



Analysis of the visa policies of the Visegrad countries

Relative openness. Polish visa policy towards Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

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Executive summary

Top priority in the Polish visa policy are Belarus and Ukraine, then comes Russia, though Moldovans also enjoy several facilitations. It is in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia that Poland issues the most visas; those issued in Polish consulates in Ukraine and Belarus before Poland's entry in the Schengen area constituted ca. 40% of the total of visas issued by all EU Member States. The network of Polish consulates is also better developed in these states.

In 1990s, citizens of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine needed no visas to come to Poland. The first restrictions to their entry were introduced by Poland before the joining the European Union, later, however, than the Czech Republic or Slovakia. Visas were issued either free of charge, or with small fees, and procedures were relatively simple. Moreover, in 2005–2007, the refusal rate in Polish consular posts was much lower than the EU average.

The next series of restrictions towards Belarusians, Moldovans, Russians and Ukrainians was introduced following Poland's entry in the Schengen area: procedures have become stricter, visa fees have increased, and more documents have been required in the application procedure. This has been mirrored by the drop in the number of issued visas and visa applicants, as well as by a smaller

border traffic. Easier access to visas to selected groups is provided by two solutions: Card of Pole and Agreements on Local Border Traffic¹.

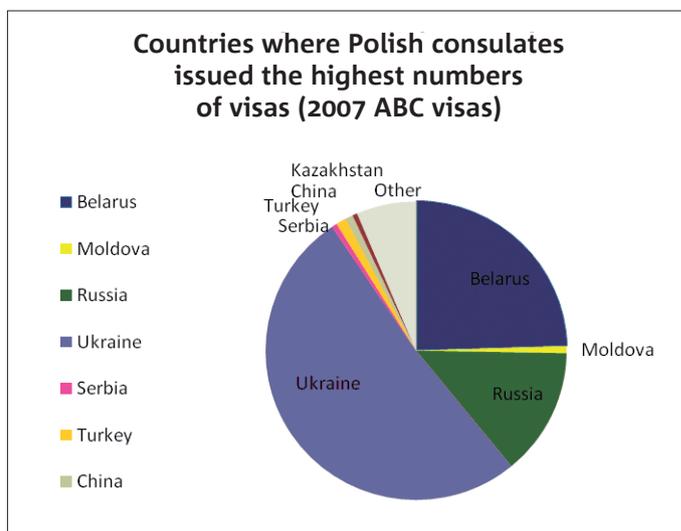
1. Main Recipients of Visas Issued in Polish Posts

Ever since Poland introduced visas towards its eastern neighbours, the citizens of these countries have become main recipients of visas issued by Polish consular posts. In 2007², visas issued in Polish consulates in four countries of Eastern Europe – Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine – constituted around 90% of all short-term (C) visas issued in Polish posts (as well as of the sum of A, B and C visas³). Additionally, around 90% of people applying for those visas in all posts were citizens of the four analyzed Eastern European countries. This percentage was slightly lower in the case of national/ long-term (D) visas, but still very high: around 74% of D visas issued by Polish authorities were granted to citizens of the Eastern European countries. We could speak about a long-lasting tendency, as a similar proportion was observed in previous years (90% of A, B and C visas in 2006, 89% of A, B and C visas in 2005 were issued to citizens of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine). Among these Eastern European countries, Ukraine is the unquestionable leader: more than half of visas issued in Polish posts were granted to Ukrainian citizens.

¹ Additionally also regulations at the EU level such as the Visa Facilitation Agreements.

² All quoted data from the years 2005–2007 come from official documents of the Council of the European Union – Exchange of statistical information on uniform visas issued by Member States. They do not include data on visas issued by the United Kingdom. Data concerning visas issued in Polish consulates in 2007–2008 originate from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³ Types of visas issued by Schengen states: **A** – airport transit visa, **B** – transit visa, **C** – short term stay visa, **D** – long-term, national visa, **C+D** – long-stay valid concurrently as a short-stay visa, **LTV** – visa with limited territorial validity.



Drawn up on the basis of data from the document of the Council of the European Union – *Exchange of statistical information on uniform visas issued by Member States*. 8.04.2008

2. Visas Issued in Polish Posts in Eastern Europe as Compared to Visas Issued by the Remaining Eu Member States

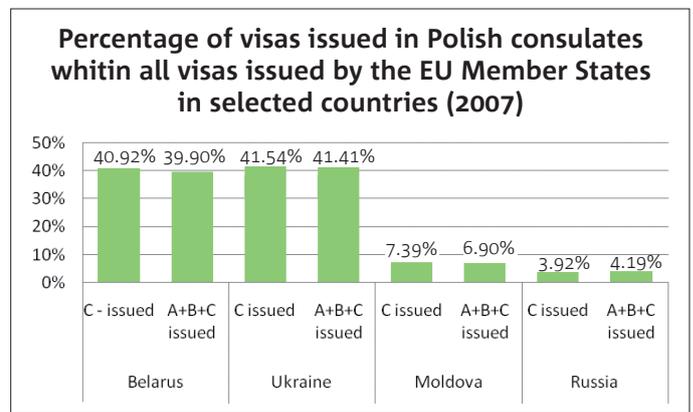
Visas issued in the Polish consulates in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine are a significant part of the entire number of visas issued by all the EU countries in the region. According to 2007 data, short term (A, B and C type) visas issued in Polish consulates in **Belarus** constituted 40% of all EU visas of this category for Belarusians. Additionally, among Belarusians, 40% of those willing to travel to the EU applied for visas in Polish consulates. In the case of long-term (D) visas, the percentage of visas issued by Polish posts was even higher (68%). Visas issued by Polish posts in Belarus constituted in previous years a significant share in the total of visas issued by EU Member States.

Among the four analyzed countries, the lowest number of Polish visas is issued in **Moldova**. Their share in the entire number of visas issued by EU countries in 2007 was low: 7% of short-term (A, B and C) visas and 12% of national (D) visas were issued by Polish posts.

Similar was the percentage of people who applied for visa in Polish posts. The rate of visas issued by Polish authorities in Moldova as compared to all visas issued by the EU changed significantly in 2007 after Bulgaria and Romania – popular travel destinations among Moldovans – joined the EU. Before this change, visas issued in the Polish consulate in Chisinau constituted around 40–50% of all visas issued by the EU countries. This was associated with the low number of consulates of the EU countries in Moldova (only France, Germany and UK of all old EU Member States had posts in that country). The situation became different as a result of the opening of the Common Visa Application Center in Chisinau which is hosted by the Hungarian Embassy. The initiative was joined by Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Slovenia and Sweden.

In the case of **Russia**, although the number of visas issued by Polish posts is high, it does not represent a significant percentage of visas issued by all EU countries. In 2007, it constituted 4% of short-term (A B and C) visas issued in the EU consulates. Before the last EU enlargement, these figures were slightly higher.

The highest number of visas in Polish posts is issued in Ukraine. Also, in 2007 Polish visas represented a significant part of the total number of visas issued by all EU Member States: 41% of A, B and C visas. The share of persons applying for Polish visas in the total of applicants expecting an EU Member State visa was similar in 2007. In previous years the percentage was slightly higher: 44–46% in 2005 and 2006 for A, B and C visas.

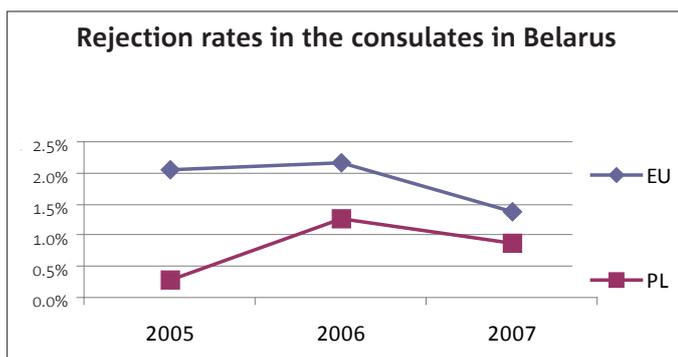
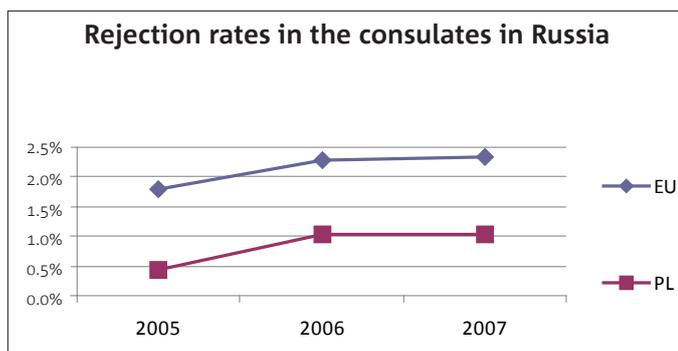
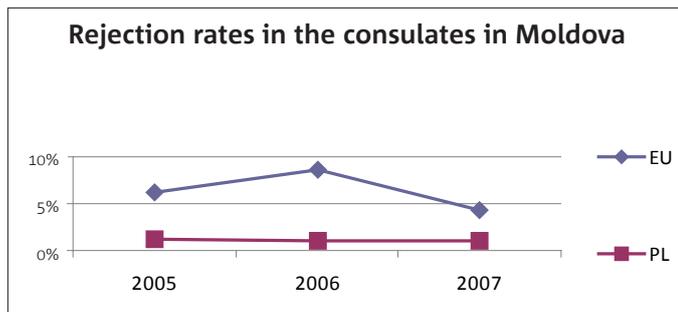
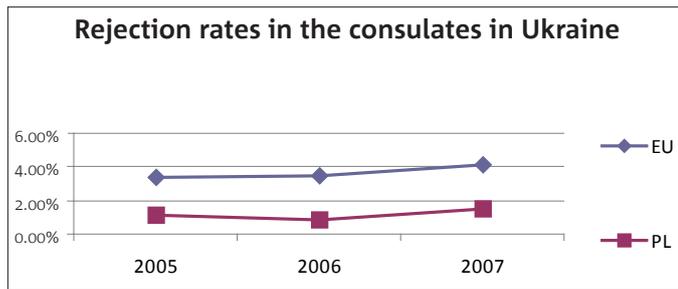


