

“Presentation of the European magazine on visa liberalization” - 22.07.2010.

MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the presentation of the second edition of European magazine on the subject "liberalization of visa" published by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS). At the beginning, we will watch the documentary film "Life in the ghetto." The film is in English, but I hope our translators will be able to translate so you could follow it with equipment. The film was made in the production of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society and is part of the project "Forum 2015". After the film, you will be addressed by the Deputy Minister for European Integration in the Government of Kosovo Arban Abraši, by Hajrula Ceku, a researcher in the Club of Foreign Policy and Ilirijana Kacaniku, program coordinator in the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

ILIRIJANA KACANIKU: Thanks all, thank you for participating in this presentation. What we want to do in KFOS, in the framework of the European integration "Forum 2015", is to increase attention on the issue of visas and visa liberalization. We are very far from the countries in the region besides increased lobbying of our and other non-governmental organizations interested in this topic. We have nothing in particular from the European Union, KFOS wants to actualize this matter. Last year we created the first edition of the magazine and at the end of last year we created a few documents. At the beginning of this year we made documentary and we also drafted a statements of various non-governmental organizations by which we invited Olli Rehn to take concrete steps. I would like to add that the European magazine represents newspaper which our foundation is periodically publishing and we would like through them to open various questions about the process of integration of Kosovo into the European community. The first edition of the European magazine was dedicated to energy, and another to visa liberalization. You can now see magazine, the first edition was released in the Albanian language, while the other, both in Albanian and Serbian language, so that the Kosovo public could be better informed. I don't want to take a lot of time, but I would add a few things about the progress with regard to the liberalization of visas. Last year there was great resistance for granting visas. On 1 January 2011 we will be the only one who will apply for visas. Last year we had the biggest expenses in the region, it was given 120 Euros for completing one application, what is 60 percent of the optimal wage in Kosovo while in 2011 we will be the only one to give for this purpose that amount of money. Probably this amount of money will be more than 120 Euros. Last year the people of Kosovo were the most rejected when it comes to visas, and therefore isolated in the world, because officially we can travel only in four states without visas. Also, we cannot travel in the countries of the region without visas. We are not even allowed to travel to Serbia and Bosnia since with Kosovo passport we cannot travel there. Kosovo documents recognized 69 countries, 43 have not answered if they recognize Kosovo passports and there are announcements that our documents will be recognized by 23 countries. We are the only in the region that don't have signed cooperation memorandum with the European Union, we do not have access to international forums, while "Schengen visa minus" still exists for us. We want to persuade the European

Union that Kosovo must have a project, that Kosovo must be included in regular policy of the European Union with regard to expansion. We have the right and we have shown willingness to meet the criteria of the European Union in the process of visa liberalization. We need a very serious offer from the European Union.

Thank you very much. You can read in the second number of European magazines about visa liberalization.

ARBAN ABRASI: Thank you Ilirijana and Hajrulau. First I would like to thank KFOS and to "Forum 2015" for the magazine and documentary, by which was made an important thing, even for the Ministry for European Integration. The documentary showed which difficulties Kosovo had in Brussels, what's going on in Kosovo and what should be done in Kosovo, in this regard. As you know, the European perspectives of Kosovo and Western Balkans are guaranteed, but in 2007, when negotiations on liberalization began, Kosovo was left aside. It was only in 2008 and 2009 when negotiations with the entire Western Balkans started. When in 2009 liberalization of visas for Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia was approved, only then civil society has ended the legend on country which has been made. The European Parliament then strongly spoke on visa liberalization and freedom of movement in Kosovo.

At the end of 2009 started a proactive approach of Brussels towards Kosovo related to the liberalization of the visa. Since then, there is a constructive approach and greater support to Kosovo. The liberalization of visa includes major reforms which should be implemented, with particular reference to the reform of the security of documentation on migration in order to show that the rule of law in Kosovo is at a high level. There is also categorization in terms of political and economic aspects in line with European standards. The approach which was introduced in 2010 upon government initiative, when it comes to visa liberalization has contributed in a way that Brussels is more active towards Kosovo. Kosovo has prepared a basic document on visa liberalization and presented it to the countries in the region and started to realize some of the technical issues in accordance with the law. In late June was adopted a Law on deportation of people from abroad to Kosovo, then was initiated civil registration and documentation preparation. 80 percent of civil registers are now digitalized and it has been done a lot on training administration. The main challenges in this process are five countries that have not recognized Kosovo's independence. This is a big challenge for Brussels and for us. Also, the challenge for us is the northern part of Kosovo where we have to establish order and peace. Particularly important issue in that area is the functioning of the judiciary. For the Government the challenges are, and migration, and reintegration, and those are also the criteria to be fulfilled in the visa liberalization. Recently, was held the plenary session on stabilization and association where was presented the technical and programming progress in line with European criteria. This progress shows that Kosovo is closer to liberalization. Latest reports say that the results are positive, given that in September this year we had it all and that all lasted only eight months.

I hope that if we engage a bit more, the liberalization of visas for Kosovo can be expected at the end of 2011 or early 2012 year. I am convinced that there will be lot of challenges on that way and that there will be a lot of criteria which should be met. I hope that from October will start a concrete dialogue on visa liberalization. From some experts from European Commission we have received estimate and I hope that, after

we get completed project on visa liberalization in September, in 2011 we will get the concrete proposals and recommendations. Thank you.

HAJRULA CEKU: After this documentary I would like to focus on a few technical things which the Club for foreign policy deals with, without avoiding political dimension since in this documentary was said that it is clear that the policy affects the visa liberalization. Club for foreign policy has made a report on prospects for visas in Kosovo and another report that is also very important - an agreement between the EU and Kosovo on the trade. We have documentation which shows that it is working on it. We are mostly focused on what European Commission frequently highlighted and those are two points: reintegration, the return of those who live in the European Union and providing documentation along with the civil registration. When we talk about reintegration and deportation of people from abroad to Kosovo, there are several criteria which should be satisfied. Kosovo cannot sign a memorandum with the European Union as whole, but with each country individually. At the request of the European Commission only Kosovo adopted the Law on the re-acceptance of people. The law was adopted in the Assembly on 15 April. When it comes to asylum, there are two disadvantages regarding staffing, such as capacity building and monitoring the migration issue where the most of work should be done on loading the code by people who are issuing a visa. It began slowly to function, but we have a lot of points on which we can't get to work because we assessed that the situation in that area is bad. The interior ministry has to sign agreements on return of the people from abroad to Kosovo, which first need to do with the countries where Kosovo has the largest Diaspora. When it comes to safe and secure providing documents and biometrics passports, Council for protection of data was appointed and it is estimated that these are very critical points. This is one of the important elements and criteria that the Government of Kosovo through a basic document for the liberalization of visa requirements should meet. The document, issued by the Government states that Jun 2010 is the deadline when biometric passports must begin to be issued. However, we see that this did not happen. We in the Club for foreign policy believe that the impact of policy is very important, but economic impact certainly cannot be rejected until the adoption of all criteria which derive from the basic documents for visa liberalization. Given that we have not met the criteria, there must be done a lot on their implementation. While we are determining the priorities in the liberalization of the visa, we realized that the Kosovo government has not reached a satisfactory level which would enable the fulfillment of the criteria in the visa liberalization. Therefore, there is a need to improve conditions in this area. The government sometimes only declarative mention domain of visa liberalization and while communicating with citizens is talking about these issues in general. But when it comes to the budget, the Government of Kosovo is very passive. The last point we dealt with was what we said in our report to improve cooperation between the EU and Kosovo. For example, the European Commission has begun a large and comprehensive investigation when it comes to the work of half of Government Ministers, although that is issue of corruption and crime. This shows that there is suspicion and distrust in Kosovo Government, which significantly affect its credibility. I do not know whether with such government credibility and the fact that half of the Ministers are under investigation, we can sign any agreement with EU countries.

So it suppose to be clear to us that the basic project on visa liberalization is a priority and that it needs to be worked on it seriously. But still, we should bear in mind that the Government credibility which is violated to a large extent, can slow the process of visa liberalization. It is a government that is passive in everything. Club for foreign policy will come out next week with the evaluation on questions on visa liberalization for May, June and part of July. Thank you.

ILIRIJANA KACANIKU: Does anybody have a comment or question?

Blue Sky Radio: The documentary explained everything, so we don't have to ask anything. I don't know what to ask. Five or six months ago I worked a story about the return of our Diaspora. I know that you are not from the Police, but since you are in the Department for External Relations maybe I can ask you. We all know that the requirement for visa liberalization is the return of people who don't have regular status, from Western countries. What Kosovo needs to do in order to integrate those people who are returning? What our institutions work? Those who return may raise the level of crime because they are left to their own.

ARBAN ABASI: The law of deportation, as my predecessor said is "sui generis" and it indicates the ratio of Kosovo towards the European Union. In this process we see perspective and I think that there will be progress. I said that in September, I expect a comprehensive basic document, and then we'll start with carrying out of tasks. There is also the issue of biometric passports, and we didn't immediately begin to issue them because we want the European Commission to be part of it. As for the deportation of our people, so far we have signed six agreements with six countries, and calls for negotiations were sent to other countries so we will soon know the schedule for the other countries. Capacity within institutions should also be developed and of course it should be worked on a regular coordination with other institutions. The strategy was approved in the government, but the budget has not so that at the moment is used reserved fund. I hope that by the end of this week or at the beginning of next, this issue will be resolved. The point is that there must be provided funds for people who are deported from abroad and who are from Kosovo, and in such a big project are involved several ministries, such as the Ministry of Communities and Returns, all municipalities but it is also important a systematization of persons and the number of people who are coming back. We have information that people, who are returning from Germany, are mostly members of the RAE community. I hope that in the next few months the working groups will function in a real sense and what is important is that the Ministry of Communities and Returns, the Interior ministry and municipalities are in the stage of final action regarding this issue - where the reception centers will be; first in Lipljan and then in other places. I think that in foreseeable future all issues regarding this will be lined up.

HAJRULA CEKU: I have something to add, perhaps significantly for the Government, because we, as a new in the Ministry, and equally young, we could include civil society and the media in these issues. What I think is important is education and lobbying. Lobbying in Brussels. People from Kosovo are not so dangerous as some people think, as well communication with public on what is the visa liberalization. I do it

all the time. Reintegration component as mentioned is important. This is a big problem, but I think that the government will show off. I think that the countries which deport these people need to provide some grants for them. At least in applying for their basic rights; to have a roof over their heads and that they can start a new life. Our instruction is that deportation is possible, but also with the assistance of countries which deport them, otherwise they are returned in a very unstable place and their arrival could further disrupt and destabilize Kosovo. We are now ready or not, but we as a government cannot solve all alone. In this should be included also the Ministry of health to provide the conditions for these people who may be ill. Then, the Ministry of Local Government should organize municipalities regarding the acceptance of these people. I see that the Ministry for Internal Affairs is working on it, and Ministry for European Integration is a new player, but the main are definitely the Ministry for Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare. It has been said earlier that the Ministry for European Integration has the minor role in this process and that is to provide frames.

ILIRIJANA KACANIKU: I would just add that the agreement between Government and certain countries should become something that involves a unique approach to the European Union because we should have the same agreements. Returns mustn't be massive, but in smaller groups and stages, because they will all end up in your municipality and the municipalities mustn't be overloaded. These municipalities also provide special services to them.

JOURNALIST: Question for Abraši. Ongoing investigation conducted against several ministers worsened the credibility of Government in Kosovo. Do you think that the current balance goes in favor of liberalization of the visas?

ARBAN ABRASI: We just said that access we have towards the Brussels is the fight against corruption and the introduction of law and order. The authorities have their own power to act against the criminalization, and if Government has credibility will be seen in September and we should wait for the report to be objective. Indications are such that this progress report will be much better than before. We also have a promise that the basic document for the liberalization of the visa will be ready in September. Ministry of Trade has begun talks with Brussels on trade and all these elements speak about the credibility of the Government.

ILIRIJANA KACANIKU: If no more questions, this conference is ended.

MODERATOR: Thank you all