



Visa Facilitation and Readmission: the European Union and Belarus sign agreements

Brussels, 8 January 2020

Today, the European Union and Belarus signed a visa facilitation agreement and a readmission agreement. The agreements represent an important step in EU-Belarus relations and pave the way for improved mobility of citizens, contributing to closer links between the EU and its Eastern Partnership neighbours. At today's signing ceremony, Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva **Johansson**, together with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of Croatia as Council Presidency, Davor Božinović, signed for the EU, while Belarus was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Makei.

Commissioner Johansson said: *"These agreements between the European Union and Belarus are a significant step forward in our cooperation. They will improve the mobility of our citizens in a well-managed and secure environment and help build closer links between the European Union and Belarus. From the European side, we will now move ahead rapidly with ratification procedures, so citizens can feel the benefits as soon as possible."*

The visa facilitation agreement will make it easier for Belarusian citizens to acquire short-term visas to come to the European Union. Once the visa facilitation agreement enters into force, the visa fee will be reduced to €35. In addition, the service fee will be limited and the deadline for consulates to take a decision on a visa application will be shortened. Several categories of travellers, including journalists, students and members of official delegations, will be able to receive multiple-entry visas with increasingly longer validity, while having to submit less supporting documents to prove their purpose of travel. Belarus has unilaterally introduced measures to facilitate short-term visa-free travel for EU citizens arriving in Minsk.

The main objective of the EU-Belarus readmission agreement is to establish, on the basis of reciprocity, procedures for the safe and orderly return of persons who reside irregularly in the EU or Belarus, in full respect of their rights under international law.

Next steps

Following today's signature, the agreements will be submitted to the European Parliament for consent. The Council will then be able to formally conclude the ratification of both agreements. A ratification procedure is also required on the Belarusian side, through approval from Belarus National Assembly. The agreements could enter into force in June 2020 (on the first day of the second month following conclusion). Both agreements will enter into force on the same day.

Background

Negotiation of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement formally started in 2014. In February 2015, the Council amended its negotiating directives by including the possibility to negotiate a reciprocal visa waiver for the holders of diplomatic passports. At the sixth round of talks held on 26 March 2019, the parties reached final agreement on both texts, which were initialled on 17 June 2019.

Over the past years, there has been progress in EU-Belarus relations. Belarus has been participating actively in the multilateral formats of the Eastern Partnership. The EU-Belarus Coordination Group meets twice a year to steer cooperation and oversee further development of relations. The bilateral relationship will be strengthened through the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities, which are currently being negotiated. This will set the strategic framework for cooperation in the coming years. Tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal freedoms, the rule of law and human rights will remain fundamental for shaping EU's policy towards Belarus.

Since 2006, the EU has concluded visa facilitation agreements with Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, North Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Russia and Ukraine.

Formal readmission agreements or practical arrangements on return and readmission are in place with 24 countries.

For more information

[Factsheet - EU-Belarus relations](#)

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