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***1296 20. DHS Signs Visa Waiver Program Agreements with South Korea**

On April 18, 2008, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff signed Visa Waiver Program (VWP) memoranda of understanding (MOU) with South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan. The security enhancements outlined in the agreement puts the Republic of Korea on the path toward visa-free travel to the U.S. and potential designation as a VWP member as early as later this year.

In August 2007, Congress authorized DHS to reform the VWP and strengthen the security arrangements required of existing participant countries as well as to expand the conditions for aspiring countries to join the program. [FN71] Among the security enhancements required, DHS must establish an electronic system of travel authorization for air passengers. VWP travelers will be asked to provide some basic information online, which will generate an authorization number for travel. DHS states that it will announce complete details on how the authorization systems will work and when they will begin later this year. VWP partners also must ensure reporting of lost and stolen passports to avoid fraudulent use and enhance security measures for airports that originate flights to the U.S. to include permitting air marshals on certain flights.

In recent weeks, DHS has also signed enhanced VWP agreements with Slovakia, Hungary, and Lithuania, [FN72] the Czech Republic, [FN73] and Estonia and Latvia. [FN74] DHS continues to expand the VWP despite strong concerns expressed by members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security at a February 28, 2008 hearing entitled "Weaknesses in the Visa Waiver Program: Are the Needed Safeguards in Place to Protect America?" [FN75]

[FN71]. Implementing Recommendations of the Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act), Pub. L. No. 110-53, 121 Stat. 266 (Aug. 3, 2007). The VWP provisions of the 9/11 Act are discussed in 84 Interpreter Releases 1833 (Aug. 13, 2007).

[FN72]. See 85 Interpreter Releases 924 (Mar. 24, 2008).

[FN73]. See 85 Interpreter Releases 694 (Mar. 3, 2008).

[FN74]. See 85 Interpreter Releases 859, 862 (Mar. 17, 2008).

[FN75]. See 85 Interpreter Releases 859 (Mar. 17, 2008).
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