



Freedom of movement: why Albania does not benefit

Another report from Brussels: homework not completed

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The European Stability Initiative (ESI), a policy institute based in Brussels, Berlin and Istanbul that conducts in-depth analysis of complex issues, released yesterday a comparative evaluation showing the degree to which the Western Balkan countries fulfill the criteria of the visa liberalisation roadmap. This document is based on the assessments by [EU] experts who visited the countries, and on the assessments prepared by the European Commission of the implementation of the roadmaps towards a visa-free regime for the Western Balkan countries. The Commission assessments will be discussed with EU member states on 25 May 2009. After receiving the information, the European Union will decide which of the countries will benefit from visa-free travel for its citizens starting from 2010.

In its assessments, the European Commission has used six distinct phrases to describe the countries' progress in four main areas, ranging from "meets the benchmarks" to "does not yet fully meet the benchmarks". According to methodology used to describe the situation:

1 was given for "meets the benchmarks";
2 was given for "meets a majority of benchmarks"; and
3 was given for "does not yet fully meet the benchmarks".

Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina are ranked last, getting 3 for all four blocks of the roadmap, meanwhile Macedonia is awarded with 1, taking into account the fact that it has fulfilled all the standards. Montenegro and Serbia are on a par with 1.75 and will have to wait for an EU decision regarding visa-free travel for their citizens. Albania is given the worst mark for all four blocks of its roadmap, while Macedonia has received the best score.

The information from the experts' missions as well as the readiness reports sent by the governments of Western Balkan countries have provided the basis for the latest Commission assessments for each country. According to Alexandra Stiglmeier, senior policy analyst at ESI: "Next week, on 25 May 2009, the European Commission will begin to discuss these results with officials from the EU member states, and afterwards it will [most likely] suggest the lifting of the Schengen visa regime for Macedonia, whilst this lifting will be currently denied to Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Montenegro and Serbia should show that the impressive progress of recent times undertaken by the governments of these two countries will continue, in order to benefit from visa-free travel to the EU [together with Macedonia]. In case of skepticism, a third option, only for these two countries (Montenegro and Serbia), would be a new Commission assessment at the end of July 2009."