

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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WRITTEN DECLARATION

pursuant to Rule 116 of the Rules of Procedure

by Genowefa Grabowska, Justas Vincas Paleckis and Hannes Swoboda

on reducing the cost of obtaining a visa for Belarusian citizens

Lapse date: 8.5.2008

0012/2008

Written declaration on reducing the cost of obtaining a visa for Belarusian citizens

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Rule 116 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. having regard to the enlargement of the Schengen area on 21 December 2007,
- B. whereas, since 1 January 2008, Belarus has been the only EU Eastern neighbour whose citizens have to pay €60 for a single-entry Schengen visa, which approximates to one third of the average monthly salary in Belarus,
- C. having regard to the EU's position on supporting the democratisation process and facilitating people-to-people contacts between Belarus and its EU neighbours,
- D. having regard to the high intensity of movement between Belarus and its Western neighbours (Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) and the sharp decrease which has been noted in the number of Belarusian citizens travelling to the EU following the increase in Schengen visa charges,
- E. whereas Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the Western Balkans have already signed Visa Facilitation Agreements, but Belarus is, as yet, uninterested in such an agreement,
 1. Calls on the EU to take further steps towards the facilitation and liberalisation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as only such action can help to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, i.e. to facilitate and intensify people-to-people contacts and to democratise that country further;
 2. Urges the EU to reduce the cost of Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated;
 3. Calls on the Commission to start negotiations on the Visa Facilitation Agreement with the Belarusian authorities;
 4. Instructs its President to forward this declaration, together with the names of the signatories, to the Council.