

03.03.2006 (14:20)

## **SWOBODA: TIME HAS COME FOR LIBERALIZATION OF VISA REGIME**

SARAJEVO, March 3 (FENA) – Time has come for courageous steps forward towards opening of the region, including BiH, in order to improve the possibilities for traveling to Europe, member of the European Parliament, in charge of monitoring the situation in the region and BiH, Hannes Swoboda said on Friday in Sarajevo.

Swoboda made this statement at a press conference at which the Center for European Integration Strategies (CEIS), non-governmental organization with offices in Sarajevo, Geneva and Vienna, presented the Report "BiH: Prepared for liberalization of visa regime".

According to Swoboda, it is unacceptable that BiH citizens, especially, the youth, have lesser possibilities to communicate with Europe than this was the case with the former Yugoslavia, adding that communication with the EU is not important only for BiH, but also for the EU.

He stressed that many people in Europe are not well informed about the region and BiH, especially because negative news dominate the media and many create their perception on basis of old news.

Swoboda, who is also member of the CEIS Board, held a meeting with BiH Council of Ministers Chair Adnan Terzic and Reisu-I-ulema of the Islamic Community in BiH Mustafa Cerić, at which it was stated that BiH's opening would have a great significance for the EU in context of the dialogue of cultures.

He supported the CEIS document, especially because the people with bad intentions can find their way with visas or without them, while it is pitiful that people with good intentions cannot visit Europe.

Swoboda declared that this study gives more information about this problem than any other study released before and announced that he would promote it in his country, Austria, which is currently presiding the EU.

He also discussed this subject with the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, especially in context of the upcoming meeting among the EU and Western Balkans foreign ministers.

Swoboda is convinced that majority in the European Commission and the European Parliament, as well as Austria, would support these activities.

He expressed hope that 2006 would mark the beginning of a no-visa regime, given that the no-visa regime in the beginning would be applied only to students-journalists, businesspersons, but that the final aim must be the no-visa regime.

Director of CEIS Office in Sarajevo Senad Slatina stressed that people in Europe still have the perception of BiH that corresponds with the situation from 1995 or 1996, which is very much different from the current situation.

He rejected the malicious accusations constantly present in the EU that BiH is fertile land for people with bad intentions, stating that these are nothing but lies and deceptions of those who do not wish good for BiH.

The Report proves that BiH and her authorities in the so-called war on terror behaved absolutely equally as majority of the Western European countries, i.e. that her security apparatus worked professionally.

Slatina stressed that the Report presented statistics that indicate that the number of illegal entries in BiH has been reduced by several tens, her personal documentation protection system is the most sophisticated in the region, as well as that BiH has fully equalized the visa issuing system with the EU and that she behaves responsibly in all spheres. This is the reason why BiH deserves to be considered for liberalization of visa regime.

CEIS Director Executive Cristophe Solioz said that this report comes in the right time due to the forthcoming meeting in Salzburg. He stressed that time has come for lobbying for BiH on basis of strong arguments and for BiH to defend her rights on a healthy basis.

(Fena) jc

---

The contents of the Fena web site are for personal use only. It is not allowed to publish parts of wholes in any form whatsoever without Fena's prior written consent. For harmful consequences that could arise from non-compliance with this instruction, Fena takes no responsibility whatsoever.