



Resolution:

Open door policy for Belarusian citizens

Following the expansion of the Schengen zone to the Belarusian border, the visa fees have been raised dramatically and there has been a large increase in required application procedures. The result is that ordinary Belarusians are kept from experiencing the democratic reality of Europe and that the authoritarian regime is able to maintain its monopoly on truth.

Traditionally Belarusian citizens have maintained strong economic and cultural ties with their neighbors: Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. However, this exchange of ideas and experiences is now hindered by bureaucratic rules and economic demands which, to quote the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)-report from November 2009, "pose an almost insurmountable obstacle" for most of the population. YEPP is of the opinion that these hindrances must be removed to ensure people-to-people contact that contribute to the acceptance of democratic ideas among regular people in Europe's last dictatorship.

Belarusian citizens pay twice as much for a Schengen visa as citizens of the other Eastern Partnership-countries. This sum should be lowered to match the level in these countries. However, softening the economic hindrances is not enough. The bureaucratic wall must also be torn down. Current demands to supply documentation on all activities while in Schengen, place of work, as well as other pieces of information are heavy strains on many ordinary citizens. The opposition is especially exposed to these demands as the revelation of this information would be harmful to them. Consequently, the process of issuing visas must be drastically simplified to ensure international political activity, tourism and economic cooperation between peoples.

YEPP demands that:

1. The Price of Visas to the Schengen zone for Belarusian nationals is lowered to the level of the other EaP-countries.
2. The process of issuing visas for Belarusian nationals is drastically simplified.
3. We welcome the decision by the Council of the European Union on the 17th of November to revise the current standards of procedure when issuing visas to Belarusian citizens, and ask the commission to initiate the following changes.

Adopted by the YEPP Council in Tirana, Albania, December 5, 2009