

Press release – EU-Belarus: MEPs back agreements on readmission and visa facilitation



In a remote voting session, the Civil Liberties Committee endorsed the readmission agreement with 54 votes to 13. The deal for cheaper short-stay visas that are issued more quickly was backed by 61 MEPs, while 6 voted against.

Return of people residing illegally in the EU

Under the readmission agreement, Belarus commits to readmit its nationals who do not, or who no longer, fulfil the conditions in force for entry to, presence in, or residence on, the territory of EU member states. This will also apply to persons who hold a residence permit or a valid visa issued by Belarus, and those who illegally entered EU territory directly after having stayed on, or transited through, the territory of Belarus.

Visa facilitation

The general visa fee for both Belarusians and EU citizens travelling to the other territory for up to 90 days in any 180-day period will be reduced to €35 (some categories of travellers will be exempt from paying fees). The deadlines for consulates to deal with requests will be reduced to 10 calendar days (extendable to a maximum of 30 days). Some Belarusian travellers, such as journalists, students and members of official delegations, will be able to receive multiple-entry visas that will be valid for longer and they will have to submit fewer supporting documents to justify their purpose of travel.

EU citizens can already enter Belarus without a visa for periods of up to 30 days, provided they cross the border at Minsk International Airport. For longer periods, of up to 90 days in any 180-day period, the new agreement

will apply reciprocally.

Respect for human rights and democracy

MEPs underline that Belarus has engaged in the last few years in improving the respect of universal freedoms, the rule of law, and human rights, including the freedoms of speech, expression and of media, and labour rights. They also stress that these all constitute fundamental criteria for the EU's policy towards third countries and that the visa facilitation agreement could be suspended, totally or partially, for human rights and democracy considerations.

The two agreements will not apply either to Denmark or Ireland.

Quotes

[Petar Vitanov](#) (S&D, BG), rapporteur for the readmission agreement, considered that "the EU should engage more with all Eastern partners, despite the challenges or perhaps, even more so, because of them, as deeper relations should extend the frontiers of the area of freedom, security and justice". Looking ahead, Vitanov asked for "a more active role for the EP in the opening and negotiations of future readmission agreements, as well as the subsequent monitoring of their application".

"Simplification of travel to and from the EU for both Belarusian as well as EU citizens is an important step on the path for deeper cooperation and understanding between the EU and Belarus and also to intensify the dialogue on democratic values. I would also encourage the European Commission to come back to us one year after the agreement is in place, so that we can evaluate to what extent the agreement meets its intentions", said [Ondřej Kovařík](#) (Renew, CZ), rapporteur for the visa facilitation agreement.

Background

Both texts were signed in January, after being negotiated for more than five years. Once the European Parliament gives its green light (likely in the next plenary, on 13-14 May), the Council and Belarus will have to formally conclude the ratification. The two agreements will enter into force at the same time, on the first day of the second month following conclusion.