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# Will Serbs need visas again to enter the Schengen Area?

The European Commission on 24 May presented a proposal of changes in the visa directive, which enables a temporary re-imposition of the visa obligation on third-country citizens in case of the abuse of visa facilitations or the threat to the security of member states. If the European Commission's proposal is accepted at the EU Council's meeting on 9 June, this may mean a re-introduction of the visa regime for the Western Balkans, first of all for Serbia.

The EC came up with this proposal in response to anxiety in member states caused by the influx of a large number of asylum seekers from the Balkan states in the case of which the visa obligation for entry to the Schengen Area was lifted in 2009–2010. The phenomenon mainly originates from economic reasons and concerns primarily the citizens of Serbia, who in 2010 constituted the third largest group (after citizens of Russia and Afghanistan) of asylum seekers (almost 18,000). At the same time, a definite majority of applications from this group were rejected (12,370 out of the 12,690 decisions taken were negative). As a result of pressure from the EC and the member states, the Serbian government took action to restrict migration. According to Serbian data, the number of asylum seekers has fallen by 35% since December 2010.

If the Council of the EU accepts the EC's proposal, it will be possible to impose the visa obligation temporarily, omitting the co-deciding procedure (decisions of the Parliament and Council of the EU) for six months if over the past six months the following have increased by more than 50%: the number of people staying illegally on the territory of a member state or the number of people who submit asylum applications (less than 3% of the applications submitted were considered positively over the past six months) or the number of readmission requests rejected by the country.

The lifting of the visa obligation has been the largest success of the Serbian government over the past few years, and it can be expected they will take active measures to retain this privilege. However, this will be difficult to achieve due to the migration pressure caused by economic factors. <MarSz>