



Free and Safe Movement: The Roadmap

Identification of EU membership with visa free travel remains one of the strongest traits in Albanians' support for integration. Indeed, the free movement of people, as well as that of goods, services and capital, is an area of admirable achievements for the European Union that other regions of the world try to emulate also. Borderless regions, however, do not come alone, but are the representation of a wide and complex package of efforts, commitments and vision. In the European Union, many policies agreed upon by the Member States have been instrumental to freeing movement. These have included strengthening external border security, and cooperation and coordination between Member States' police and judicial authorities in order to fight organised crime, smuggling, illegal immigration and other such activities. The overall objective is for free movement to go hand-in-hand with security where this latter one is conceived of as an internal and regional matter simultaneously. The Roadmap on visa liberalisation,

handed in to the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lulzim Basha on the 3rd of June in Brussels, remains faithful to the Union's experience and vision of free and safe travel. The Roadmap sets out specific steps that Albania needs to take towards lifting the visa regime. The four target areas identified are document security, illegal migration, public order and security, and external relations and fundamental rights. Each area is expounded into detailed requirements tailored to Albania's situation and needs, such as issuance of biometric travel documents, enhancement of the integrity and security of the civil registry and the document distribution process etc.

This step was taken within a regional framework whereby the EU presented customised roadmaps to other countries in the Western Balkans, thus delivering once more on its commitment to the region. The roadmaps also build upon the Visa Facilitation agreements operational in the region since January

2008. For Albania, this agreement has meant a sharp reduction in visa fees from 60 to 35 euros, simplified procedures, a visa fee waiver for various categories with 50% of the population now being exempt from the fee altogether etc. The political will towards liberalization of the visa regime has been concretely reaffirmed by the EU on several occasions since the Thessaloniki Summit.

Even though the anchoring point in this process is the European Union, in their efforts towards liberalisation of movement, the Western Balkans' countries, just like EU Member States, must combine the domestic and regional dimensions of security. In practice that will mean more regional cooperation on the many issues that impinge upon visa free travel.

The efforts of each country will be closely monitored by the Commission, which upon positive assessment can then advance a proposal to the Council to lift the visa regime.

Albania starts issuing printed civil status certificates

On 14 August, the first printed certificate was issued in Albania. Owing to an EC-funded €2.5 million project, "Technical Assistance to the Government of Albania on Modernization of Address and Civil Registration Systems", all Albanian civil status data as registered in the hand-written fundamental register books has finally been computerised.

Starting from Kamëz and Paskuqan civil registry offices, Albania's government aims to gradually enable all other offices in the country to issue printed certificates. New printed certificates are to replace hand-written certificates, and thus provide better accuracy of data as well as shorter queues.

"These are the first tangible results of the modernization of the civil registration system," said Ambassador Bosch. "In order to ensure sustainable results, it is important to provide continuous commitment to the process at all levels. The Interior Ministry and the Civil Status Offices are aware of the major challenge ahead in maintaining the quality and sustainability of the new system", he added.



