



9 June 2016

Appeal of the National Platform of Georgia Regarding the Delay on Decision to Grant Visa Free Travel to Georgia

A realistic prospect of visa-free regime in the EU for Georgian citizens has been achieved thanks to a hard work of the Government of Georgia and the whole Georgian society, among them all political spectrum including opposition. We, as a coalition of pro-European civil society organizations, have been actively monitoring and advocating for a timely delivery of reforms required by the Visa Liberalization Action Plan. Therefore, we have the feeling of co-ownership and, consequently, of responsibility for the results of the mentioned process.

The Georgian society, which has strong European aspirations and hopes for getting visa-free travel as soon as possible, first of all, aspires to obtain an opportunity for people-to-people contacts with the EU citizens and free travel in order to see and better discover Europe.

The support for the European integration in Georgia has reached its highest level this year. This should be attributed to a large extent to high expectations born from the results of more than three years of hard work of the whole society to comply with the requirements set by the European Commission in the framework of EU-Georgia visa dialogue.

Georgia is a country, which may serve as a stronghold of democratic values, in this part of Europe. The success of European integration process in Georgia will have a deep impact on the confidence in the EU in this part of the world, and it will influence future positions of the Union in the wider Black and Caspian Sea Regions.

The recent doubts provoked by the delayed decision on providing Georgia with visa-free travel within the Schengen area, will strongly affect the trust in and credibility of the EU Institutions. This process fuels and enforces main arguments of the Russian propaganda aimed at challenging European aspirations of Georgian people, and it is especially dangerous as the date of the parliamentary elections approaches.

A possible delay of the decision on Georgia by the Council of the European Union, for any reasons, including the demand for adoption of a temporary suspension mechanism of the visa exemption in cases of rapid growth of illegal migration from third countries, will result in a situation whereby the European Parliament is not able to approve it before the summer break. Consequently there is a risk that the decision will remain pending until the election day on October 8, 2016. Such a prospect would definitely become a strong argument in hands of "Eurosceptic" forces, rising their chances to gain support of the frustrated part of the electorate.

The Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls upon:

- The Government of the Netherlands, Presidency of the Council of the EU
- The Government of Slovak Republic, upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU
- EU Member States

- The European Parliament

to support respective decision granting short-term visa-free travel to Georgian citizens and to adopt the decision before September 2016.

Signatory organisations:

1. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
2. Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)
3. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)
4. European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi
5. Open Society Georgia Foundation
6. Local Democracy Agency Georgia
7. Georgian Trade Union Confederation
8. World Experience for Georgia
9. EU-Georgia Business Council
10. Georgian Institute of Politics
11. "School-Family-Society" Association
12. Bridge of Friendship – Kartlosi
13. Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
14. Youth Alternative
15. Human Rights Centre
16. International Society "Caucasian Mosaic"
17. Psychea
18. Public Advocacy
19. Healthy World
20. Youth for Justice - Georgia
21. Union "Healthy Children"
22. IDP Association "Consent"
23. Community Development Association
24. "Women Enterprise" Fund Georgia
25. International Business and Economic Development Centre
26. Association "MERKURI"
27. Association "Atinati"
28. International Center for Advancement of Research, Technology & Innovation (ICARTI)
29. Civil Society Institute
30. Europe Foundation
31. Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi"
32. Peaceful and Business Caucasus
33. International Center of Geopolitical research
34. Young socialists of Georgia
35. Biological Farming Association "Elkana"
36. Junior achievement of Georgia
37. Center for Social Sciences
38. Center of Development and Democracy
39. Georgia Press Association
40. Association for the efficient use of the Georgian energy resources
41. Association of Tea Producers Georgia "Georgian Tea"
42. Association for the Farmers' Rights Defence
43. Foundation "Multi- Ethnic Resource Centre on Civic Education Development"
44. Foundation "Caucasus Environment"
45. Caucasus Institute for Economic and Social Research
46. Georgian Association "Woman in Business"
47. Caucasian House Georgia

48. Association European Studies for Innovative Development in Georgia
49. Civil Society and Democracy Development Center
50. Save The Future Generation
51. International Fund of Sustainable Development
52. United Public Movement "Multinational Georgia"
53. Association "Imedi"
54. Journalism Recourse Centre
55. Women's Initiatives supporting Group
56. Union "Anti-Violence Network of Georgia"
57. Association of Youth Journalists "New Vision"
58. Institute for the study of nationalism and conflict
59. Association DEA for Disabled Women and Mothers of Disabled Children
60. Caucasus Environmental NGO network (CENN)
61. International Business Development and Investment Promotion Centre
62. Civil Society Development Institute
63. OXFAM Georgia
64. Georgia Alliance for Safe Roads
65. People's Harmonious Development Society
66. Union "Article 42 of the Constitution"
67. The Greens Movement of Georgia
68. Research-Intellectual Club "Dialogue of Generations"
69. Youth Initiation for Democracy
70. Coalition Homecare Georgia
71. Repatriates' Union
72. Free Choice
73. European Integration Forum
74. International Center for Civic Culture
75. Association and Radio "Green Wave"
76. Institute for Euro-Atlantic integration and strategic studies
77. Human Rights House Tbilisi