



Press release

August 22nd 2013

GETA calls on European Union to suspend talks on visa-free travel for Russian officials

The Gay European Tourism Association has written to the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, urging her to suspend negotiations on proposals to give 15,000 Russian officials the right to travel throughout the European Union without visas, in light of Russia's recently introduced anti-gay laws.

GETA argues that granting free travel to the officials and politicians who are responsible for human rights abuse in Russia sends the wrong signal.

In the letter Carlos Kytka, Executive Director of GETA, says that "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 also written to the 48 MEPs who earlier this year expressed their concerns about liberalising visa restrictions for Russian officials because of the country's human rights record, drawing their attention to the subsequent worsening situation and asking them to maintain their opposition. The European Parliament has the power of veto over all EU bilateral agreements and could scupper any deal with Russia.

GETA is also currently lobbying the International Olympic Committee and European sports ministers to ensure that gay people travelling to Sochi for the Winter Olympics are free to express their support for gay rights without fear of intimidation, violence and arrest.

"As Europe's gay tourism association, GETA fights for gay people's rights to travel freely in Europe" said Carlos. "This is a time for action, not words. If we can persuade the European Union to suspend these negotiations it will hit the Russian state and send a clear message that civilised countries have no patience with homophobia. Why should Russian official travel freely in Europe when gay people risk arrest and violence when travelling in Russia?"

You can see more about GETA's campaign against Russian homophobia and give your support at <http://www.gaywelcome.com/no-russian-visas.php>



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Notes

- Carlos Kytka is available for interviews in English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian. He can be contacted on +33 74 80 52 76 or by email at carlos@geta-europe.org
- Copies of the letter to Commissioner Malmström and Members of the European Parliament are attached.
- GETA exists both to help businesses and organisations involved in gay tourism in Europe to prosper and grow and to help gay tourists to make have the best possible holiday in Europe.
- Membership of GETA is free to businesses and organisations involved in European tourism who agree to the GETA Pledge to welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual customers and agree to treat them with the same respect that they treat all their customers.
- GETA's travel website www.gaywelcome.com is the most comprehensive guide for gay travelers in Europe.
- You can see more about GETA at www.geta-euope.org