

Even assurances from Solana do not secure a visa

Dnevni list (Daily in Bosnia and Herzegovina targeting the Croat community in the country)
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BRUSSELS – For the first time in two decades there is hope that the situation with regard to the visa requirement that the EU has imposed on Western Balkan countries will change. This is the assessment of the European Stability Initiative (ESI). In 2008 the EU formulated a series of concrete and demanding requirements listed in a detailed “visa road map”. It promised visa-free travel as the award for meeting these conditions, states ESI in a text published on their website.

Solana’s guarantees are not valid

It mentions that the process of applying for a Schengen visa continues to be “time-consuming, expensive and stressful”.

People throughout the region perceive the visa requirement as personal rejection. They are unable to reconcile it with the offer of a future in the EU. Pro-European reformers feel discriminated against; businesspeople despair over the limitations that the visa obligation imposes on their companies' growth potential; young people feel imprisoned, states ESI.

As an illustration of the problem that citizens who apply for a Schengen visa are faced with, ESI mentions the case of the Serbian journalist Dejan Anastasijevic who in 2004 applied for a Belgian visa in order to attend a security conferences in Brussels. As evidence, he submit-

ted an invitation letter by the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. Anastasijevic got the answer that „Solana's invitation is invalid since he is not a citizen of Belgium, and the EU 'is not a Belgian company'.” Next year when the second part of the conference took place, this time in Barcelona, Anastasijevic received the answer that „Solana does not live in Spain.” In both cases he was only granted visas after he threatened to publish newspaper articles about the events.

White Schengen List

ESI's project „White Schengen List“ where former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato is the chairman has assessed that the EU's conditions for the abolition of the visa requirement are demands whose fulfilment will require time and money, „but their fulfilment will make the whole of Europe, not just the Western Balkans, safer.” Well-secured borders through regulated asylum procedures, forgery-proof passports and police structures able to cooperate with law enforcement agencies throughout Europe are a good in themselves. Z.P.