



## **Fajon: Visas can be removed if government fulfills the criteria by December 2009**

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17 November 2009

The Slovene MEP Tanja Fajon, the European Parliament rapporteur on visa liberalization, stated yesterday in Tirana that it is up to Albania now to receive the good news next spring, but that everything depends on three main issues: the return of political dialogue, the fight against crime and corruption and the independence of institutions.

Speaking at a meeting organized yesterday in the Albanian capital, regarding the final steps towards visa-free regime, Fajon clearly declared: "Although the remaining criteria are of a technical nature, the decision of European Commission and later that of Council of Ministers will be a political one." Reminding the audience of the case of Serbia that received the good news despite not fulfilling totally all the criteria, but showing a clear determination by its government to fulfill them shortly, MEP Fajon declared that a positive decision is up to the Albanian government, which should achieve the remaining benchmarks. She said most of them have a political background.

As regards political criteria, the most essential one is the establishment of a political dialogue among majority and opposition. Ms. Fajon stressed that in the beginning of next year the European Commission will be tasked to check Albania's readiness to meet the benchmarks of the roadmap. The Slovene MEP highlighted that she is not very optimistic about the possibility for all the remaining benchmarks to be met in such a short period of time, but that it is important to show a determination to fight against organized crime and corruption, by giving concrete examples of political will.

The Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in Tirana, Mr. Helmuth Lohan, rephrased the expression of some days ago that, "You should help us in order for us to help you". "Albania has drafted an integration

strategy, but the Albanian authorities should be more active about the implementation of these strategies and it should go beyond their implementation. Clear cooperation among law enforcement and implementation agencies should be in place" – stated Mr. Lohan. The EU requires a consolidation of democratic institutions of the country. "We will closely monitor every step undertaken by Albania," highlighted Ambassador Lohan.

Deputy Prime Minister of Albania and Chief of Albanian diplomacy, Mr. Ilir Meta, declared that it is very important to have on the same line all the factors contributing to the integration process of the country into the EU. Mr. Meta also expressed the maximal engagement of Albanian government to fulfill all the benchmarks of the roadmap, by mentioning the results achieved in each of the four blocks, which are reflected in the updated readiness report sent yesterday to the European Commission. Mr. Etion Kapedani, Secretary General of Ministry of Interior, asked the European Commission to check Albania's preparedness through the quantitative methodology of comparing data, and not by a short-cut. Mentioning the money laundering issue, Mr. Kapedani stressed that the Commission should assess all the steps according to the quantitative work fulfilled by Albanian authorities.

The Conference organizers, the European Stability Initiative and the European Movement in Albania, published a report on the figures where Albania stands with meeting the benchmarks set out in the roadmap, showing those fulfilled, those partly fulfilled and those not finished yet. Red colored were the figures of fighting corruption and money laundering.

*Translation of the article: "Fajon: Vizat hiqen nëse qeveria zbaton kushtet deri në dhjetor"*