

Visa Liberalization  
for Kosovo

# THE GRAND FINALE





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Visa Liberalization for Kosovo —  
The Grand Finale

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# Introduction

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Ever since the countries of the Western Balkans, except for Kosovo, were included in the decision of the European Union, first for “visa facilitation” and then also for the visa liberalization, Kosovo engaged to become part of this group.

This was not possible, and the country lagged far behind.

The example of Kosovo proves once again that in the EU processes, the later the involvement is, the more difficult the conditions become, while the process becomes even longer and unpredictable at the same time. While it took other countries two or three years to complete the process from the roadmap to visa liberalization, Kosovo has not managed to do such a thing even after ten years. But now, after a decade from the start of the process, visa liberalization for Kosovo is on the horizon. The European Union has started the relevant legislative procedures which should lead to a positive decision. The issue was stuck on the level member states of the Council of the European Union (EU), while the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (EC) since 2018 have constantly re-confirmed that all conditions have been met and maintained the position Kosovo should be granted visa liberalization.

Under the Presidency of the Czech Republic, on October 13 of this year, this issue was included in the agenda of the EU Council, starting with the visa working group.

Now this process must go through adequate procedures that are inevitable for taking the decision in the EU structures where once again both the Commission and the European Parliament must be included, even formally.

In any case, even if the signals are encouraging and positive, the experience so far teaches us that nothing can be taken for granted and there is always the risk that something will go wrong, and the process will stall again.

This paper analyses the process so far, the nature and logic of some additional conditions, the reasons for oppositional or sceptical attitudes from some EU member states and the possible scenarios now that the process has entered the phase called “the beginning of the end”. The political context in all of Europe after Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the risk from the possibility of misuse of visa liberalization and the formal steps with possible time limits that must follow until visa liberalization are also analysed.

# From “facilitation” to “liberalization”

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The European Union first facilitated the visa regime for the countries of the Western Balkans region by reaching agreements with each country. The certain categories of the citizen of these countries, according to these agreements, could obtain visas faster; visas would cost less, or even be free; they would be valid for more entrances, exits and other attenuations.

At the end of 2009, the European Union approved visa liberalization for three countries, and a year later for two more, thus leaving Kosovo completely outside not only for visa liberalization but also for the facilitation of the visa regime.

In December 2009, the EU Council stated that Kosovo should also benefit from the prospect of the eventual lifting of visa requirements, naturally reiterating the fulfilment of all conditions so that Kosovars are also included in the EU's plans to establish contacts between people all over Europe.

The visa dialogue between Kosovo and the European Commission started on January 19, 2012. Half a year later, on June 14, 2012, the EC handed over to Kosovo the roadmap for visa liberalization. When the Government received the roadmap, it was celebrated in Kosovo as if this was the end and not just the beginning of a long process.

The conditions included in the roadmap, as well as the EU Council's insistence that the process should be more carefully supervised than in other countries, was a kind of warning that in the case of Kosovo, things could go more slowly. Immediately after the European Commission's first report on the fulfilment of the criteria from the roadmap, which came out on February 2, 2013, it was obvious that one or two such reports would not be enough, but more would be needed.

The first report was published in February 2013, the second on June 24, 2014, and the third on December 18, 2015. The fourth was the one in which the recommendation for visa liberalization was confirmed, but with two additional conditions: The Commission confirmed that conditions that had to do with, among others, redmission and reintegration, security of documents, management of migration, asylum, data storage, cooperation in law enforcement, freedom of movement were entirely fulfilled.

Two areas remained where the fulfilment of the criteria was almost complete but with one condition each. These were “border management” and “public order and security”. First, the 2016 report found that 14 out of a total of 15 criteria related to border management had been met. The only remaining issue was the ratification of the demarcation agreement with Montenegro.

From block 3, which was about preventing and fighting organized crime and corruption, 14 of the total 15 criteria were also met. The unfulfilled condition at that time had to do with the work of the courts, and this condition for some states was much more important than that of border demarcation. But Kosovo authorities did not focus so much on these criteria as on the demarcation of the border with Montenegro, which became a dramatic issue in the country's political scene.

