



To the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania Audronius Ažubalis

#### APPEAL

of non-governmental organizations, initiatives and campaigns from Lithuania, Belarus and other countries on behalf of the VISA-FREE travel coalition Go Europe! Go Belarus!

Dear Mr. Minister,

we refer to you with a proposal and appeal to support further steps to promote people-to-people contacts and facilitation of ties between our countries, Lithuania and Belarus.

We strongly appreciate statements of Lithuanian officials declaring openness of Lithuania to Belarusians, as well as the repeal of fee for Lithuanian national visa, although it only applies to a rather narrow category of Belarusian citizens.

Nevertheless, these steps are not enough for a real change to happen in terms of contacts between citizens of Lithuania and Belarus, something we believe to be of key importance to influence situation in today's Belarus towards democratic transformations.

Therefore we propose you:

1. To amend the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania **to allow the consular offices of the country to regularly issue short-term multi-entry Schengen visas with a validity of five years, as provided by the European Union Visa Code established in 2009, rather than one year, as is still provided by the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners in the Republic of Lithuania.** Such a little amendment would be very important for Belarusians who should often visit Lithuania because of family, business, public and other reasons. At present, even those Belarusians who have been repeatedly applying for visas to Lithuania for many years and have never violated visa rules or the legislations of EU member states, still need to re-apply for visas annually. For some categories, notably human rights defenders and civil society activists, multiple entry visas are still sometimes issued for just six months. It contributes to the workload of consular offices and bureaucratic pressure on all stakeholders. Nor does it contribute to establishing and maintaining long-term contacts between citizens of our countries. In addition, the current situation is in conflict with official statements of the Lithuanian leadership and prevents both sides from fully enjoying the opportunities given to all member states of the Schengen area by the Community Code on Visas.
2. **To actively promote coming into affect of the Agreement on Small Cross-Border Movement between Belarus and Lithuania** to enable the residents of the Belarusian-Lithuanian borderland to cross the border of the neighboring country by simplified procedure. Though signed and ratified, the agreement implementation is prevented by political difficulties now, and we fully realize this is not a Lithuanian side whom we should blame for it. However, a strong and public position of Lithuania could facilitate some progress if Belarus were reminded about a need to enter the stage of implementation, the way it is done with Latvia. Should Belarus stay reluctant, it would at least let the society see the reasons behind the problem.

Created in 2010 thanks to efforts of Belarusian NGOs and think tanks as well as their partners in the EU member states, our public coalition seeks to achieve the relaxation of visa requirements between Belarus and Schengen area and step-by-step introduction of visa-free movement, a goal provided by the EU Eastern Partnership program. Our efforts are coordinated with numerous partners in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries, aiming at removing visa barriers throughout the entire European continent.

We will be grateful to Lithuania for supporting this idea, crucial for relations between our countries and their democratic future. For our part, we would like to assure you that we are doing every effort in Belarus to promote the visa facilitation and lifting of visa regime for Lithuanian as well as other EU citizens. It also applies to rooting out another survival of the old days, a procedure of compulsory registration of foreign citizens who visit Belarus.

Yours sincerely,

on behalf of the VISA-FREE travel coalition Go Europe! Go Belarus!

**Belarusian organizations abroad:**

Belarus Watch (Lithuania)  
H.U.B. – The Civil and Political Representation of Belarus in Lithuania  
“StudAlliance” – Youth association in Lithuania  
Belarusian Education Society (Lithuania)  
Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania)  
Belarusian Information Center (Lithuania)  
Belarusian Society of Political Prisoners and Deported Persons (Lithuania)  
Student Representation of the European Humanities University (Lithuania)  
Belarusian Culture Society in Lithuania  
Belarusian House in Warsaw (Poland)  
“EuroBelarus” – International consortium (based in Lithuania)  
“New path for Belarus” (Estonia)  
Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels)

**Belarus:**

The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus  
Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions  
Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies  
“Varuta” – Baranavičy Information Center  
“Viasna” – The Human Rights Center  
“GayBelarus”  
“Civic Forum” – Republican Public Youth Organization  
“Dzedzich” – Agency of Regional Development  
“Dobraya Volya” – Charity Foundation  
“Civic Initiative “For Freedom of Religion””  
For the Free Development of Business  
Legal Transformation Center  
Mahiliou Youth Center  
“Nadzeya” – Socio-Educational Centre for Women  
“Naračanka” – Center of social activity (Miadziel)  
“Our House” – Civil campaign  
“Our Alternative” – The coalition of organizations (Hemel)

“Our Belarus” – The human rights movement  
“Our Generation” – The initiative group of the association of Belarusian pensioners  
Puchavičy district organization of consumer rights protection  
The Education Center “POST”  
“The Movement for Freedom” – the human rights and educational NGO  
“The modern technologies for informing the population of Belarus”  
“The Third Sector”, Centre for Informational Support of Public Initiatives, Hrodna  
The Lev Sapieha Foundation  
The Center for European transformation  
The Center for European Studies  
The Centre for Social Innovations  
“Ecoagrotour” – Pastavy  
“Ecohouse”

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