



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM  
ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

# Policy Paper

## **Visa Policy Facilitation and Liberalisation**

To the Summit of the  
European Union and the Russian Federation  
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**Working Group „Democratic Structures and Processes“**

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## **“Visa Policy Facilitation and Liberalisation”**

The freedom of movement, including the opportunity to cross state borders without unnecessary obstacles, is a fundamental human right and a crucial democratic value. It therefore remains a focal point of civil society organisations both from the European Union and the Russian Federation. Visa regime is still a huge barrier to people-to-people contacts, business, scientific and cultural cooperation and exchange between Russia and the EU.

Little progress has been made regarding the areas targeted by the recommendation of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum in 2011. The level of implementation of the existing agreements (Visa Facilitation Agreement between the EU and Russia and the EU Visa Code ) remains inadequate, including the fact that multiple long-term visas are not granted to all who qualify according to the existing provisions. The reliance on the justification of the purpose of visit limits the opportunity to fully benefit from uniform multiple-entry long-term visas (a businessperson who is granted a multiple visa due to the need to visit the EU states for business purposes may face a problem when travelling as a tourist, since the visa is not used according to the declared purpose). Electronic application systems are not in place, what is more, even the existing ones do not function properly, making the application process burdensome and time-consuming. Finally, the transparency of the visa liberalisation process between the EU and Russia has not been enhanced, with the list of Common Steps towards Visa-free Short-term Travel (hereinafter: the list of common steps) remaining closed to the public. The only area where the progress is noticeable is the advancement of negotiations on the amendment of the visa facilitation agreement. The proposed facilitation mechanisms include fee waiver and long-term visas for civil society representatives. If adopted, these instruments will considerably improve the situation of civil society leaders, including human rights activists, just as it was recommended by the EU-Russia Forum in 2011. Thus, all the previous recommendations by the EU-Russia CSF remain standing.

Building on the previous recommendations, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is drawing attention to the following issues:

- **Visa facilitation should be enhanced**

The Amendment to the existing Visa Facilitation Agreement should be finalised and signed as soon as possible. Civil society representatives should be included into the group of categories enjoying facilitation of visa regime. The authorities should disseminate the new regulations.

- **Civil society should be involved in visa dialogue**

In order to enable full participation of the EU and Russian civil society organisations, the list of common steps, a document negotiated by the Russian Federation and the European Union listing the benchmarks to be met in order to achieve mutual visa liberalisation, should be made public immediately. Civil society’s experience of independent research and monitoring, promotion of

experience sharing, information campaigns and international cooperation would considerably contribute to the fulfilment of the common goal of reaching a visa-free regime for Russian and all of the European Union's citizens. This is possible only when the required criteria are publicly known.

- **Visa dialogue should be depoliticized**

The visa dialogue should be based only on the transparent criteria of the disclosed list of common steps, with no reference to the dynamic political developments between the European Union and Russian Federation. Visa policy cannot be used as a political instrument. Only this can ensure an honest process of visa liberalisation and facilitation.

- **Registration procedures should be simplified**

According to Art. 10 of the 2007's Visa Facilitation Agreement, registration procedures for foreigners in Russia and the EU should be aligned as soon as possible. It is crucial for Russian authorities to recognize, adopt and implement international standards in this matter.

- **Visas for volunteers (charity work visas) should be introduced in Russia**

Currently voluntary work is not properly regulated in Russian legislation and the category of charity work visa simply does not exist. This forces voluntary workers to apply either for tourist or business visas, neither of which correctly reflects their status. The Russian Federation should introduce a special category of long-term visa for persons participating in foreign voluntary service and numerous programmes of long-term youth exchange – visiting Russia for a period of more than 90 days.

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