



Regional Women's Lobby For Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe

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VISA FREE TRAVEL

As of December 19, 2009, the citizens of **Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro** are able to travel to the countries of the Schengen area without a visa and stay there for a maximum of 90 days. This does not apply to the countries of Great Britain and Ireland, which are not in the Schengen zone. The governments of Serbia and Montenegro organized special flights to the EU just after midnight on December 19, to mark the occasion. For Serbians, the decision relates only to those citizens who have biometric passports, and are not residents of Kosovo.

ICTY PROSECUTOR'S REPORT

At the beginning of December, Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY, presented his report to the Security Council on cooperation between the court and countries of the Western Balkans. For **Serbia**, Brammertz offered conditional praise stating that Serbia's cooperation with the tribunal has improved but that Belgrade must keep up efforts to arrest the two main fugitives – Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic. Regarding **Croatia**, Brammertz urged the government to do more to find certain documents from the war that the court has requested. He welcomed Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor's decision to set up a task force aimed at locating the documents and said a report from the task force he received this week was helpful.

INFRASTRUCTURE CONFERENCE

On December 9, 2009 a high level conference in Brussels brought together EU high officials, representatives of major European banks and officials of West Balkan countries to make a deal on funding infrastructure policy in the Western Balkans. To that end, an agreement between the European Commission and three leading European banks created a fund of two billion and 200 million Euros of support to West Balkan projects. This fund should enable the better functioning of the free trade CEFTA agreement and increase economic growth and investment scope.

EU 2010 BUDGET

The European Parliament has approved a 122.9 billion Euro budget for 2010, nearly half of which is to go to agriculture and natural resources. This is a 6% increase from the 2009 budget and is the last year that the EU budget has been negotiated under Nice Treaty rules. Under the Lisbon Treaty, which went into effect on 1 December, the European Parliament will have greater powers to influence the budget. All areas will be subject to parliament's "co-decision" with the EU governments.

MONTENEGRO

On December 9, 2009 Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic submitted **Montenegro's** answers to the EC's questionnaire. European Integration Minister Gordana Durovic said that more intensive talks with the EC will begin in January, and that the dialogue is expected to last several months. Expectations are that Montenegro could achieve candidacy status at the end of 2010.

CROATIA

On December 21, 2009 **Croatia** closed two more negotiation chapters (free movement of services and social policy). However three further chapters that were on the agenda to be opened (fisheries, environment and foreign and security policy) were again blocked by **Slovenia**. The Swedish presidency expressed hope the Slovenian blockade would be short and Slovenia stated it expected their reservations would be resolved within the first few months of 2010. Other than these three, only two other chapters remain to be opened: judiciary and competition policy. The first is blocked until the Netherlands and UK decide that Croatian cooperation with the ICTY is satisfactory, while the second concerns the difficult matter of dealing with ailing shipyards kept alive by high state subsidies.

Support for EU membership remains low in Croatia; a new Gallup poll found many continue to perceive the EU critically – nearly four in ten thought of EU membership as being neither good nor bad while 43 percent would vote against accession in a referendum.

BOSNIA

Top international officials in **Bosnia** have come to odds with the Bosnian Serb leadership over a decision to extend the contracts of foreign judges and prosecutors dealing with war crimes for three more years. The Republika Srpska

leadership had rejected the extension, however the High Representative went forward with it as he has the power under the Dayton peace accord to impose laws and officials unilaterally. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has said he will call a referendum over the issue.

Constitutional consultations between leading Bosnian political parties and the Office of the High Representative continued this month. The discussions were started in October to try to find consensus on constitutional reforms. However consensus still remains far and there is no hope that the Office of the High Representative can be closed down soon or that a more centralized government can be formed. Some analysts believe that if the three sides do not achieve a consensus before the next general elections in the autumn of 2010 that the international community will impose a solution in order for elections to take place under a new set of rules.

SERBIA

Following the positive report given by The Hague's Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz on **Serbia's** cooperation with the Tribunal, the EU decided to unfreeze its Interim Trade Agreement with Serbia.

The Interim Agreement establishes a free trade area between the EU and Serbia and regulates issues of competition and state aid. It also guarantees that EU market will remain open to many Serbian products and provides for the gradual opening of the Serbian market to EU products. Next years EU budget foresees approximately 50 million euros to Serbia in budget support.

Serbia signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008, however the Netherlands has blocked its implementation, arguing that Mladic should be arrested first. Discussions on the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia will be opened again in June 2010.

On December 23, 2008 Serbia formally submitted its application to join the EU. President Tadic presented the application to the Swedish Prime Minister; as Sweden is the current holder of the EU presidency. However before membership negotiations begin in earnest it is likely that the EU will require the capture of the two main remaining war fugitives mentioned above, Mladic and Hadzic. It is likely to take at least four years before membership is extended to Serbia, and probably longer say many analysts.

The application will now be placed on the agenda of the EU Council of Ministers, and forwarded to the European Commission if it gets the approval of the ministers of all 27 EU member states. The EC will then send to Serbia a detailed questionnaire. The official EU response to the application will be given after the questionnaire is submitted.

Opinion polls suggest overwhelming support within Serbia for joining the EU, at 60-70%. But a majority also opposes the hunt for General Mladic, still perceiving him as a national hero.

ALBANIA

After receiving in November Albania's membership application, this month the EU presented Tirana with the questionnaire which is meant to help the EC form an opinion on the country's readiness to join the EU. The questionnaire has almost 400 pages and will involve significant effort by the public administration to complete.

Albania has been in a political crisis since the parliamentary elections in June; the socialist opposition has alleged the democrats manipulated the elections. The opposition, led by Tirana Mayor Edi Rama, is holding countrywide demonstrations, asking for recounting of some ballots. They threaten to continue the months of boycotting of the country's parliament until their demands are met.

KOSOVO

This month the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) opened hearings on the secession of **Kosovo**. **Serbia** has presented a case to the ICJ asking it to declare Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 as a breach of international law. The Kosovo side argued that independence was irreversible and statements were made in support of their position by countries such as **Croatia** and the US. This is the first time that the ICJ has been asked to examine whether secession complies with international law. The verdict is not expected for several more months. The decision will not be legally binding, but is expected to influence whether other countries recognize Kosovo.

MACEDONIA

The name dispute with Greece again proved to be a roadblock on **Macedonia's** path of EU integration. In the meeting of EU foreign ministers on December 12, 2009, Greece officially blocked the start of membership talks for Macedonia until the resolution of the name dispute. Other members of the EU council expressed hope that membership negotiations with Macedonia could begin mid-2010.