



Visas to be scrapped by year's end?

B92

May 5, 2009

The European Commission is likely to recommend the abolishment of visas for Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro by the end of the year, reports VoA.

The EC will send Bosnia-Herzegovina a message of encouragement to continue its process, while also warning that the commission must convince European citizens that the Union's doors are open to countries for whom security and the rule of law are top priorities.

A report will be ready by May 18, where the EC will state what each country has done to meet strict conditions in areas such as security, tackling organized crime and corruption, data protection, personal documents, and border management.

The report, which will be published after a meeting of EC experts with negotiating delegations from the countries in the region, will also be based on European inspection teams' findings.

The report, which will also carry recommendations for visa liberalization, will be the topic of the last ministerial conference under the Czech EU presidency, in mid June.

"European foreign ministers could, if all goes well, take a decision to abolish visas. The decision is not formal, but if the ministers agree, later, during the autumn procedure of ratification in national parliaments [*Comment: this is an incorrect translation. Stiglmeier said: ... "during the official vote by EU interior ministers in the autumn"*], they'll stick to their decision. That would be great news

and we could be drinking a champagne toast as early as June," said Alexandra Stiglmeier of the European Stability Initiative.

That would effectively mean that the citizens of these countries would be able to travel around Europe, without visas, by January 1, 2010.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said that countries that had progressed furthest could be on the Schengen white list by the end of the year.

"Those that are moving fastest, that are best able to assume their obligations and are implementing all the security measures that lead to visa abolishment, these countries will be able to get on the Schengen white list by the end of the year, I hope. The rest of the countries will have to wait till they convince the European people and their interior ministers of their seriousness," Rehn said.

"As far as we know, based on the information we have received from various [*sources and based on the readiness reports of the Western Balkan*] governments, the recommendation will be given to Macedonia for sure, and it has been seen that Serbia and Montenegro have made a lot of progress over the last months and weeks, and the commission is analyzing these two files very closely," Stiglmeier said.