



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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EU statement on the enlargement of the Schengen Area

In response to the statement of the Delegation of Belarus in the Permanent Council on 21 December 2007 the European Union wishes to state the following:

On 21 December 2007 nine EU Member States joined the Schengen area. Internal border control for land and sea borders between these and other Schengen countries were lifted. Subsequently, travel in the Schengen area has been made considerably easier. 24 European countries have introduced free movement for all – their own nationals, other EU citizens as well as people from outside the EU. Third country nationals, including Belarusian citizens, can now travel with one Schengen visa within the whole enlarged Schengen area and do not need to apply any longer for a national visa of the said nine EU Member States.

The Schengen system foresees uniform procedures and scales for visa fees. The fee for a Schengen visa is waived for a number of categories of persons, such as children under six years, pupils, students, post-graduate students and accompanying teachers as well as scientific researchers. No fees can be charged for third country nationals who are family members of an EU citizen or of a national of the Agreement on the European Economic Area. Furthermore, Member States have further opportunities to promote contacts between the EU and Belarusian citizens by means of waiving or reducing the fees in particular cases. The EU has signed a number of visa facilitation agreements that foresee lower visa fees. Such agreements are in force *inter alia* with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

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The European Union welcomes the fact that, given the high numbers of visa applications, EU Member States are an attractive destination for Belarusian citizens. We remain confident that this will be the case also in the future. For the EU, enhanced and intensified contacts with the Belarusian people are important. The EU is committed to fostering trade, social and cultural exchanges and regional cooperation across its external borders. To this end, the possibility of simplified border procedures for local border traffic has been established. Agreements in this regard may be concluded with third countries.

The EU recalls that it has offered Belarus a full partnership within the European Neighbourhood Policy provided that the Belarusian authorities take concrete measures towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This offer, which is still valid, could bring substantial benefits to the people of Belarus, such as easier travel to the EU, possibilities to work and study in the EU, increased business and trade opportunities in the EU as well as EU assistance for Belarus in various sectors.

The EU calls again on the Government of Belarus to use this opportunity and not to deprive the Belarusian people of the benefits of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Norway, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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