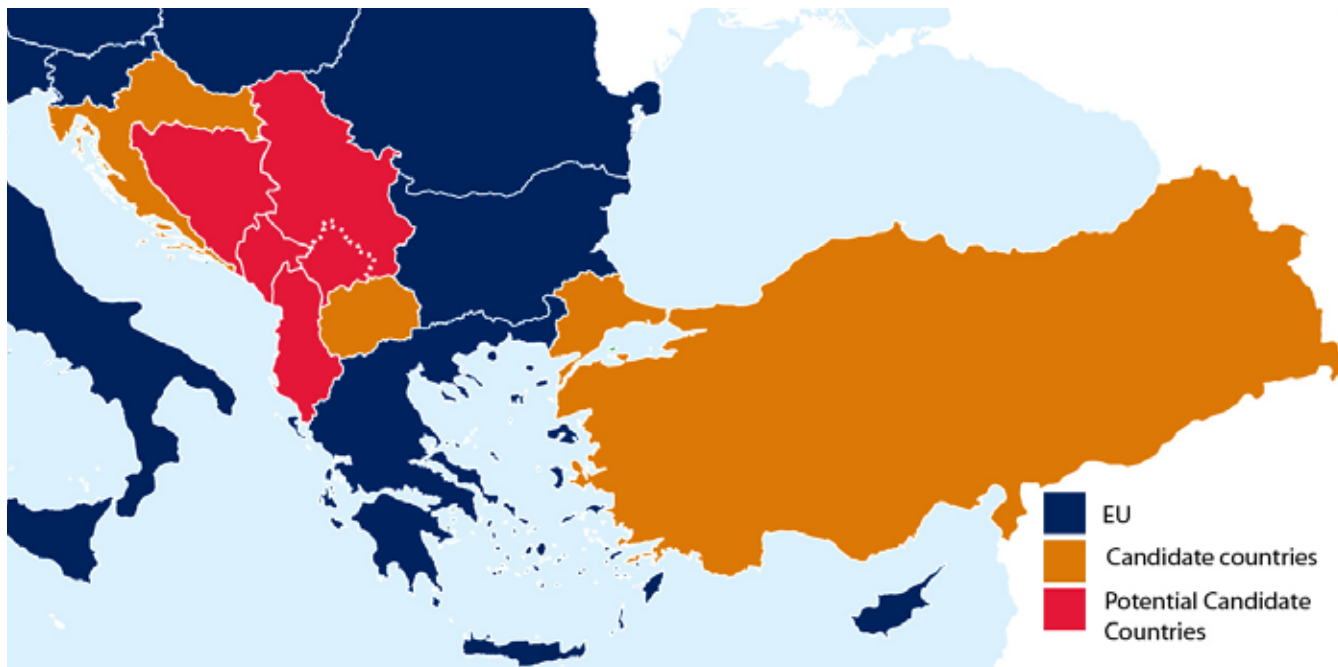
One of the first printed certificates

The Acting Head of the European Commission Delegation, Hubert Petit, said that the issue of data protection becomes even more important now that Albania has begun to use a civil status database. "In line with the Personal Data Protection law, adopted earlier this year, the Government should appoint a Data Protection Commissioner and establish a Data Protection Authority without further delay," he said. "Albania should ensure that a reliable civil registry is in place well in time before the deadlines for voter list

preparations and that identity documents in line with international standards are issued to all voters sufficiently in advance of the next parliamentary elections."

The project was implemented and enjoyed additional funding from the OSCE and the United States' government. Furthermore, STATISTICS NORWAY made significant contributions to the computerization of the civil status data and the development of the software, enabling the printing of certificates.

Positive 'European perspective' for Western Balkans



The European Council reaffirmed its full support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. During its meeting in June in Brussels, this policy was considered as a precondition for peace and stability in the region. Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, whose country held the rotating Presidency of the European Council in the first half of 2008 asserted the EU's commitment to the Western Balkans.

"The European perspective for the Western

Balkans is beyond any doubt, now that the network of SAA-s has been completed with the signature of agreements with Bosnia-Herzegovina and with Serbia", said the Slovenian Prime Minister.

A wide range of significant initiatives have been launched in various fields, whose aim is to help Balkan countries improve their transport and energy structure, strengthen scientific cooperation, and give their students opportunities to study in the EU.

With regards to Albania, the Council welcomed the commitment of the country to ensure the conditions for free, fair and democratic elections which must take place in 2009. The Council underlined that further efforts with regards to institutional capacities in public administration, the fight against corruption and organised crime as well as in the judiciary will be of similar importance.

European Union supports Albania's Local Government Units



Representatives of the EC Delegation, Albanian Mayors Association, the Communes Association and the Regional Councils Association at the National Conference on 4 July

The European Union supports Albania's Local Government Units in strengthening the local licensing administration capacities which promotes transparency in private-public partnership and better services for the local community. Funded by the EU, the € 1 million

project "Technical Assistance and Training on Public Services Delivery to Local Government" directly benefits the Albanian Mayors Association, the Communes Association and the Regional Councils Association. The preliminary results of the project were presented

by three pilot local government units - Shkodra Municipality, Dajti Commune and Elbasani Regional Council - in a National Conference on 4 July.

"Such a positive practice will be extended to other 20 local government units of Albania and will increase accessibility and transparency and the degree of standardisation of licensing procedures at the local level", said Mrs. L. Muço, Project Manager from the EC Delegation to Albania.

"The medium term objective is to increase the collaboration between governmental levels with the aim to further rationalise the distribution of regulatory tasks between central, regional and local government and develop administrative capacities of the local level in licensing administration", said Mr. H. Domi, Executive Director of Albanian Association of Regional Councils.

Albanian students win scholarships to study in Europe

The Delegation of the European Commission to Albania met with students who will start scholarships under the Erasmus Mundus master programmes in autumn 2008 as well as with alumni of the programme. The meeting brought together the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan, the Minister of Education and Science, Mr Fatos Beja, and the Minister of European Integration, Mrs Majlinda Bregu.

The EU Erasmus Mundus programme supports European top-quality masters courses and provides scholarships for third-country nationals participating in these courses on the one hand, and for EU-nationals studying at partner universities around the world on the other. Erasmus Mundus was endowed with €230 million over the period 2004 - 2008 and will continue with a €494 million endowment over the next 5 years. Albania is part of a special Western Balkans Window of Erasmus Mundus. In addition to the regular scheme, Albanians are therefore eligible for €4 million of additional funding dedicated to the region.

This year, 25 Albanians have been accepted in Erasmus Mundus master programmes of a wide variety, including Public Health, International Trade, Urban and Regional Studies, Horticultural Sciences, Marine Biodiversity, Information Technology, Local Development, and Human Rights. These students will have the opportunity to enrich their academic experiences through combining courses



Roundtable between the students, Ambassador Lohan, Minister of Education Beja and Minister of European Integration Bregu

from different universities within the European Union.

To facilitate their initial contact with their host countries, students were provided a package including practical information on travel in Europe, a Visa Facilitation Leaflet, useful material for their studies as well as brochures explaining the opportunities for research in the EU, an

area pertinent to Albania's development. In addressing the 2008 Erasmus Mundus students, Ambassador Lohan said: "I am very happy to meet you, excellent students and scholars, whom the EU invites to study at its centres of excellence in learning, and I wish you every success - for your studies and as "ambassadors" of Albania to your new universities."



Ambassador Lohan and the students sharing their experiences, discussing the Erasmus Mundus scheme and future opportunities

For further information on the Erasmus Mundus scheme, please follow this link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/programme/back_en.html

Work of art for the Serious Crimes Court plaza



Emanuel Koko and his winning proposal for the work of art for the Serious Crimes Court plaza

Three artists presented in August their proposals for the work of art to be placed in the plaza of the Serious Crimes Court in Tirana. The construction of the Serious Crimes Court is now in its final stages owing to a project funded by the European Commission with 5.07 million EUR. The building itself has cost 4.47 million and an additional 0.6 million have been invested in equipment and

furniture.

The work of art to be placed in front of the Serious Crimes Court, in combination with the architectural design of the building itself, will serve to enhance public understanding of the importance of this institution and communicate to citizens the emphasis put on the independence and transparency of the Albanian judiciary. Furthermore, the competition provides important impetus

for Albanian artists not only to express their talent but also to creatively engage with their country's developments.

The presentations of the art works by the three artists were followed by the gathering of the evaluation commission. The winner, Mr Emanuel Koko was soon after announced. He was awarded 2 500 EUR and another 10 000 EUR were made available for the actual construction of the work.



The three artists and the works they presented to the evaluation committee during the competition

“Audiovisual media services in the EU” Seminar

The European Commission Delegation to Tirana, in cooperation with the National Council of Radio and Television (NCRT), organised a workshop for local stakeholders on European electronic media legislation. Various experts from different EU member states offered their experiences in the workshop, explaining to media representatives in Tirana the challenges and successes in media legislation implementation in their respective countries. They also gave their own viewpoints on the legislation

and its implementation in Albania. The workshop was held in a moment when Albanian corresponding authorities are to approximate media legislation to the EU acquis.

“This workshop comes at the right time as Albania aims to get familiar with the European standards and practices”, said Mrs. Mesila Doda, the NCTR's and Seminar's Chairwoman. Considering media legislation as one of the principal pillars to promote the

proper development, efficient service and better quality of electronic media, representatives of foreign media and experts of the field presented a wide range of discussion issues in their speeches during the workshop.

Considering the need for assistance in the current media environment in Albania, the EC's initiative was welcomed by the participants and stakeholders.

“Friends of Europe” Summit

Over 300 politicians, policymakers, pundits, as well as representatives from international organisations, civil society and the private sector, were gathered at the Summit “Friends of Europe”. During the ninth annual Balkans Summit, “A Balkans Balance Sheet”, in June 24, participants discussed the health of the European Union's Balkan enlargement strategy and the European Union's influence on Balkan politics.

As pointed out in the Summit, the region has experienced a number of very positive developments, namely the Regional Cooperation Council in February 2008 and the signing of Stabilisation Association Agreement with

Bosnia-Herzegovina on 16 June.

While tensions are still evident across the region, especially over the independent state of Kosovo, there are positive developments in Serbia's new government, with a more pro-EU political class ruling the country.

International and EU institutions remained optimistic about the prospects of region's eventual integration in the European block. Olli Rehn, Commissioner for EU Enlargement, assured Western Balkan countries that the European Commission is well engaged in their accession process, as can be seen through its vast assistance and commitment to facilitate the reform processes in the

respective countries.

“We need patience and determination to drive progress in the region. I am glad that the European Council gave its full support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans”, said Commissioner Rehn. He further added that “by making solid progress in economic and political reform and by fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements, the remaining potential candidates in the Western Balkans should achieve candidate status, according to their own merits, with EU membership as the ultimate goal. This is a powerful message. The EU sticks to its word”.

Please visit the websites below or contact the Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana

www.delalb.ec.europa.eu

www.europa.eu

www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement

www.eu2008.si

Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana, Albania:

Rruga Durrësit, 127-1, Tirana, Albania

Telephone: (355) 4 228320 or 230871 - 228479 - 234284 - 229851 Fax: (355) 4 230752 or 274412

e-mail: Delegation-Albania@ec.europa.eu

Publisher: Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission

If you would like to receive the next edition please

email: suela.thanasi@ec.europa.eu or contact the

Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana