
UKRAINE CITIZENS TO GET VISA-FREE TRAVEL TO EU

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25.11.2016

24.11.2016

BBC

Ukrainian citizens will be able to travel to most EU countries without a visa, European Council President Donald Tusk has announced.

He said the country had met relevant standards "perfectly" and in the coming weeks EU officials would work out how the scheme will be implemented.

The announcement was made at a meeting of Ukrainian and EU leaders in Brussels on Thursday.

Corruption in Ukraine and the country's future were also discussed.

The visa-free scheme will allow Ukrainians with a biometric passport to enter the Schengen area - including some non-EU areas such as Switzerland and Iceland, but not the UK or Ireland - without a visa for up to 90 days.

Mr Tusk said: "The last three years have seen the birth of a new Ukraine, that advances its democracy and economy through sometimes very tough reforms.

"Additional assistance from Europe should help Ukraine in strengthening its democratic path."

He said all EU states had decided Ukraine was ready for a visa-free regime, and that it would come into force once the European Parliament and the European Council agreed on changes to the EU's visa policy.

They are trying to determine a way to suspend the visa waiver case of an emergency.

Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has been promising his citizens visa-free travel to the EU for nearly three years. It was part of a partnership accord signed in 2014 that angered Russian officials.

Mr Poroshenko said after the summit that he was "sad" visa-free travel was not already a reality for his country's citizens, but hoped it would happen by the end of the year.

Ukrainian passport-holders can travel to Russia without a visa.

The question of whether to look eastwards to Russia or westwards to Europe has been a huge political matter in Ukraine in recent years.

Read more from the BBC on the Ukraine conflict [here](#)

The other major matter on the agenda at Thursday's meeting was corruption, and the country's record on tackling it came under scrutiny.

EU officials have been urging Ukraine since 2014 to clamp down on corruption and to carry out other reforms. But critics say not enough has changed, and Mr Poroshenko has been accused of backing corrupt officials.

The seizure of territory by pro-Russian rebels in Donbass in south-eastern Ukraine also remains a concern for the Kiev government, more than two years after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said before the summit that Russia must be forced to honour peace agreements signed in early 2015.

Kaynak/Source: