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Decree 555 of Belarus: the travel ban for children from Chernobyl and Belarus

Written question No. 562 to the Committee of Ministers
by Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Netherlands

Since the Chernobyl disaster, many volunteers in European countries have given hundreds of thousands of children the possibility of a holiday with a guest family.

On 13th of October 2008 president Lukashenko published decree 555, which had entered into force a few months earlier, which made it nearly impossible for groups of children to travel abroad.

After much international pressure the ban was suspended for one month over the Christmas holiday. Due to late publication of this suspension, only a small number of children was able to spend time abroad over Christmas.

Since January 21 2009 the ban is fully in place again. Children are not allowed to travel unless the receiving country signs an extensive treaty, with an enormous number of guarantees by the receiving state.

This stifles the work of NGO's completely and makes exchanges completely impossible.

At the very same time Belarus is making a top priority of joining the Council of Europe. For this the Human Rights situation in Belarus should improve and part of this is the lifting of the travel ban.

Mr Omtzigt,

To ask the Committee of Ministers,

– Does the Committee of Ministers agree that the restrictions in decree 555 are a violation of the right to travel freely (with parental consent) for Belarus children?

– Is the Committee of Ministers prepared to make a permanent repeal of decree 555 a precondition for a new dialogue with the Belarus government or by which other means will the Committee of Ministers communicate to the Belarus authorities that they should revoke decree 555 and let these exchanges of children take place?

Signed:

OMTZIGT Pieter, Netherlands, EPP/CD