



ESI: There is hope for visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries

Berlin/Belgrade, 22 March (ONASA/BETA) – 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 detailed ‘visa road maps’. It promised visa-free travel as the award for meeting these conditions,” states ESI in a text published on their website.

This organisation points out 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.

“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. It is cooperation, not exclusion, which works best in fighting organised crime and illegal migration,” the declaration of the “White Schengen List Project” reads.

ESI is convinced that the visa liberalisation process should be transparent.

The citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia have to know what has been asked of their governments in order to hold them accountable for progress, while the “European public” deserves to know what these countries are undertaking in the context of far-reaching reforms in order to make the EU safer, ESI stresses.

ESI’s assessment is that Macedonia is most advanced in this process and that the EU has to make sure that countries who meet the conditions are moved onto the White Schengen List. Otherwise, ESI emphasises, the credibility of the process would be jeopardised. (end)