



Delivered to:

Vladimir Putin – President of the Russian Federation

Herman Van Rompuy – President of the European Council

Dmitry Medvedev – Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation

José Manuel Barroso – President of the European Commission

Sergey Lavrov – Minister of Foreign Affairs

Catherine Ashton – High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Your Excellences,

Attached please find a joint appeal by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and Visa-free Europe Coalition “On the re-introduction of visas for crews of EU Transport Vehicles by the Russian Federation”. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely yours,

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Berlin, Warsaw, 31 October 2012



**Joint Appeal by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum
and Visa-free Europe Coalition**

**On the re-introduction of visas for crew of EU Transport Vehicles
by the Russian Federation and reciprocal measures on the EU side**

31 October 2012

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russian Civil Society Forum and the Visa-Free Europe Coalition express their strongest concern regarding the planned restrictions of the visa regime of the Russian Federation towards the European Union citizens. The visa requirements expanded to include crew members of transport vehicles are to come into force on November 1, 2012 and will affect citizens of those EU Member States, which do not have bilateral agreements with Russia. We appeal to the authorities of the Russian Federation to reconsider this decision, harming the visa dialogue between Russia and the EU, and to withdraw from its implementation.

Russian and European societies expect increased co-operation between their authorities in order to accelerate visa liberalisation dialogue, which is fundamental for strengthening people-to-people contacts including business, scientific, cultural and civil society cooperation as well as the development of a common European space. Ongoing negotiations on the amendments to the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement¹ have triggered high expectations for further simplification of visa requirements, rapid achievement of visa-free regime and the de-politicisation of visa dialogue. These expectations have been, however, thwarted by the unmerited and unexpected decision on the part of the Russian Federation to toughen the visa regime by reintroducing visa requirement for transport vehicles crews of selected EU member states.

In the opinion of civil society organisations from Russia and the EU, working together within the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum as well as within the Visa-free Europe Coalition this decision is a considerable step back in the visa dialogue, which results in diminished trust between EU and Russian partners both on the level of diplomatic relations as well as societies. The decision to re-impose visa requirements on some professional groups from selected EU member states appear to be unjustified and discriminating. It will slow down the process of visa liberalisation dialogue between the EU and Russia.

¹ *Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to the citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation, 2007, L 129/27*



We encourage the EU leaders to speed up the visa facilitation dialogue and broaden up suggested circles of people to benefit from visa liberalisation. In particular, we believe that representatives of civil society groups and non-governmental organisations should be among such groups. Engaging in dialogue with civil society on visa liberalisation issue would help advancing the current negotiation between the EU and Russia on the amendments of the visa facilitation agreement.

All citizens of the EU member states should enjoy the same facilitations for the issuance of Russian visas, which would ensure a constructive dialogue between the EU and Russia eventually resulting in visa liberalisation. We call upon the Russian federal authorities to refrain from re-introducing a visa regime for EU countries' crew members of transport vehicles and the EU authorities from adopting reciprocal measures.