



A visa-free regime for Albania and Bosnia-Hercegovina moves a step closer

Citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina and Albania will be exempt from EU visa requirements by the end of this year, if the full Parliament on 7 October backs a report adopted this Tuesday by the Civil Liberties Committee. The European Commission has indicated that the two countries meet the security requirements.

On 30 November 2009, the EU decided to waive visa requirements for citizens of Serbia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, a decision which took effect on 19 December that year. Bosnia-Hercegovina and Albania did not meet all the criteria at the time (relating to illegal immigration, public policy and security).

Last May, however, the Commission decided that the two countries had made good progress and therefore recommended that Parliament and the Council give the go-ahead to abolish the visa requirements by the end of the year, for visits of less than three months. The Civil Liberties Committee's report, drafted by Tanja Fajon (S&D, SL) and adopted by 49 votes to 2, backs the Commission's proposal.

"A very strong positive message" to Albanian and Bosnian citizens

"We are sending a very strong positive message to the citizens of Albania and Bosnia-Hercegovina that we are ready to lift the visa requirements", said Ms Fajon on Tuesday. She called on the Council of Ministers to finalise the process as swiftly as possible.

Only holders of biometric passports will be exempt from the visa rules.

Kosovo still "outside the process"

However, the Slovene MEP regretted that Kosovo remains "the only part of the Western Balkans still totally outside the process of visa liberalisation" because of "the split between Member States over recognition of its independence".

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