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Moldovans Get Freer EU Access After Ukraine Crisis

Moldovan Citizens Allowed to Travel to Schengen Zone Without Visas

*Після української кризи молдаванам спростили доступ до ЄС
Євросоюз остаточно схвалив скасування візового режиму між країнами Шенгенської
зони та Молдавією, повідомляє автор. Того ж дня євродепутати підтримали ініціативу
керівництва ЄС про скасування більшості митних зборів для українського
сільськогосподарського і промислового експорту починаючи з травня поточного року. За
оцінками правників, це дозволить українським підприємствам економити до 487 млн. євро
на рік, йдеться в статті.*

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303847804579479203798258452>

BRUSSELS—The European Union gave final approval Thursday to a decision that will allow citizens of Moldova to travel to many European countries for three months without a visa.

The change is aimed at bolstering ties with a country that, like Ukraine, lies between Europe and Russia. EU leaders worry that Moldova will face growing Russian pressure as it moves toward signing an "association agreement" with the EU this summer.

In a separate move Thursday, EU lawmakers overwhelmingly backed a proposal from the European Union's executive to lift most customs duties on Ukrainian agricultural and industrial exports to the bloc from May. The move could save Ukrainian firms €487 million (around \$670 million) a year, the EU estimates.

The tariff move is intended to help boost Ukraine's flagging economy by advancing the zero tariff benefits the country would receive under a bilateral trade and political deal with the EU. The two sides hoped to finalize that agreement in June. The decision, which must be rubber-stamped by member states, will scrap almost all tariffs on iron, steel, farm produce and machinery exports.

The visa change, which takes effect April 28, will affect Moldovans who hold a biometric passport and are traveling to the Schengen zone, a European free-travel area that includes roughly, but not exactly, the same countries as the EU. It covers trips that last a maximum of three months in a six-month period.

The EU agreed to the change after Moldova undertook such reforms as modernizing its border police, strengthening human-rights laws and extending cooperation with Ukraine on border management.

Cecilia Malmström, the EU's commissioner for home affairs, said the deal could provide an example for other countries in the region.

"This shows that the efforts by the Moldovan authorities have paid off and that the EU is committed to deliver on engagements with third countries wishing to work with us," Ms. Malmström said.

The Moldovan government issued a brief statement welcoming the move.

EU officials are moving toward a similar deal with Ukraine. They hope to sign association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in June.

The 28-member bloc has intensified its attempts to bolster ties with countries on its eastern flank since Russia invaded Crimea. But the effort has its roots in an eastward push by the EU after the end of the Cold War.

In 2007, the EU agreed to lower visa fees for Moldovan citizens, waiving them altogether for broad groups such as students and the elderly. At the same time, Moldova lifted all visa requirements for EU citizens.

In 2010, the EU set milestones for Moldova to reach to be granted further visa liberalization. EU officials recently concluded that the country's reforms met those benchmarks.

On Thursday, European Parliament President Martin Schulz and Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Kourkoulas, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, signed the document making the decision final.

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