Drawn up on the basis of data from the document of the Council of the European Union – *Exchange of statistical information on uniform visas issued by Member States*. 8.04.2008

Data on all the visas issued by EU Member States in 2008 is not yet available, which is why we are unable to see whether or not this percentage has changed. However, keeping in mind that the number of visas issued in Polish consular posts in 2008 is much lower than in 2007, we might suspect a decrease of that percentage as well.

The number of issued visas should not be analysed separately from refusal rates. Refusal rates in Polish consulates were in the first years after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 much lower than the EU average. The largest difference is visible between average refusal rates of the old Member States and Poland, while the average refusal rate of new Member States is comparable to that of Poland (however, in Moldova and Ukraine the refusal rates in Polish consulates were lower). In Polish posts in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia refusal rates from 2005 to 2007 were on average lower than 1.5%. This is in contrast to much higher refusal rates for the old Member States in Moldova (16–23%) and Ukraine (9–10%), and less so in Belarus (3–7%). Difference in the case of Russia is the smallest (2–3% for old Member States). Analyzing changes within this time-frame we can observe a small increase in the refusal rates for Ukraine and for Russia. In Belarus and Moldova, a de-

crease in refusal rates also occurs – higher for old and lower for new Member States.



Average refusal rates in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

EU – EU Member States (excluding UK)

PL – Poland

Drawn up on the basis of data from the document of the Council of the European Union – *Exchange of statistical information on uniform visas issued by Member States, 2006, 2007 and 2008*.

3. The Network of Polish Consulates and its Development

The network of Polish consular posts authorized to issue visas in the Eastern European countries is well developed. At the moment there are 3 posts in Belarus (Brest, Grodno, Minsk), 5 in Ukraine (Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lutsk, Lviv, Odesa), 4 in Russia (Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Moscow, Sankt Petersburg), and one in Moldova (Chisinau). Polish networks in Belarus and Ukraine are the most developed out of all networks of EU countries⁴. The last development of the Polish network was associated with Poland's accession to the European Union and took place in 2002–2004.

Countries which have decided to open posts in Belarus do so only in Minsk, except for Latvia (Minsk and Vitebsk) and Lithuania (Minsk and Grodno). Here, Poland is another exception with 3 consulates. Before the 1990s, one Polish consulate operated in Minsk (established in 1972). Two additional posts were established in late 1990s in Grodno (1995) and Brest (1997). There are no plans to establish new posts in Belarus at the moment.

In Ukraine, most of the EU Member States issue visas in one post in Kyiv. Some others – mainly new Member States – issue visas also in two or three posts in other cities of Ukraine: in the south and east of Ukraine, and in border regions (Odesa, Donetsk, Mariupol, Chernivtsi, Uzhgorod, Lviv, Berehove). Poland runs posts not only in Kyiv but also in other regions of Ukraine (Lviv, Lutsk, Odesa, Kharkiv). Before 1990s, visas were issued in 2 operating posts in Kyiv and Lviv (the second one opened in 1987). Another consulate was open in Kharkiv in 1996. The enlargement of the EU and the introduction of visas for

⁴ Based on the information from Polish Embassies and Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ukrainian citizens led to the establishment of two additional consular posts in 2002: in Odesa and Lutsk. In recent months, three new consulates were planned in Vinnitsa, Sevastopol and Ivano-Frankivsk. However, due to the financial crisis the establishment of the post in Ivano-Frankivsk will probably be postponed.

