Open up Sesame!

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Introduction
The Western Balkan countries, that represent only 4% of the EU population, are well on the road to stabilization, with the capacity to transform into functional states and to fully integrate into the EU and NATO. Albania has just signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU. This is an election year for the FYR of Macedonia and for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The latter may succeed to adopt constitutional changes prior to the election. It is also an important year for further Croatian and FYR Macedonia talks on accession to the EU, and a key year for Romania and Bulgaria to remove any remaining obstacles to full membership. The talks on the future status of Kosovo, no matter how complex, are being conducted in peaceful manner. Serbia and Montenegro are in the post referendum succession period that opens up space for the completion of the process of adopting states’ legislation in accordance with a new statehood status.

Last but not least, Serbia and BH should fulfill their international responsibility towards the ICTY and eventually sign SAAs with the EU. In spite of the news of gloomy prospects for the WB, that recently arrived from the EU Summit in Brussels, and the slowing down of visa liberalization process, the countries, leaders and people of the WB have been demonstrating social and political maturity by making a continuous effort to fulfill membership requirements. The facts supporting this statement are evident in another round of democratically held elections, enhanced trade liberalization, the settlement of bilateral disputes through a demonstration of the readiness to overtake regional initiatives, up to the recent agreement between WB/SEE countries to set up a Regional Cooperation Council. This form of a greater regionally-owned co-operation framework over the next year and a half will assume the responsibilities

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2 Under the term Western Balkans the authors consider: Albania, the FRY of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and the Territory of Kosovo, whose new status is yet to be defined.

3 EU Summit, Brussels, June 15, 2006. The failure to adopt the constitution now seems to have fatally undermined the case for further expansion. ‘We can not say ‘yes’ to an enlarged Europe and say ‘no’ to institutional reform. (…) We are keeping all our enlargement commitments, at the same time, recognising that there are some concerns in our public opinion regarding the scope and the pace of Enlargement’, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso stated during the Summit, www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/200606/84.
of the Stability Pact.4

**WB-potentials for case study of successful democracy promotion**

All the relevant preconditions for the further integration of the WB are already here. Organized in the described modern democratic manner, with a clear EU-Atlantic perspective, the WB can become a role model for the promotion of democracy, the key foreign policy goal of both the EU and the US. Dropping the WB now would be a bad sign for other pro-democratic forces supported by the transatlantic partners.

Still, visa facilitation and liberalization for the WB, the condition sine qua non for a continuation of the positive trends, are subjects which are being avoided by the big EU member states. This attitude brings to the citizens of the WB countries feelings that they are not considered as citizens of Europe, because they are being denied one of the fundamental rights upon which the EU was founded: Freedom of movement. The required conditions for entrance to inclusion in the so-called ‘White Schengen List’ (WSL) are not on the table at all. Instead new phrases like: paper curtain, and Schengen wall, the consular sadism are mounting. It is about time for current EU security and political concerns that impede progress in this area, on one hand, and political and technical requirements that the remaining WB countries should met in order to become eligible for WSL, on the other, to be carefully rethought in accordance with changed circumstances.

The EU must recognize and adequately respond to the fact that one of the most wanted ICTY fugitives, Ante Gotovina, captured in Spain, and most of those who are now brought before the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic and trailed in front of the Special Court for organized Crime in Belgrade, owned valid Schengen visas. To put it simply — criminals obtained visas. A reverse process of increased cross-border control, suppression of illegal migration and a gradual liberalization of the visa regime for pro-EU oriented majority of citizens of WB counters should be instigated.

The authors of this text, who for years have dealt with the non-violent democratization, human rights and integration of the WB and remaining SEE countries into transatlantic structures, will try to explain why they find entrance to the WSL for those WB countries that are still not granted this option5, a precondition for any further process of sustained development in the region that would lead to its full EU and NATO integration. Until then, rapid visa liberalization can serve as a guarantee for the protection of political and financial investments by the IC in the region, as a solution to and an incentive for the post war and transitional duress that the citizens of most of the WB countries are still

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4 Agreement reached at the Stability Pact’s biannual Regional Table, (its highest decision-making forum) meeting in Belgrade on 30 May 2006.

5 Croatia was placed on the positive list long before the conclusion of SAA. Hereafter the authors will refer to ‘remaining WB countries’, meaning: Albania, FRY of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and the Territory of Kosovo as most of them are in a similar situation regarding the EU visa status.