



Canada Lifts Visa Requirement for the Czech Republic

by Henry J. Chang

Originally published in *Blaneys on Immigration* (December 2013)



Henry J. Chang is a partner in the firm's Immigration Law group. He is admitted to the practice of law in the Province of Ontario and the State of California. Henry is also an Executive Member of the Canadian Bar Association National Citizenship & Immigration Law Section. A recognized authority in the field of United States and Canadian immigration law, he lectures extensively on the subject in both the United States and Canada.

Henry may be reached directly at 416.597.4883 or hchang@blaney.com.

On November 14, 2013, Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Chris Alexander, announced that, effective immediately, Czech nationals will no longer require a temporary resident visa to visit Canada. Czech nationals can now stay in Canada for up to six months visa-free, which is consistent with all other visa exempt nationals. This reverses Canada's previous decision to impose visa requirements on Czech nationals, which came into effect on July 14, 2009.

At that time, Citizenship and Immigration Canada ("CIC") justified its decision based on the fact that nearly 3,000 refugee claims had been filed by Czech nationals since the visa requirement was lifted in October 2007. In contrast, there were less than five such claims in 2006 when the visa requirement was still in place. At the time that the visa requirement was reinstated in 2009, the Czech Republic was the second top source country for refugee claims.

CIC has stated that a recent visa policy review of the Czech Republic has revealed that it now meets the criteria for a visa exemption. Visa policy reviews are based on several criteria, including a country's immigration issues (such as violation rates and asylum claims), the integrity of a country's travel documents, safety and security issues, border management, human rights and bilateral relations.

CIC further justified its decision to lift the visa requirement by referring to recent changes in Canada's refugee system. In particular, claimants from the Czech Republic will be processed more quickly as it is a designated country of origin, and those whose claims are rejected will be removed from Canada within a few months. ■