

Brussels, 19 April 2007

EU-Russia relations: Council approves conclusion of agreements on visa facilitation and readmission of illegal immigrants

Today, the Justice and Home Affairs Council approved the conclusion of two agreements on visa facilitation and readmission of illegal immigrants, which should enter into force on 1st June 2007. These agreements had been signed on 25 May 2006 and mark a milestone in the EU's relations with Russia, opening the way for easier travel and people-to-people contact across Europe, while fighting illegal migration.

Vice-President Frattini expressed his satisfaction "for the completion of the ratification procedures with a view to a simultaneous entry into force of the agreements before the summer holidays. These agreements shall facilitate travelling for many EU and Russian citizens and will help us to tackle more effectively illegal migration. This is a concrete example of how the "Common Spaces" agreed with Russia will benefit our citizens and enhance our cooperation with Russia".

The **visa facilitation** agreement eases the procedures for issuing short-stay visas. Visa fees applied by both Parties have been aligned to 35 €. Visa fees are waived for some categories of persons such as close relatives, students or disabled people and the documents that need to be presented have been simplified for certain categories of persons. The agreement also sets out simplified criteria for issuing multiple-entry visas for many categories of persons, such as, students, journalists, people traveling on business and lorry drivers.

Moreover, a decision on whether or not to issue a visa will have to be taken as a rule within 10 days. Individuals holding Russian or EU Member State diplomatic passports will be exempt from the visa obligation under the agreement. Both parties have also agreed to undertake measures, as soon as possible, to simplify registration procedures.

The agreement on **readmission** sets out clear obligations and procedures for both the Russian and the respective EU Member State authorities as to when and how to take back people who are illegally resident. This includes nationals from Russia, the EU and those from third countries and stateless people. The provisions on the readmission of third-country nationals and stateless people will only become applicable after a transition period of 3 years. A special accelerated procedure will apply to persons apprehended in common border regions who will be able to be returned within a few days. The agreement contains the necessary safeguards with regard to data protection and to the protection of fundamental human rights.

A joint committee will be set up under each agreement, which will monitor its implementation.

According to Eurostat, in 2005 the number of Russian citizens residing in the EU-27 was close to 500.000 persons. Around one third of them (178.000) resided in Germany, followed by Estonia (86.000), Spain (33.000) and Finland (25.000). Other

Member States with an important Russian population were Latvia, Lithuania, Greece and Italy. Russian citizens represent 2.7 % of the total third-country national population of the EU-27, which stands at around 18 million.

In 2005, Russia was the third-country where the highest number of Schengen visas were issued. Of a total number of 8.2 million Schengen visas issued (all categories considered), 1.8 million were issued in Russia (21,9%).

For more information on the activities of Vice-President Frattini, please visit his website at

http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/frattini/index_en.htm