

EU threatens to take Sweden to court

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BRUSSELS, August 25, 2011 (AFP) - The European Union's executive arm has threatened to take ten EU states to court over their failure to bring national legislations in line with the bloc's freedom of movement rules.

The European Commission launched infringement proceedings against Austria, Britain, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Spain and Sweden between March and June, it said in a statement on Thursday.

The situation in Belgium is under review. The 16 other members of the 27-nation bloc are respecting the free movement directive.

"The right to free movement is one of the most cherished rights of EU citizens," said EU justice commissioner Viviane Reding.

"I want to ensure that all EU citizens can effectively enjoy their free movement rights," said Reding, who last year sparked a row with France over its expulsion of Roma minorities from Romania and Bulgaria.

Infringement proceedings are a first step used by the commission to force a state to comply with EU rules. A government that fails to meet the bloc's demands can be hauled before the European Court of Justice, which can impose big fines.

The French government adopted on June 16 amendments required by Brussels, including safeguards to protect EU citizens from arbitrary expulsions or discriminatory treatment, the commission said.

"Last summer's events were a wake-up call for Europe," Reding said.

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"The commission will not hesitate to speak out if member states do not properly apply this fundamental right, notably the procedural safeguards that protect EU citizens from facing arbitrary or disproportionate expulsion."

Germany sent a response to the commission this week and it is being analysed, an EU official told AFP on condition of anonymity.