



Don't wait for visa-free Europe!
Visa-free Europe Coalition statement on Eastern Partnership Summit

12 December 2013

The Visa-free Europe Coalition would like to express satisfaction with the overall result of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. An important step was made on the path of facilitation and liberalisation of visa regime between the European Union and its Eastern neighbours. As Moldova has fulfilled all criteria required for liberalisation, Belarus declared joining negotiations on visas, we call on Ukrainian authorities to intensify efforts to fulfill Visa Liberalisation Action Plan provisions in order to make visa-free regime between Ukraine and EU possible.

The Visa-free Europe Coalition welcomes the decision of the European Commission to officially recognize that the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan were fully met by the Republic of Moldova. The proposal of the European Commission, on the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, to allow visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Moldovan citizens holding the biometric passports represents a clear sign that the EU is strict and fair towards the Eastern Partnership countries which are involved in the visa liberalization process.

Given that the Republic of Moldova met the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, we call on the European Parliament and the European Council to proceed as soon as possible with the discussion of the visa liberalisation of Moldova and the transfer of the country to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirements. We would like to stress that in order to avoid technical delay, the visa liberalisation for Moldova should take place before the end of the current mandate of the European Parliament and European Council. It should become precedent significant in the context of the overall character of Eastern Partnership project. Since it proves that EU is reliable partner that fulfil its obligations.

We would also like to call on the Moldovan government to ensure the irreversibility and sustainability of the reforms undertaken within the visa liberalisation process and remain committed to the agreements between the European Union and Republic of Moldova.

We also congratulate Moldova and Georgia for initialling the Association Agreements with the EU and Azerbaijan for signing Visa Facilitation Agreement which will simplify visa procedures for a large number of Azerbaijani citizens and

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allow them to visit European Union facing less obstacles. We call on both parties to conclude and sign Readmission Agreement as quickly as possible and to launch the visa dialogue.

The Visa-free Europe Coalition welcomes the decision of Belarus to join negotiations on facilitation and liberalisation of visa regime with the EU. We expect concrete steps of both parties to ease travelling through the EU-Belarusian border. Because no agreement on facilitation of issuance of visas is signed, Belarusians are not allowed to obtain visas in simplified procedures and pay the highest fee possible – €60.

With great disappointment we acknowledged the decision of Ukrainian authorities not to sign the Association Agreement against will of majority of citizens. We call on both parties to continue visa dialogue, regardless of overturn in Kyiv's foreign policy. We expect the EU institutions to elaborate satisfactory plan of supporting Ukrainian society, among others, by liberalisation of the visa regime. The EU should provide an assistance in accomplishment of remaining criteria of Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. Consular services of EU Member States should use provisions of the Visa Code and Visa Facilitation Agreement in order to provide efficient issuance of multiple visas with long term of validity. Ukrainian society for over two weeks have protested in Kyiv and other cities proving its pro-European attitude. European Union should not disappoint Ukrainian society and should show any support possible, including in the area of visa policy.

The Visa-free Europe Coalition recommendations are:

- The EU should **decide on visa liberalisation for Moldova** before the end of the current mandate of the European Parliament.
- **Moldovan government should ensure irreversibility and sustainability of reforms** undertaken within the visa liberalisation process.
- **Azerbaijan and the EU should sign Readmission Agreement** as soon as possible to enable launching visa dialogue.
- **Belarus should realise its declaration and commence negotiations** on facilitation and liberalisation of visa regime with the EU.
- **Ukraine should continue reforms** required by Visa Liberalisation Action Plan.
- The EU should consider concrete steps in support of Ukrainian society, including **further facilitation and liberalisation of visa regime**.
- Member States of the EU **should effectively use provisions of legal framework regulating issuance of visas to ease travelling** for Eastern Partnership citizens.

Last, but not least, we would like to congratulate to all parties of the Eastern Partnership initiative and Lithuanian presidency in the EU Council for an impressive effort before and during the Summit, which let all abovementioned developments to happen.

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