Press release | 12.11.2009

Western Balkans

EU Parliament backs visa-free travel for Western Balkans

Commenting on today's European Parliament plenary vote on visa liberalisation for the Western Balkans, Austrian Green MEP **Ulrike Lunacek** (European Parliament rapporteur for Kosovo) and German Green MEP **Franziska Brantner** (Greens/EFA foreign affairs spokesperson) jointly commented:

"Today's vote in the European Parliament paves the way for visa-free travel to the EU from the Western Balkans. This sends a positive signal to the region's citizens and marks an important step towards their countries' membership of the EU. It however remains to be seen whether the EU Council will follow suit on 30 November. Interior and justice ministers should respect Parliament's position, not least because the institution gains co-decision powers on this issue just one day later when the Lisbon Treaty comes into force."

Speaking on Kosovo, **Ulrike Lunacek** added:

"Parliament demands the immediate launch of a dialogue on visa requirements for Kosovo through the Commission. Some Member States may not recognise Kosovo as a state but this can be no excuse to deny its citizens the right to visa-free travel.

The Greens are disappointed that a majority of MEPs rejected our amendment calling for the establishment of Kosovo-Serbia border controls to meet international standards."

Franziska Brantner further commented:

"The EU Council is widely expected to grant visa-free travel to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia from 19 December. This is set to give a nice Christmas present to the citizens of those countries, but it would leave Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania left behind without a clear timeline to enjoy the same privileges.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's recent progress has brought the country in line with the criteria for visa-free travel. It is grossly unfair that Bosnian citizens who do not also hold a Serbian or Croatian passport must nevertheless wait to have the same travel rights as their neighbours."

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