

WRITTEN QUESTION P-4422/08  
by Inese Vaidere (UEN)  
to the Commission

Subject: Russia's plans to lift the visa regime for some EU citizens who are Russian nationals

Recently the Russian Federation granted the right of visa-free travel to Russia to residents (non-citizens) of Latvia and Estonia, which has had a negative impact on the process of integration of non-citizens and their wish to naturalise as citizens of those Baltic States.

Furthermore, according to information confirmed by Andrei Zeronkov, chairman of the Constitution Party in Russia, Russia has plans to consider officially as Russian nationals all residents of the Baltic States who have formerly held USSR citizenship and 'feel close ties with Russia', regardless of the citizenship they currently have, and to grant them (including those with Latvian (EU) citizenship) visa-free travel to Russia.

Is the Commission going to react to the decision of the Russian authorities to give visa-free entrance into Russia to non-citizens of Latvia without informing the Government of Latvia, in spite of lifting visa regulations for citizens of the border zone in both countries?

What is the Commission's opinion about the next step – an intention to increase the number of residents and citizens of Latvia, who will have more privileged status depending on their nationality and ethnic background? What is the Commission's opinion about Russia's intention to grant a visa-free regime for some EU citizens?

The Commission has stressed that all EU citizens must be treated equally and the EU should not be divided, after several EU Member States took action to move closer to a visa-free regime with the US. Does the Commission see this case as unequal division of EU citizens?

How does it fit into the context of the EU-Russia visa dialogue aimed at setting up reciprocity and an equal requirement for mutual travel for the citizens of both the EU and Russia?

Does the Commission consider these developments as interference in the internal affairs of the EU Member States concerned? Is the Commission aware of the impact and consequences this decision will have on these EU Member States' efforts to facilitate the process of naturalisation and to create a united and integrated community?