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Committee on Foreign Affairs

2007/0140(CNS)

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OPINION

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

for the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas
(COM(2007)0423 – C6-0296/2007 – 2007/0140(CNS))

Draftsperson: Doris Pack

PA_Legapp

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The European Parliament has been consistently calling for a relaxation of the draconian visa regime which was imposed on the countries belonging to the former Yugoslavia. This regime, which contrasts sharply with the pre-war conditions that applied to Yugoslavian citizens, has been particularly pernicious for the social and economic development of the countries of south-eastern Europe.

Rather than serving its original purpose, notably that of preventing local criminal networks from extending their activities outside the region, it has prevented honest students, academics, researchers and businessmen from developing close contacts with partners in the EU countries. A sense of isolation, of undeserved discrimination, of ghettoisation has prevailed, particularly amongst the youngest, which has undermined their European identity. Europe is a prosperous society to which they would like to belong but from which they feel rejected.

In the meantime, criminals have expanded their networks, forged alliances with fellow organisations in the EU Member States and expanded their activities in our territories, all this despite the visa restrictions which currently apply.

It is therefore legitimate to question the very foundations of the visa policy which the Union has applied so far towards the countries of south-eastern Europe. Much more emphasis should be placed on regional cooperation in the fight against organised crime and trafficking, with more funds and programmes being directed at upgrading facilities, training and better remuneration for staff, and promoting more sophisticated technologies. All this costs money, and this is where the Union should show solidarity. It is in the interests not just of these countries but also of the Union to develop efficient, reliable and corruption-free border control forces, police and public administration. Assistance under the Pre-Accession Instrument should therefore be stepped up, with additional funds being provided for this purpose.

By providing such (financial and technical) assistance the Union would enable these countries to fulfil the requirements for the next step: visa liberalisation. The European Parliament, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs in particular, strongly advocate lifting as soon as technically possible the visa requirements for citizens of the region. In our view, this would be a tangible sign that their countries belong to Europe. It would encourage them to take resolute action to adopt the reforms which will eventually lead them to full membership of the European Union.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, as the committee responsible, to propose approval of the Commission proposal.

PROCEDURE

Title	Agreement between the EC and Bosnia and Herzegovina on short-stay visas
References	COM(2007)0423 - C6-0296/2007 - 2007/0140(CNS)
Committee responsible	LIBE
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	AFET 24.9.2007
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Doris Pack 12.9.2007
Discussed in committee	3.10.2007
Date adopted	3.10.2007
Result of final vote	+: 23 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Vittorio Agnoletto, Christopher Beazley, Monika Beňová, Michael Gahler, Jas Gawronski, Alfred Gomolka, Richard Howitt, Anna Ibrisagic, Vytautas Landsbergis, Willy Meyer Pleite, Samuli Pohjamo, Libor Rouček, Katrin Saks, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Gitte Seeberg, Ari Vatanen, Josef Zieleniec
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Árpád Duka-Zólyomi, Gisela Kallenbach, Erik Meijer, Rihards Pīks, Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, Marcello Vernola