Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 15.06.2011 www.osw.waw.pl

Blocking Bulgaria and Romania's entry into the Schengen zone

On 9 June the Council of the European Union postponed at until least September 2011 the decision to include Bulgaria and Romania in the Schengen zone, despite the fact that both countries fulfil the technical membership requirements. This decision means a painful blow to Sofia and Bucharest's efforts and a definitive shifting of the enlargement of the zone to the political level.

The position taken by a section of the EU countries proves that the EU will agree to the enlargement not earlier than in 2012, only after Bulgaria and Romania's significant progress in combating corruption and a full adjustment of the countries' judicial systems to EU standards have been seen. Positive opinions about Bulgaria and Romania's preparedness for membership in the Schengen zone have already been issued by the European Parliament and a group of experts that have evaluated the fulfilment of technical membership requirements. However, enlargement requires unanimous agreement of all the Schengen member countries. The Netherlands made its agreement dependent on the curbing of corruption and the completion of the reform of the judicial system in both countries. Similar reservations have so far been formulated by Germany and France. At the same time the Netherlands emphasised that it would not change its position on this issue until 2012.

The Council's decision proved that the criteria of the membership in the Schengen zone had been re-evaluated. The decision has been postponed until September 2011, which is linked to the publication on the reports by the European Commission relating to the implementation of the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism. This instrument comprises the monitoring of Bulgaria and Romania's progress in their fight against corruption and in adjusting the countries' judicial systems to EU norms. The stance taken by a group of EU countries shows that the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen zone will be not very likely before the EU has completed the implementation of this mechanism. Blocking the accession of the two countries is also part of the growing political importance of migration issues and a sceptical approach of part of the countries of the EU to the idea of the free movement of people, which is linked to social fears of the influx of immigrants from North Africa. <dab>