

Cecilia Malmström
Commissioner for Home Affairs
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

August 20th 2013

Dear Ms Malmström,

Re: Proposed Visa facilitation agreement with Russia

I am writing to ask you to delay any consideration of the proposed 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 am aware that members of the European Parliament have recently written to you expressing serious concerns about these proposals in respect of up to 15,000 Russian officials with so-called “service passports”. The MEPs are concerned about serious violation of human rights and corruption in Russia and do not want to see the Russian officials responsible for these actions being granted the right to move freely within the European Union.

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.

GETA 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.

The United States has taken a strong stand with the 2012 Magnitsky Act which prohibits those Russian officials known to have been involved in specific human rights violations from visiting the USA. It seems perverse that, as state sponsored human rights abuse grows in Russia, the European Union should be considering making travel in Europe even easier for the very same officials.

I strongly urge you not to agree to the removal of visa restrictions for Russian officials to send a strong signal directly to the Russian Government that the European Union does not support state-sponsored discrimination and violence against LGBT people.



I understand that the European Parliament has to authorise bilateral agreements between the European Union and other countries and GETA will also be raising this issue with MEPs.

I would be grateful if you could let me know what measures the European Union is proposing to introduce that will ensure that Russian officials and politicians who violate human rights are not allowed free movement within the European Union.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "CK", written in a cursive style.

Carlos Kytka
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Cc Stefano Manservigi, Director-General for Home Affairs, European Commission