

Council of the European Union

Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER)

25 May 2016

Steering Committee Statement on Possible Delays in Introducing Visa-Free Regime with Georgia and Ukraine

The EaP CSF Steering Committee expresses concern over the intention of the EU Member States to couple the Council decision on visa liberalization for Georgia and Ukraine with revising the temporary suspension mechanism of the visa exemption in cases of rapid growth of illegal migration from third countries under Regulation No 539/2001.

While we recognize the legitimate right and urgent need of the EU to control its external borders, Georgia and Ukraine, the Eastern Partners that fully complied with the requirements of the Visa Liberalization Action Plans (VLAPs), are not posing any essential migration challenges to the EU, as corroborated by the European Commission. The revision of the temporary suspension mechanism will automatically apply to all countries enjoying the visa waiver with the EU, therefore there is no practical need to combine such amendments with the decision on visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine.

Should the Council decide to couple the two issues, this procedure will result in unnecessary and substantial delay for the introduction of the visa-free regime. Given the public opinion trends, we are convinced that such a delay will be perceived as an artificial obstacle, severely undermining the credibility of the European Union both in Georgia and Ukraine.

By undermining its reputation as a reliable partner, which adheres to its rules and procedures and stands by its commitments, the EU runs a risk of alienating the societies in these countries. Further combined with the persistence of the old elites and destabilizing influence of Russia, the path of the reforms, including those on antidiscrimination and countering corruption, implemented within VLAPs, can be endangered. Such a development could lead to a political and economic destabilization of the two countries and, consequently, could have a negative impact on the international credibility of the EU and its policies.

Therefore, we:

- support the decision of the recent Justice and Home Affairs Council session to introduce a monitoring mechanism and assessment system that would serve as a safeguard against the rollback of the VLAP reforms after the visa liberalization;
- appeal to the Council of the European Union to refrain from unnecessary delays in concluding the visa liberalization process for Georgia and Ukraine;
- ask the EU Council to decouple the necessary revision of the temporary suspension mechanism of the visa waiver and the decision on the visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine, and to table the necessary amendments to the Regulation No 539/2001 separately.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum