

Albania and BiH are closer to a visa-free regime with the Schengen Area

The European Parliament on 7 October accepted the European Commission's proposal for Schengen Area countries to lift the visa obligation for citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EP's decision must be approved by the European Council at the session on 8–9 November. However, France opposes the abolition of visas for the two countries.

The European Parliament passed the decision by a majority of votes (538 for, 47 against) on the basis of the European Commission's report, which was presented on 14 September. According to the Commission, Albania and BH have met all the conditions set in the EU's Road Map of March 2008. A number of reforms have been implemented and requirements have been met, including those regarding biometrical passports, border protection, illegal migration control, co-operation with the European justice system, EUROPOL and FRONTEX, and the asylum policy. The process of the implementation of EU solutions has been closely monitored by missions of EC experts (approximately 30 visits over two years).

However, the French secretary of state for European affairs Pierre Lellouche called into question the reliability of the EC's report at the session of the European Parliament on 29 September and demanded 'security guarantees' from the two countries which would ensure France proper protection against a wave of immigrants. These actions have to be seen in the wider context of the conflict between France and the European Commission.

However, most member states want a unanimous positive decision. If the lifting of the visa regime for Albania and BH is called into question as being unreasonable, this will undermine the reliability of the EU's activity since blocking this decision would mean the use of double standards. The visa requirement was lifted for citizens of Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia without any additional conditions in December 2009 as part of the same procedure.

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