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ALMHOFFER: IT WOULD BE A PITY IF VENICE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION WAS NOT ACCEPTED

SARAJEVO, March 5 (FENA) – Austrian Ambassador in BiH Werner Almhofer told Fena that he could not predict whether the Croat side would accept the opinion of the Venice Commission regarding the manner of electing the future members of BiH Presidency, but bearing in mind that the Croat side had supported all other elements of constitutional reforms, it would be a great pity if this did not happen.

Still, Ambassador Almhofer is optimistic that the Croat side would accept the opinion of the Venice Commission and that the entire package of constitutional reforms would be accepted on time so that it could be applied at the forthcoming October General Elections.

According to him, the matter of the BiH Council of Ministers is very important for the EU, and the already arranged constitutional solutions will enhance the function of this body.

Among the two new state-level ministries is the ministry of agriculture, and agriculture is one of the most important European policies, stressed Almhofer adding that it is important that the Council of Ministers holds the responsibility for negotiations with the EU, as well as for implementing the results of the negotiations.

Brussels will monitor the success of reforms that the authorities have already accepted. Almhofer stressed that there will be many purely technical things that need to be adjusted to the EU standards. It will be necessary to adopt approx. one hundred laws, and it will not be possible to implement them successfully without an efficient state government.

The Austrian Ambassador also reiterated the statement of the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, who underlined the need for ensuring efficient functioning of the BiH central institutions, because it is not enough only to have the government committed to reforms, but that it is also capable of turning them into political reality.

Almhofer declared that the BiH team was well prepared for the first round of negotiations for a Stabilization and Association Agreement, and that they made a good impression on the European side.

However, he warned that the second round would encompass more technical matters, such as the joint market, customs and taxes, and these are the things that require the engagement of an efficient State government.

In conclusion, the Austrian Ambassador also commented on the forthcoming meeting of foreign ministers of the EU and Western Balkans countries in Salzburg, at which liberalization of visa regime would be one of the subjects. He deems that majority of the EU member states support this idea and expressed hope that Austria would be able to support this request at the meeting in Salzburg.

According to him, BiH has good arguments for liberalization of visa regime and it is expected that BiH Foreign Minister Mladen Ivanic would present them in Salzburg.

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SWOBODA: MAJORITY IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTS LIBERALIZATION OF VISA REGIME WITH BiH

SARAJEVO, March 5 (FENA) – The majority in the European Parliament supports the no-visa regime for BiH, member of the European Parliament in charge of monitoring the Western Balkans, including BiH, and head of delegation of Austrian Social Democrats in the European Parliament, Hannes Swoboda, told Fena during his visit to Sarajevo.

However, there are people in the European Parliament who fear the infiltration of suspicious people from BiH and this is why it is important to resolve some of the key issues, i.e. present the working results in BiH, such as the fact that nobody suspicious was granted BiH citizenship over the past years. Swoboda deems this is a signal of preparedness for opening the borders and a no-visa regime.

Regarding the members of European Parliament who are opposing the liberalization of visa regime with BiH, Swoboda said these are the people who come from the right wing, including nationalists who “play with people’s fears”.

“They were against it before and they are against it now, but I think that majority of political groups, national parties, social democrats, the greens and liberals, support the no-visa regime with BiH”, said Swoboda.

When asked whether Islamophobia is one of the motives of those opposing liberalization of visa regime with BiH, especially in context of the so-called war on terror, Swoboda said that there is a small group of people who abuse islamophobia, the fear of infiltration of terrorists via BiH, but that this is a small group, while majority of his colleagues in the European Parliament are convinced that BiH is doing everything in her power against the possible infiltration by terrorists.

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