

Dear Mr Kukan,

You recently signed a letter to EU foreign and interior ministers expressing deep reservations about the on-going discussions with the Russian government on the visa facilitation agreement and the proposals to give Russian officials with so-called “service passports” visa-free entry to the European Union.

At the time you expressed concern about human rights abuses by the Russian government. Since that letter was written, Russia has introduced a new law which seriously undermines the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people in Russia. The federal law passed by the Russian Parliament in June 2013 bans “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships” accessible to minors. The imprecise definition of propaganda has given licence for members of the state security forces and private vigilantes to subject gay people to harassment and violence as they go about their daily lives. There are increasing reports of beatings and murders of gay people in Russia since this law was introduced.

The Gay European Tourism Association is particularly concerned about the safety of LGBT travellers in Russia who face intimidation and arrest in Russia just for being themselves. Already four Dutch tourists have been arrested for making a film about the life of the gay community in a Russian city.

Russia will host the 2014 Winter Olympics at Sochi and the Russian Government has confirmed that all visitors – competitors, spectators and media – will be subject to this law. They will face violence and arrest just for being themselves while visiting Russia.

GETA does not believe that now is an appropriate time to allow Russian politicians and officials, who have introduced these retrograde laws which go against the European Union’s principles on human rights, to have free access to Europe. The European Union would be rewarding these officials for their increasingly repressive policies.

In the 1930s Europe’s failure to speak and act against the state sponsored attacks on sectors of German people, including homosexuals, sent the wrong message to the Nazi Party and emboldened its actions with disastrous consequences for Europe. The European Union has recently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and has a duty to act firmly to show its distaste for European countries that threaten the peace and nature of our continent through its repressive actions.

GETA has written to Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs, urging her to delay consideration of a visa-facilitation agreement with Russia until such time as that country has the same standard of respect for human rights that we hold so dear in the European Union.

I hope that you will redouble your efforts to ensure that the European Union halts its discussions about visa facilitation as a clear signal that the European Union opposes the growing human rights abuse in Russia.

Best wishes
Carlos Kytka
Executive Director