

promoting ideas and values of human rights, democratic society, immediate contact with citizens as well as the European neighbourhood policy (included in the Lisbon Treaty), it is a painful paradox to see it raising the cost of visas for the Belarusians.

Therefore, I, together with my colleagues Justas Paleckis and Hannes Swoboda, decided to issue a written declaration which called for reducing the cost of Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens. The declaration, in all official EU languages, is available for signing in the European parliament. In the next three months, beginning from 30 January 2008, all MEPs can support the declaration by signing it. Then it will be the council's and the commission's turn to take specific and effective action. Additionally, I and Hannes Swoboda asked the EU council and the European commission what these two institutions intend to do to facilitate the system of granting visas.

The Schengen agreement has created a Europe without borders, which is one of the greatest benefits of integration. Europe without the barriers on its internal borders is undoubtedly a privilege for its citizens. Yet, at the same time this situation

could bring isolation to the countries left outside. The EU has another dilemma to face. It is naïve to think that the "tough way" with Belarus will make her more democratic or more ready for concessions. In fact, the effect will be quite the opposite and it will be the Belarusian citizens that are going to suffer most, as their freedom of movement will be even more limited.

That is why we have to take up decisive actions against isolating the Belarusian society as well as reinforcing its authoritarian regime. One of the possible steps is reducing the cost of a visa to not more than €35 for all the Belarusian citizens, no matter what our current relationship with Belarus is. Yet, the EU should adopt still further solutions to facilitate and liberalize the visa procedure for Belarusian citizens, as these are the basis for implementing the main goal of the European policy towards Belarus, i.e. further democratisation of this country.

Let's not get cut off from Belarusians. Let's give them a chance to get to know democracy and the free market. I invite you to sign the Written Declaration no.12 on reducing the cost of obtaining a visa for Belarusian citizens! ★



*"It is naïve to think that the 'tough way' with Belarus will make her more democratic or more ready for concessions"*



Genowefa Grabowska is a member of the committee on constitutional affairs