

A network of policy centres in  
Central and Eastern Europe and  
Central Asia

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Catherine Ashton, Vice-President, European Commission,  
and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, European Council  
Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy  
Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner, Home Affairs  
Martin Schulz, President, European Parliament

Prague/Kyiv, 27 February 2014

## **EU member states should show long-term commitment to Ukraine's European integration by swift easing of visa requirements followed by full visa liberalisation with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia upon signing of association agreements**

**Dear Ministers, Dear European Council President, Dear High Representative, Dear Commissioners, Dear President of the European Parliament,**

The dramatic events in recent days in Ukraine have demonstrated once again the high commitment of Maidan protesters and the citizens of Ukraine to become more closely integrated with the European Union. Ukraine now faces immense challenges in terms of democratic transition, territorial integrity and constitutional stability, as well as pressures, not least from Russia, in trade relations and energy security.

We call upon the European Council to recognise the need for a signal that the EU embraces the "European choice" of the Ukrainian people, and to de-link the issue of visas from conditionality on the Ukrainian authorities, just as it did so in 1990-1991 with regard to Central Europe. Poland, the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries did not have to meet elaborate conditions in order to see visas dropped; they met these conditions afterwards, and it is time for the EU to recognise the reforms already introduced in Ukraine and other Eastern Partner countries, and to drop visa requirements as they did with Central European countries.

One of the most negative and enduring perceptions about the EU in Ukraine, and other partner countries (Georgia and Moldova) that allow EU citizens visa-free travel to their countries, has been the strict visa requirements for travel to the EU. Since these three countries have all initialled association agreements with the EU, and embarked upon visa dialogue with the EU, and all have completed phase one of the dialogue (Moldova has in fact also completed phase two, so met all the technical requirements set by the European Commission), **we call upon the EU member states and the European Council to bring forward full visa liberalisation to the date of signature of the respective association agreement with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.**

With the release from prison of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine, and the will of the interim government in Ukraine to sign the association agreement, the conditions are now in place for the EU and Ukraine to sign the association agreement, and for the EU to expedite signature with Moldova and Georgia. As the signing of an association agreement marks the beginning of intense co-operation between the EU and the signatory countries, the introduction of visa-free travel for citizens of all three countries – all facing strong pressures from Russia concerning trade and territorial integrity, compounded by energy security in the cases of Ukraine and Moldova – is a necessary response to the clear "European choice" made by the citizens of the three countries in the face of strong pressures.

**With immediate effect, the EU member states should demonstrate their support for the European choice of the Ukrainian people by introducing more favourable conditions for issuance of Schengen visas (including waiving visa fees, shortening of waiting times, and transparent terms of the procedure in compliance with the Schengen Visa Code). EU member states can also go a step further by issuing national visas to citizens of Ukraine with the minimum of delay and conditions.**

The burden shouldered by the citizens of Ukraine since the Vilnius Summit requires a historic response from the side of EU member states, demonstrating that the EU actively supports fundamental freedoms, which should include the freedom to travel, and not least the opportunity for all citizens of Ukraine to visit the member states of the EU and to see the benefits of democracy, the rule of law, and freedom of expression.

*PASOS is a network of more than 56 independent think-tanks spanning 28 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.*

## STATEMENT

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### Signatories of statement, 27 February 2014

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