

**Question for oral answer O-000062/2013
to the Commission**

Rule 115

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on behalf of the EFD Group

Subject: EU external border with Belarus

Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership is a positive indication that the country will not turn its back on Europe. It is crucial that Belarus also take part in EU initiatives in the future and that it endeavour to develop bilateral cooperation.

The Lithuania-Belarus border demarcates the external border of the EU. It is the meeting place of two large economic entities, namely the European Union and the Customs Union of the Eurasian Economic Community, with many European countries holding an interest in Belarus. Belarus' borders serve as a major transport hub for the exchange of goods with Eastern neighbours and other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Today, cross-border transport at the Lithuania-Belarus border is impeded by traffic jams that stretch for kilometres. The slow passage of traffic through the border serves as an obstacle to trade growth and creates problems for citizens in crossing the border. Schengen visas for Belarusians cost EUR 60, while for Russians and Ukrainians they cost EUR 30. There is no justification for such discrimination against Belarusian citizens and it prevents them from travelling to the EU.

What action will the Commission take to resolve the complicated situation surrounding the Lithuania-Belarus border and to maintain transport flows through the border region? Who, in the Commission's opinion, must take responsibility for losses and inconvenience suffered by traders?

What measures does the Commission envisage in order to resume negotiations with Belarus regarding visa arrangements and readmission agreements, and to reduce the cost of Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens?

Does the Commission intend to propose an action plan for the normalisation of EU-Belarus relations? What initiatives and measures are foreseen to resume fully-fledged bilateral political dialogue between the EU and Belarus and to ensure further participation by Belarus in the Eastern Partnership?

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