

# Travellers from US face EU crackdown

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US business travellers and tourists flying to the European Union are facing the threat of the same laborious registration requirements that Washington has demanded of Europeans in the latest US security crackdown.

In its first reaction to the new US visa law, the European Commission said it was “considering” a so-called electronic traveller authorisation scheme – similar to the American plan – that would require foreigners heading to the EU to give notice of their travel plans before departure.

The threat has been conveyed to senior US officials and lawmakers, with one letter sent last month stressing that a European system would “of course operate on a reciprocal basis”.

A spokesman for the EU executive said no final decision had been taken, but the idea had received “new impetus” by the adoption of a US counter-terrorism bill last week that requires travellers to give US authorities at least 48 hours’ notice of their plans to visit the country.

George W. Bush, US president, signed the law last Friday in spite of repeated appeals by the Commission and European business groups to reconsider the measures. The law will tighten scrutiny of travellers from the 26 developed countries whose citizens do not at present require visas to enter the US, including Britain, France, Germany and most other western European countries.

Russ Knocke, spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security, said the US was “comfortable” with the EU having a reciprocal system. “It would lend itself to increasing baseline security for air travel throughout the west,” he said.

European business groups voiced sharp criticism of the US law. Carlos González, an international relations adviser at Business Europe, a pan-European federation that lobbies on behalf of more than 16m companies, said: “This measure is a setback for business travellers and we are concerned about it. Business travel to the US is a very regular activity.” The law demands the screening of all air and sea freight at foreign ports before being shipped to the US.

The German Industry Federation, BDI, hit out at the screening requirements enshrined in the law. “We are following with concern the tightening of security measures in the US, which impose a burden that is not justified by the benefits,” said the BDI’s Carsten Kreklau.

The federation added that the law “contradicted all existing customs security initiatives, which are based on targeted risk analysis”. According to BDI data, it takes about 10 minutes to scan each container – meaning that the screening of a large cargo ship “could easily result in an additional delay of 1,600 hours [nearly 70 days]”.

The spokesman for Franco Frattini, EU commissioner for justice and home affairs, said Brussels had asked the US for more information about the details of its plans – some of which have been left open in the legislation.