Most of the EU countries issue visas in the posts in Moscow or in Moscow and Sankt Petersburg. However several countries go beyond these two locations and issue visas in such places as Kaliningrad, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Rostov, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Pskov, Sovetsk, Rostov-on-Don. Poland with 4 posts (Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Moscow, Sankt Petersburg) is one of the countries with higher number of visa-issuing posts. Consulates in Moscow and Kaliningrad are the oldest, followed by Sankt Petersburg and finally – in 2004 – Irkutsk. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no new posts are planned.

Moldova has a smaller consular representation of EU Member States. There are several consulates in Chisinau, however – except for France, Germany and UK – these are mainly consulates of the new Member States: Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. As it was mentioned earlier, due to insufficient accessibility of consular posts in Moldova, the Common Visa Center hosted by the Hungarian Embassy was opened.

4. The Most Important Changes in the Polish Visa System in the Last Years

During 1990s, citizens of Eastern European countries wishing to come to Poland did not in fact need a visa. In the case of Belarus and Russia, the agreement on the visa-free movement between Poland and Soviet Union from

1979⁵ was in force until the introduction of visas in 2003. That Agreement consisted of a quite complicated system of vouchers and AB stamps: to come to the other country travellers needed either a tourist voucher/ confirmation of tourist services, or an invitation by an individual registered in the regional office. Persons who travelled for business or to have medical treatment received “AB” stamps in their passports. Those regulations did not require many efforts and were easy to fulfil through the whole 1990s. With Moldova and Ukraine, according to the signed agreements, movement was *de iure* visa-free (earlier, the above-mentioned Agreement from 1979 was in force). The agreement with Moldova was signed in November 1994 and entered into force in March 1995; the agreement with Ukraine was signed in June 1996 and entered into force in August 1997.

The planned EU enlargement inevitably led to the introduction of visa regimes and application of the first restrictions. In the case of visas for Poland’s neighbours, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, this was done in October 2003 (the date was changed in the last moment from the original July 2003), for the citizens of Moldova much earlier: in February 2001.

The implementation of visa regimes was preceded by lengthy negotiations with the governments of the neighbouring countries. The Polish administration aimed at maintaining good relations with its Eastern Neighbours and preserving a policy of easy access had decided to implement the visa regime as smoothly as possible without excessive restrictions towards travellers. The rule of reciprocity was important as well – as negotiations covered

⁵ Agreement between the Government of the People’s Republic of Poland and the Government of the USSR on Mutual Visa-Free Travels for Citizens of both States. Signed in Warsaw 12.13.1979, entered into force 05.23.1980.

also the issue of travel requirements for Poles going to Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Eventually, in accordance with the signed agreements, short-term visas were available free of charge to Moldovan and Ukrainian citizens (Polish citizens did not need a visa to travel to Moldova and Ukraine at all), and for inhabitants of the Kaliningrad District (visas free of charge were also available to Poles traveling to the Kaliningrad District). The prices of short-term visas issued in the consulates in Belarus and the remaining regions of Russia were relatively low (5 EUR/6USD in Belarus, 10EUR/12USD in Russia) and large groups of people did not need to pay for visas (children, pensioners, the disabled, students, as well as participants of cultural activities and sport and academic exchange programs). Additionally, Schengen visas were treated the same way as Polish transit visas (visas to go through Poland), procedures in Polish consulates were simplified, and very few documents except for the visa application were required.

The next difficulty that the citizens of Eastern European countries have to face is the consequence of the implementation of Visa Facilitation Agreements (VFA) between the EU and Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. For new Member States, these agreements have actually made the issuing of visas more difficult. As they were implemented more or less at the time of the Schengen enlargement, it is difficult to analyze their effects separately – however, we might firmly state that implementing a fee of 35 EUR is not a facilitation in the light of the earlier applied fees. The time limit for the processing of a visa application set at 10 days from the submission of documents, according to VFAs, is not conducive to facilitation when visas in Polish consulates were often issued within one day.

Poland's accession to the Schengen area has led to even more restrictions. Procedures have

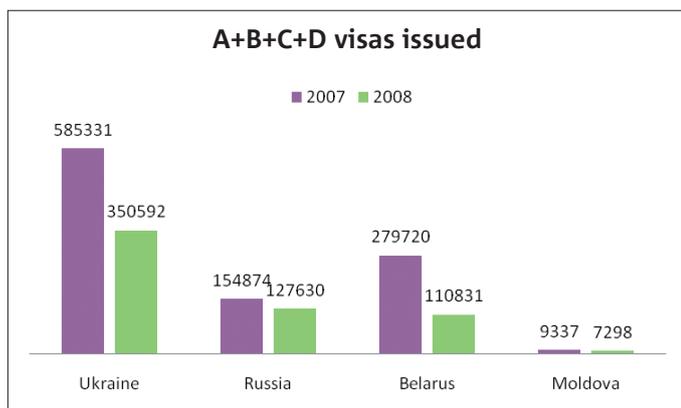
become tighter: many more documents are now demanded (what also influences the total price of a visa), the procedure has become longer – details of each individual are now checked in the Schengen Information System and those applying for visas are now interviewed more frequently. After Schengen, the visa procedure verifies if the person applying for a visa poses not only a security threat, but also a migration threat. All these factors led, as analyzed above, to slightly higher refusal rates, a decrease in the number of visa applicants and above all the extended time periods required for visa issuance.

Steps to ease the new visa regime which were taken by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be also mentioned. They are above all connected with the national visas. As the national visas are in competency of individual Member States, Polish authorities made use of that fact. Fees for national visas for the citizens of Belarus and Ukraine were lowered (the fee for a Polish national visa is 60 EUR, but from November 2007 it is 35 EUR for Ukrainians and Belarusians, from October 2008 20 EUR for Belarusians). Moreover, consuls have become authorised to annul visa fees in certain circumstances.

5. Consequences of Poland's Accession to the Schengen Area to the Number of Issued Visas

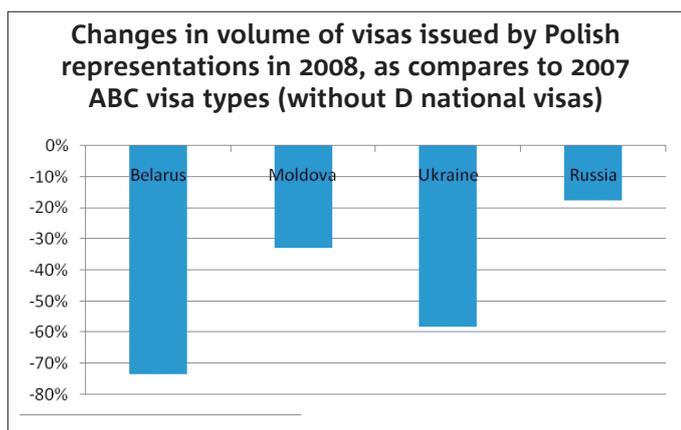
On 21st December 2008, Poland and other new Member States joined the Schengen area. This caused significant changes in regulations and procedures in the consulates of these countries. In Poland, the result has been a huge **decrease in the overall number of visas issued**. The decrease is the most significant in the case of Belarus – in 2008 60% fewer visas (including A, B, C and D types) were issued in Polish consulates in Belarus than in 2007. Decrease is also very large in Ukraine – 40%,

a little lower in Moldova – 22%. From the four selected countries the lowest decrease can be observed in Russia – 18% .



Drawn up on the basis of data from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

If national (D) visas are excluded from the comparison, the decrease is even larger.

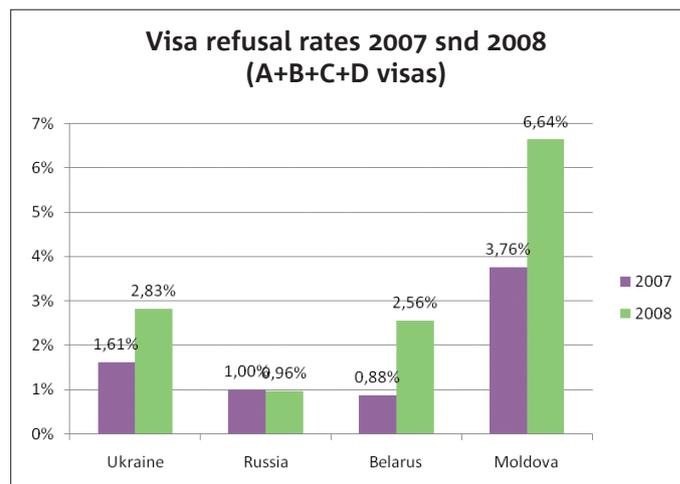


Drawn up on the basis of data from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The decrease was largest in the first months but changes proved to be more than just temporary, as there are also huge differences between the number of visas issued at the end of 2007 and 2008.

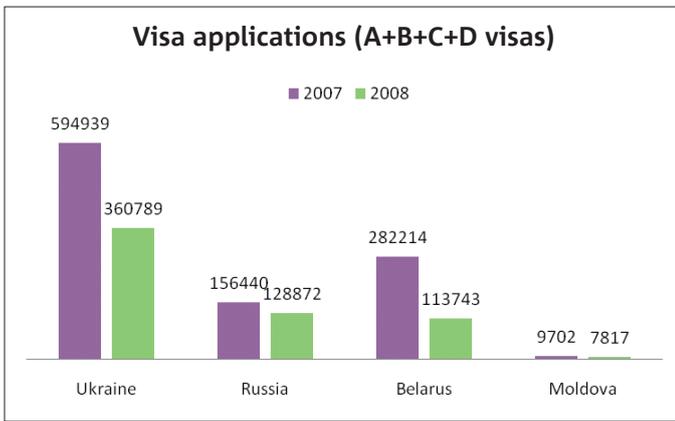
Although visa refusal rates in 2008 were higher than in 2007, we might expect that it is not the main reason for the decrease of the number of issued visas. Small increase in the visa refusal rates can be observed in Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova (Ukraine from 1.61% to 2.83%. Belarus from 0.88% to 2.56%. Moldova

from 3.76% to 6.64%); in Russia the refusal rates barely changed.



Drawn up on the basis of data from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

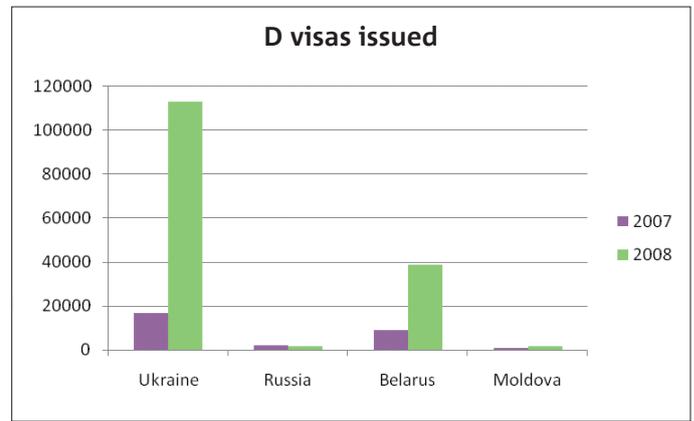
A much lower number of issued visas cannot be explained by refusal rates only – visa applications require an analysis. A comparison of the number of visa applications from 2007 and 2008 demonstrates that here the change is very significant. Of course to some extent it could be explained by the fact that travelling to Poland, many people can use a Schengen visa of some other EU country. However, we need to remember that in order to travel to Poland, as most of the visa applicants do and did in the past, one cannot simply apply for a visa to some other EU country, especially when additional documents confirming the route are required. According to many applicants, factors responsible for the decrease of the numbers of visa applicants are higher prices of visas (or prices at all), longer and more complicated procedures, as well as the increased number of documents required for application (which often means higher costs). We might expect that many people do not want to take the risk of being refused a visa.



Drawn up on the basis of data from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The numbers of issued D visas might also be examined. Compared to 2007, the number of long-term/national visas increased in 2008. This could be associated with the changes in the Polish labour law⁶ and the fact that more people decided to come to Poland to work legally. We also need to keep in mind differences in the fees for national and Schengen visas, mainly for Belarusians (starting from November 2007 35 EUR, and from October 2008 20 EUR, compared with 60 EUR for a Schengen visa).

⁶ In the second part of 2007 and beginning of 2008, several changes were introduced which led to much easier access to Polish labour market and, as a consequence, might have led to higher numbers of people applying for national (D) visas. In July 2007, citizens of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia received the right to work without permission just after the proper declaration of future employer on the willingness to higher a selected person. This included work in 3 months within 6 next months in all sectors of the economy (previously, from 2006 the same solution applied only to agriculture). In October, fees for work permissions were significantly reduced. Starting from February 2008, the period of the possible work without official permission was extended from 3 to 6 months within 12 months. Also starting from February 2008, Moldova nationals do not need to have a work permission.



