
EU decision about Visa liberalization for Kosovo

On 4th May the European Commission announced that Kosovo has all the characteristics for requesting the visa liberalization. According to Schengen's procedures, the visa free regime should be implemented in maximum 6 years. However, in this case it could also last over 10 months. The day after, on May the 5th Federica Mogherini - EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security- together with Dimitris Avramopoulos - European Commissioner for Migration Home Affairs and Citizenship- met in Pristina the prime minister of Kosovo, Isa Mustafa. During the joint press conference Federica Mogherini claimed that Kosovo is part of Europe. Therefore, «it needs to be integrated closer and deeper into the framework of the European Union».

At first glance, the difficult path of Kosovo towards visa liberalization seemed to have come to an end. Indeed, the Commission confirmed that “by the day of adoption of this proposal [the fourth roadmap] by the European Parliament and Council, Kosovo will have ratified the border agreement with Montenegro and strengthened its track record in the fight against organized crime and corruption” . Kosovo will benefit from the visa-free list for short stays in the Schengen zone. However, from a legal point of view there are obstacles deriving from the fact that several EU member states do not officially recognize the Balkan state. Moreover, a crucial point for the good development of the visa liberalization process regards a controversial border deal between Kosovo and Montenegro. The problem lies in the governmental opposition in Montenegro who refuses the deal and contributes to sharpening the political crisis in Pristina.

Besides that, Kosovo as well as Turkey, Georgia, and Ukraine could be asked to meet other conditions if necessary. Specifically, according to the fourth report on visa liberalization Kosovo is expected to “transferring a sufficient number of judges to court's serious crime departments; ensuring the operational independence of the Public Procurement Review Body and Public

Procurement Regulatory Commission”. Instead, in the Turkish case the success of the visa liberalization process is connected with the respect from Turkish side of specific rules that Turkey has to implement in the treatment of refugees.

At this point a brief excursus on Kosovo’s path towards visa liberalization is required. The talks to liberalize the visa regime began in 2012. Generally speaking, from EU’s perspective the slowness of the process depends on the bad economic conditions in Kosovo. The dialogue with the European Commission started in January 2012. This produced a roadmap explaining all the procedures and steps that Kosovo needed to take in order to obtain a visa-free regime. Among the reforms that Kosovo needed to implement great emphasis was put on security issues; for instance: document security; border and migration management; asylum, fight against organized crime. Four reports followed, including the one on 4 May 2016.

According to what reported by *Agenzia Nova*, visa liberalization for Kosovo will have positive impacts in the daily life of Kosovan citizens. From a mere economic point of view, the achievement of the visa-free regime would help Kosovan citizens to spare 5 million euro per year. Kosovo remains the last country in the region of Western Balkans which does not enjoy the visa-free status. Kosovo might benefit from the visa-free regime from many aspects especially if one considers that assuring the free movement might enhance personal and economic relationships among people. Furthermore, being totally part of the Schengen area might help Kosovan citizens to feel less isolated and help the country to actively contributing to the development of the Balkan region. Nevertheless, according to the European Commission, Kosovo did not yet fulfilled all the requirements. Among the reforms that Kosovo still needs to implement the most determining regards the reliability and security of passports and documents in general, and the respect of fundamental human rights *de facto*.

Moreover, several political analysts expressed skepticism about the speed of the process for two main reasons: firstly, the capacity of Kosovo to fulfill the remaining requirements in time; secondly, the difficulty of predicting the vote of the Commission since Spain does not recognize the statehood of Kosovo, and Germany and France are frightened by the huge numbers of asylum seekers from Kosovo. It is not by chance that *Zeri*, a Pristina-based Albanian language daily, reported that Kosovo’s process of visa liberalization will be delayed. The German newspaper *Die Welt* quotes German Interior Minister Thomas de Mezière, who confirms that Germany and France pushed for «a special clause that allows EU members to slow down the visa liberalization process for any

country». Moreover, in the specific case of Kosovo determining is the fear of a huge number of eventual asylum seekers.

From a political perspective, the postponement of the visa liberalization procedure for Kosovo is strictly connected to the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens. Thus, the delay for Kosovo might depend from the “suspension of the decision on the abolition of visas for Turkish citizens”. Thus, although the insistence of the Parliament, Kosovo should wait for the success of the visa liberalization process.

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