



20 July 2009

**Open Letter**  
**by the [Schengen White List Project](#): A Roadmap for Kosovo!**

We welcome the recent European Commission proposal on visa liberalisation in the Western Balkans. It is an important step forward in a process that will allow people from the Western Balkans, like other Europeans, to travel freely around Europe.

We appreciate the fact that the visa liberalisation process is based on objective benchmarks. Governments in the region have a duty to implement wide-ranging reforms to enhance the EU's security and allay the concerns of EU citizens. The countries of the Western Balkans have been asked to improve control of their borders, introduce forgery-proof biometric passports, and put in place concrete strategies to combat organised crime, corruption and illegal migration.

Now the European Commission has found that three countries – Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro – have largely met these conditions. We are glad that the European Commission is in a position to propose visa-free travel for them. This shows that the process works.

We also hope that the authorities in Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina will soon fulfil the remaining criteria and gain visa-free access to the Schengen zone before the end of 2010. We welcome the fact that the European Commission is specifying in detail which conditions still have to be met by both countries, ensuring a rigorous and transparent procedure.

However, we are disturbed by the fact that Kosovo has been left out of this process, a blanket visa requirement having been proposed for all of its residents, including those with Serbian citizenship – this, without any mention of a process that could possibly lead to this requirement being lifted.

We know that EU member states currently disagree on the question of Kosovo's independence. However, all member states should agree that leaving Kosovo residents of all ethnicities trapped in a visa ghetto would be a serious problem – not only for Kosovo, but also for the entire Western Balkans and the EU's interests in the region.

We are convinced that it is in the EU's interest to encourage the same reforms in Kosovo as have already taken place in Macedonia and Montenegro. To do this, the EU should use the considerable human and financial resources it already deploys in Kosovo.

Bearing this in mind, we call on all EU member states – whatever their view on the status of Kosovo – to consider two changes to the Commission proposal.

First, Kosovo should also receive a visa roadmap. It must be given the opportunity to implement the same far-reaching reforms that the other five Balkan countries have set out to implement and to thus contribute to its own security, as well as to that of the entire region and the whole EU. Once Kosovo meets these conditions, the visa requirement should be abolished.

If Kosovo can be placed on the visa “black list” without an EU consensus on its status, then it can also be placed on the “white list” once it meets the necessary technical requirements. The visa liberalisation process should be considered status neutral by the EU.

Second, there should be no discrimination against Kosovo residents. In line with the Commission's proposal, the 3.5 million Serbs living outside Serbia, including the Serbs of Bosnia, will be eligible to receive Serbian passports allowing visa-free travel within the EU. The residents of Kosovo, meanwhile, will not. We disagree with such thinking. It will have the unintended consequence of encouraging Kosovo Serbs (and Kosovo Bosniaks) to relocate and take up residence outside of Kosovo – in plain contradiction to the EU's stated objective of a multiethnic Kosovo.

For years, the countries of the Western Balkans have been waiting for visa-free travel. In the region's relationship with the EU, few issues have been as important. The EU has been on target with its policy of roadmap conditionality and strict but fair evaluations. In the interests of European – and Balkan – security, it must build on this success.

Signed:

- **Giuliano Amato**, chairman of the Schengen White List Project Advisory Board, former Italian prime minister and interior minister
- **Otto Schily**, former interior minister of Germany, member of the German Bundestag
- **Radmila Sekerinska**, chairperson of the National Council for European Integration of Macedonia, former deputy prime minister of Macedonia
- **Misha Glenny**, author of "McMafia: Crime without Frontiers" and several books on the Balkans
- **Ivan Krastev**, chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia
- **Jordi Vaquer**, director of the Centre for International Relations and Development Studies (CIDOB), Barcelona
- **Heather Grabbe**, former senior adviser to the European Commissioner for Enlargement

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