Drawn up on the basis of data from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

6. Movement of People

The movement of people with countries neighbouring Poland – Belarus, Moldova and Russia – has been very intense. The scale of traffic has been increasing within the last years (with the small decline after EU enlargement and the introduction of visas), however, as a result of Poland’s accession to Schengen zone the number of visas issued to citizens of these states decreased, which is also mirrored in the intensity of traffic on the borders between Poland and these countries. The comparison below of the number of border crossing (passenger traffic) in 2007 and 2008 is a good illustration of the trend:

Part of the border	Foreigners					
	TOGETHER		FROM POLAND		TO POLAND	
	2008	change	2008	change	2008	change
	2007		2007		2007	
Russia	786 890	-44.99%	401 070	-44.14%	385820	-45.85%
	1 430 556		718 017		712539	
Belarus	4 348 288	-46.65%	2 221 169	-45.51%	2127119	-47.80%
	8 151 026		4 076 053		4074973	
Ukraine	5 159 335	-47.90%	2 551 367	-47.92%	2607968	-47.88%
	9 903 188		4 899 225		5003963	

Passenger passport border traffic and local border traffic in 2008 the number of border crossings
Source: Polish Border Guards Statistics

Although ethnic and family bonds and tourism are among the reasons why citizens of Belarus, Moldova and Russia decide to travel to Poland, more important are social and economic factors mainly linked with economic

profit. A large number of people travel to Poland on business or in order to establish business relations, many travellers are involved in petty border trade (people from the border regions of Belarus, Ukraine and Kaliningrad District). Petty border trade is a consequence of many factors, including differences in prices of certain goods and underdevelopment of the border regions. Commodities most often brought to Poland are petrol, alcohol and cigarettes. There is also a significant number of labour migrants (mainly Ukrainians and some Belarusians; the number of labour migrants from Russia is very low). It is extremely difficult to assess the number of migrants from Ukraine, but certainly it is not as high as it was at the beginning of 1990s, because at the moment Poland is not the main destination country (the ultimate targets are now old EU Member States, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Germany, as well as Russia). The scale of movement of Moldovan citizens to Poland is difficult to estimate, but it is not high.

7. Special Regulations

Local Border Traffic Agreements

Poland started negotiations with its neighbours concerning the agreements on local border traffic quite late – at the end of 2007, almost a year after Regulations laying down rules on local border traffic was established⁷. Among three countries with which Poland shares borders, the most advanced is the implementation of the agreement with Ukraine. After three rounds of negotiations, the Agreement between Polish and Ukrainian governments on the establishment of local border traffic was signed in March 2008. However, the Agreement was not ratified because of the reservations of the EU Commission which gave an opinion on the significant discrepancies among the Agreement and Regulation

(EC) No 1931/2006. Three problematic issues were listed – used terminology, rules of the payments for medical treatment of people travelling within the area, and the size of the area itself.

According to the Regulation No 1931/2006 a *border area means an area that extends no more than 30 kilometres from the border. The local administrative districts that are to be considered as the border area shall be specified by the States concerned in their bilateral Agreements as referred to in Article 13. If part of any such district lies between 30 and 50 kilometres from the border line, it shall nevertheless be considered as part of the border area.*

Keeping that in mind in the Polish-Ukrainian Agreement, regions (województwa) were selected as administrative districts and, as a consequence, local border traffic area was extended on both sides of the border to 50 km which led to reservations, of the Commission. The Commission also questioned the obligation to have medical insurance for people who travel in the local border traffic area as inconsistent with the Regulation (EC) No 1931/2006. As a consequence, the Polish administration undertook actions to make changes in the regulation. The Polish government together with the Slovak and Hungarian governments presented proposals to change some aspects of the EU regulation that would enable the ratification of the Polish-Ukrainian agreement. At least until now, those actions have not been successfully completed. In the meantime, further negotiations of the agreement between Poland and Ukraine have taken place as well as work on the Protocol to the Agreement which would meet Commission's requirements. The Protocol to the Agreement was signed in December 2008: after negotiations, municipalities (gminy) were taken as administrative districts according to which boundaries of the local border traffic area

⁷ (EC) No 1931/2006.

were marked⁸. Changes in terminology were made. The issue of medical insurance was not changed but, according to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that problem was discussed with the EU Commission and the Polish point of view was accepted.

