

**Question for written answer E-005320/2014
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Esther de Lange (PPE)

Subject: EU biometric visa requirements

Over more than twenty-five years and in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, NGOs (such as the Dutch organisation 'Stichting Rusland Kinderhulp') have been organising exchange programmes to promote the health and wellbeing of children living in the areas in Ukraine, Belarus and western Russia that have been hit hard by Chernobyl.

The work of NGOs not only brings health benefits to these children, but also makes a significant contribution to the development of civil society in the region and fosters partnerships and cultural understanding across borders. In this way, exchange projects are contributing to the objectives of the EU's Eastern Partnership. Between 500 000 and one million children from Eastern Europe have participated in exchange projects involving visits to Germany or the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, owing to the new EU requirements concerning biometric passports and visas, NGOs are being hampered in their activities. In order to obtain a visa and meet the EU requirements, people need to travel to embassies which are often more than 500 km away. These travel costs are endangering the projects, as 80 to 90 % of the children come from rural areas.

1. Is the Commission aware of the problems that EU biometric visa requirements pose for the work of NGOs?
2. Could the Commission specify which exemptions exist from EU visa requirements?
3. Does the Commission think that exemptions could be granted from the visa requirements for children who receive an official invitation from NGOs such as Stichting Rusland Kinderhulp?