The Electronic Travel Authorization Program

February 24th, 2014

The Electronic Travel Authorization program is a key commitment of the Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan, and is intended to mirror the current U.S. Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program to ensure a common approach to screening travelers outside the North American perimeter.

The Electronic Travel Authorization program proposals include:

Amendments made to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.* As part of the Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan, all foreign nationals who are currently exempt from the requirement to obtain a temporary resident visa (TRV), would be required to apply for and obtain an Electronic Travel Authorization prior to travelling to Canada by air.

On the CIC website ("Description of the objective," 2013), one can see that the eTA program is a key commitment of the Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan, and is intended to "mirror the current U.S. Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program to ensure a common approach to screening travelers outside the North American perimeter."

In brief, the eTA program intends to:

1. Screen visa-exempt foreign nationals and help the Government of Canada prevent those who are inadmissible or do not meet the requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.
2. Screen visa exempt foreign nationals in order to identify threats before they arrive in the North American perimeter.
3. Facilitate travel for low risk individuals

The Electronic travel authorization program:

The introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorization proposes more equality amongst travellers. With the implementation of the eTA, even citizens from visa-exempt countries will have to apply in order to obtain such a permit prior to travelling to Canada by air.

In addition to that, the Electronic Travel Authorization also brings a new promise of increased national security, and the facilitation of travel for low risk individuals, who will be entering Canada. As aforementioned, with this initiative even individuals from visa-exempt countries will be screened, and many government resources (of which human, financial) will be saved through this early screening process. As a result, most security threats will be detected long before arriving on Canadian territory.

Furthermore, the eTA program could also be a key step in creating more equality between members of visa exempt, and non-visa exempt nations.

Problem fields of the eTA

CAPIC also believes, however, that the implementation eTA program could face challenges. For instance, the implementation of such a program could also be accompanied by difficulties in terms of costs, the amount of resources used by the government for adequately implementing it, and designating one particular Ministry that will be responsible for implementing it.

Other factors include the fact that this could render travelling more difficult for all consumers who do not possess this authorization, because they will risk being barred from entering the nation. In addition to that, if other nations decide to reciprocate this initiative, it will make travelling for Canadians, more difficult and more expensive.

Another aspect that is to be considered, is the fact that that the implementation of the eTA program might not create more equality between nationals from visa-exempt, and non-visa-exempt countries. In other words, the idea of having visa-exempt countries is based on an unequal system, and it is this very system that should be rectified in order to gain more equality between travellers.

Sincerely,

Dory Jade C. Dr. RCIC
President