



## Visas, EU approved the white list of Balkans

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BRUSSELS – Interior ministers of the European Union approved the Commission Proposal for the removal of Schengen visas to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. With this decision, these countries are being placed to the "white" Schengen list, which means that their citizens will not need to apply for visas to EU countries except for Britain and Ireland. Citizens of these countries will be able to stay in the EU countries for the maximum 3 months half a year, but they will not be allowed to work.

The decision, which comes into force on 19 December, 20 days after publication in the Official Gazette, which means that Serbian, Montenegrin and Macedonian citizens owning a biometric passports can celebrate Christmas outside their country of origin. Although Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not part of the group of beneficiary countries, the interior ministers of both countries are invited to Monday's official ceremony by the Swedish presidency. European Stability Initiative estimates that lifting the visa regime for Albania can be reached even before July 2010, if progress described in paper from the Albanian authorities will be verified in the field by the European experts. Alexandra Stiglmeier, Senior Analyst at the European Stability Initiative said: "Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have made good progress in the recent months. Now, the Commission should assess this progress, and we do hope they will do it soon, and then the Commission should make a legislative proposal. If everything goes well, Albania and

Bosnia and Herzegovina may enjoy a visa-free regime perhaps in April-May next year, even though July appears to be a more realistic target date".

It is assessed as an urgent situation giving Kosovo a similar roadmap for starting the process of visa facilitation and then visa liberalization later. Experts say that non-recognition of Kosovo's independence by some EU member states does not affect the process of Schengen visa liberalization. "Visa policy has nothing to do with the status issue. Commission is currently negotiating with Taiwan, to liberalize visas for the citizens of Taiwan, and Taiwan is not recognized by some individual member states of the EU. So if it is possible that the removal of visas can be offered to Taiwan, it is possible that this can be offered to Kosovo as well", - adds Stiglmeier. Visa liberalization process includes short trips, mainly for tourist purposes, for duration of staying of no more than 90 days in half a year to Schengen countries for the citizens of the region. For long term staying in these countries, or to work in EU countries, citizens should apply as usual at the consular services. The removal of the visa regime enables the movement of citizens without special Schengen visa, but everyone remains subject for refusal of passing by border authorities' evaluation.

*Translation from the original article: "Vizat, BE miratoi listën e bardhë të Ballkanit"*