

Swoboda: Time Has Come for Liberalization of Visa Regime

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, 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-l-ulema of the Islamic Community in BiH Mustafa Ceric, at which it was stated that BiH 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 inten-

tions 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.



Hannes Swoboda

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, it's 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.

R. K.

Mandatory Disinfection on Border Crossings Between BiH, Serbia

The mandatory disinfection of the vehicles coming from Serbia and Montenegro to BiH came into effect on Friday, at the border crossing points Karakaj and Sepak, aiming to prevent the spread of bird flu which broke out in Serbia on Thursday.

As stated at a press conference held at the border crossing points Karakaj and Sepak, the preventive measures have been introduced by the Republika Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and are being implemented by the Veterinary Service.

The vehicles coming from Serbia and Montenegro to BiH must drive over the sponge soaked in disinfectant, while the officers of the Veterinary Service are disinfecting the upper parts of the vehicles.

The disinfection fee for motorcycles is 2.5

KM, for cars - five KM, for lorries - 12 KM, and for trailer trucks - 20 KM. The Decree of the RS Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, which came into force on February 18, aims to prevent the bird flu virus spread and stipulates the mandatory disinfection of the vehicles coming from BiH to Serbia.

The disinfection fee for the motorcycles is 100 Dinars, for the cars - 200 Dinars, for the lorries - 500 Dinars, and for the buses and trailer trucks - 800 Dinars.

The inhabitants of the Serbian municipalities near the border by the river Drina, who work in the RS border municipalities, are exempted from paying the disinfection fee. All other citizens who cross from one state to another are now to pay the mandatory vehicle disinfection fee twice. **R. K.**

Average Unemployment Rate in FBiH at 46% Last Year

A total of 347,478 unemployed were registered in the cantonal employment services in Federation BiH at the end of last year, up 21,740 from December a year earlier.

An average unemployment rate in Federation BiH last year was 46% and has a growth tendency from earlier years. An average employment rate was 24.5%, the Federation Employment Bureau said. A total of 31,483 people from the register of the employment services were employed last year. During last year, a total of 388,584 workers were employed in average, up 274 or 0.07% from the 2004 average, which amounted to 388,310 workers.

According to some researches and assessments of the World Bank, the unemployment rate is between 17 and 23%, including those working at the black market as part of the overall employment, them around 180,000.

A. G.