



## **Visa-free Europe Coalition statement on suspension of visa requirements for citizens of Ukraine**

18 December 2013

At this difficult time million-strong rallies prove the Ukrainians' desire to be an integral part of the European Community, defending their European choice firmly and peacefully, demonstrating their commitment to European values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

However, while Ukrainian officials having diplomatic and official passports keep entering the EU without visas, the rest of Ukrainian citizens still suffer from artificial administrative barriers on their way to the European Union, despite some relief in the visa arrangements of the EU Member States.

Having the greatest respect for the principles of the EU visa liberalization policy, including the introduction of a unified regional approach before achieving visa-free country criteria and meeting the appropriate action plan benchmarks, we nevertheless urge the relevant EU institutions, especially the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament, to show some flexibility, creativity and attention to this issue giving consideration to the outstanding, inspiring, and yet disturbing political environment prevailing in Ukraine today.

Ukraine has significantly advanced on the way to implementing the EU Visa Liberalization Action Plan, and has met most of the criteria, which was specifically acknowledged in the 3rd progress report for Ukraine published by the European Commission in November 2013.

Therefore, taking into account the importance of the present moment, we call on the governments of the EU Member States, and the EU institutions **to express European solidarity in a practical and tangible way and decide on a temporary suspension of the visa regime for the Ukrainian citizens' short-term travels to the EU for the year 2014.**

We believe that at the time when millions of citizens of Ukraine are fighting for their right to a European choice, introduction of a visa-free regime would send a clear message of support from the EU and would come as an expression of trust and respect to those Ukrainians, who, according to the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso, are writing the new narrative for Europe today!

Instead, postponement of the prospect for the abolition of visas for the citizens of Ukraine will only increase the room for manipulation by the authorities and for pressure on the citizens of Ukraine, and will deny them the opportunity to witness the realities of life in the European Union, thus limiting their opportunities and freedoms.

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**VISA-FREE EUROPE COALITION**

Sapieżyńska 10a, 00-215 Warsaw, Poland  
contact@visa-free-europe.eu [www.visa-free-europe.eu](http://www.visa-free-europe.eu)

We also believe that this step will be perceived by Ukrainian citizens as a sign of a real attention to them from the European Community, will create an ever more significant request for reforms, and will promote the development of civic engagement. The temporary nature of such a measure will increase the Ukrainian citizens' interest in and attention to the Ukrainian Government's unprecedented long-term performance of tasks set out in the Action Plan on Visa Liberalization for Ukraine.

The temporary suspension of the visa regime could become permanent on condition that Ukraine fulfils other criteria stipulated by the Action Plan on Visa Liberalization over the course of 2014.

We believe that such a progressive and, we must admit, an unconventional step will prove to be an evidence of courage of the United Europe for the citizens of Ukraine and its living word of genuine solidarity, and, as the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso put it, readiness to stand by the people of Ukraine in this very difficult moment.

Coalition members against the Statement

*Romanian Center for European Policies*

*Open Society European Policy Institute*

Coalition member abstained from

*Institute for Development and Social Initiatives "Viitorul"*