The most important regulations of the agreement are:

- Persons who apply for the traffic permit must have had documented residency in the border area for a period of at least 3 years; additionally, they need to have a valid travel document, they cannot be noted in the SIS for the purposes of refusing them the entry and are not considered to be a threat to public policy, internal security, public health or the international relations of the States of the Contracting Parties or any of the Member States of the EU (...);
- The first permit for a border resident will have validity of 2 years, next permits 5 years;
- The person holding the permit might stay in the border area for up to 60 days at a time but no longer than 90 days during each 6 months from the day of the first crossing of the border;
- Fee for the permit is settled at 20 EUR (however, several groups do not need to pay – pensioners, retired, the disabled and children under the age of 18);
- Residents of border areas crossing the border under the local border traffic regime are obliged to have a document confirming the conclusion of medical insurance agreement;
- Certain penalties are provided for in the event of abuse of the local border traffic regime (in the case of Poland fine, obligation to leave the territory, expulsion, cancellation of permit, putting on the list of people unde-

sirable in a country, similarly in the case of Ukraine, but also adding administrative detention according to the Article 20 of the Code of Administrative Offences of Ukraine);

- Movement of people under the Local Border Traffic Agreement will take place through border crossing points designed for the international movement of persons and through border crossing points designed for local border traffic.

Local border traffic on the Polish-Ukrainian is to be launched in July 2009.

Work on the agreements with Russia and Belarus is less advanced. Until March 2009, there were 3 rounds of negotiations with Belarus. It is believed that ratification will be faster than in the case of Ukraine, because the issues which the EU Commission questioned with regards to the agreement with Ukraine are changed (the agreement with Belarus is said to be analogous to the agreement with Ukraine, including changes implemented with the Protocol from December). Among cities that are to be included, on the Polish side Sokółka, Hajnówka and Biała Podlaska are mentioned, on the Belarusian side Grodno and Brest. With Russia, only one round of negotiations took place in July 2008. The Russian government is said not to be particularly interested in signing an agreement with Poland only without EU decisions regarding the situation of the whole Kaliningrad District.

Card of a Pole

Among special regulations, the so called “Card of a Pole” should be mentioned. This is a regulation directed at people with Polish origins who live in certain countries⁹. The Card of

⁸ That includes: 1,107 localities and around 1 million of citizens in Ukraine, 1,575 localities and 689,000 of citizens in Poland according to the Minister Jan Borkowski statement during the joint session of the Foreign Affairs and Administration and Internal Affairs Committees 18.02.2009.

⁹ The Card of a Pole might be issued to a person without Polish citizenship and who has a citizenship of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan or is a stateless person living in one of those countries. It can be issued

a Pole started to be issued in March 2008 for people who “consider themselves a part of the Polish nation” and at the same time have basic knowledge of Polish language, know and cultivate Polish traditions, in the presence of Polish consul declare the belonging to the Polish nation, can prove that at least one parent or grandparent or both great grandparents had Polish citizenship or present written certificate from the Polish NGO acting in the listed countries (see footnote number 8) that a person is and has been engaged within last three years in the activities for the benefit of Polish language or culture, or Polish minority.

Among other benefits, a person who has a Card of a Pole might get a long-term multiple-entry Polish national visa without a fee, and might work legally in Poland without any permits. The Card is valid for 10 years.

The Card of a Pole has been causing significant controversies, connected with the implementation of the regulation (confirmation of Polish origins is one of the most problematic issues), as well as the need for such a regulation. It was also criticised by Belarusian and Lithuanian authorities.

Before the implementation of the regulation the opinion prevailed that it would have a symbolic meaning rather than actual influence on the situation in the region. It is at least partly confirmed in rather limited numbers of issued Cards: 8,729 until 12th January 2009. Until that moment less than 1% of applications were declined. The majority of cards were issued in Ukraine, then in Belarus.

8. Recommendations

Summing up, we should focus on recommendations. In detail, these have been presented in the text *What to do with visas for the Eastern Europeans? Recommendations from the perspective of Visegrad countries*, published under the same project. The recommendations were divided in three groups: firstly, the activities to be undertaken by individual states, i.e., above all good practices to be applied in diplomatic posts. The second group included activities related to cooperation with other states in the region, as well as exchange and use of experiences. The last group included above all promotion of positive solutions and liberalisation of visa policy towards eastern neighbours in the EU forum. This means above all systemic changes: amendments in roadmaps for visa-free traffic and complete abolition of visas.

to a person whose Polish origin was confirmed in accordance with Repatriation Act from November 2000.