them to strengthen the security of our country and help them achieve the same status as other EU members.

This step will make America more secure by strengthening our relations with important allies and by improving travel security standards and passport policies in these countries. Security requirements for participation include biometric passports, strict passenger screening through an e-travel authorization system, passenger information exchanges, strict reporting of lost or stolen passports, airport and baggage security, and agreements for home country repatriation of any visitors who violate U.S. laws.

Our central and eastern European friends are first-class allies. Americans whose families hail from these countries should not be treated as second-class citizens compared to those whose roots are in western Europe. Polish grandmothers, Romanian business people, and Bulgarian students should be able to visit the U.S. just as French and German citizens can now and just as some central and eastern Europeans will soon be able to.