Considering the findings of the fourth report, the Commission gave both the conclusion and the conditional proposal for the decision to liberalize visas for Kosovo.

“Based on this assessment and taking into account the ongoing monitoring and reporting that took place since the start of the dialogue on visa liberalization with Kosovo, the Commission confirms that Kosovo has fulfilled all the requirements of its roadmap for visa liberalization with the understanding that until the day of approval of this proposal by the European Parliament and the Council to have ratified the agreement on the border/administrative line with Montenegro and strengthened the list of evidence for the fight against organized crime and corruption,” the European Commission concluded at the end of the report.

It took two years for the Commission to formally confirm that Kosovo had fulfilled the remaining two conditions. This happened on July 18, 2018, through a supplementary report of the European Commission. But the expectations that from this moment everything will go smoothly, were not met. The European Parliament acted very quickly and supported this proposal. Furthermore, once that moment until present day, the European Parliament has continuously, through a series of resolutions, asked the EU member states to ensure the liberalization of visas for Kosovo as soon as possible, without delay. Since the confirmation in 2018, the European Commission, continues to repeat that this assessment remains fully valid.

The issue has since been stuck in the EU Council where, due to opposition from some member states, it was not put on the agenda at all for four years.

In many meetings, the Council only reiterated that “it understands the importance of visa liberalization for Kosovo” and that “this issue is under consideration in the Council” but did not take any formal steps.

# Real concern or excuses for delays in the process?

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Since the proposal for visa liberalization for Kosovo was not formally on the agenda of the Council, it cannot be formally said which EU country was against it. However, based on many diplomatic sources, including from the countries that have been sceptical, France and the Netherlands were leading those countries that refused to support this decision and as a result, this issue was left pending for four years in a row.

Those two states, according to diplomatic sources, mentioned as their main concerns the potential danger for a mass emigration from Kosovo to the EU, as a result of visa liberalization. They also put doubts in the European Commission's assessment that Kosovo had fulfilled the condition related to the track record in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

Some countries that did not have a clear position, silently supported France and the Netherlands. While those countries that were in favour, and at the same time aware that without France and the Netherlands the decision can hardly be passed — even though it is made with a qualified majority — did not have the courage to put the visa liberalization for Kosovo on the agenda.

“In principle, all countries in the EU are equal. But there are some that are a little more equal than others. When France and the Netherlands are against, then things are not put to a vote

because this is no longer a matter of votes or numbers,” said one EU diplomat in year 2019, explaining why this issue is not even being put on the agenda. The same source said that “If we put it on the agenda formally and France and the Netherlands are against it, then it will be much more difficult to move forward on this file.”

In the case of France, the main reason for concern was what the diplomats called “the bad experience with Albania and some other countries.” With this, they meant first the large increase in the number of asylum seekers from Albania to France and the spread of organized crime groups from Albania in the countries of the European Union. Although it did not say so officially, France did not agree with the assessment of the European Commission that the risk of mass migration and the misuse of visa liberalization is small.

“Even for Albania and Georgia, the European Commission said that they have fulfilled all the conditions. And when the visas were removed, they had an extremely large number of asylum seekers from these countries and the arrival of criminal elements. We don't want to repeat the mistake with Kosovo, and we want to make sure that this doesn't happen when visas are liberalized one day for Kosovars too,” a senior European diplomat told reporters, few days before France took over the EU presidency.



France's argument, according to some experts from the EU institutions in Brussels, was not completely illogical, although it was not right that Kosovo should suffer the consequences because of the bad experience with other countries.

The number of asylum seekers from Albania was bigger comparing to asylum seekers coming from some other countries that were at war, and this was unacceptable for the European Union. Moreover, Albania already had the status of a candidate country for EU membership and was considered a safe country. The Netherlands had proposed the activation of the suspension mechanisms for visa liberalization for Albania. But this proposal did not pass because neither the European Commission nor the necessary majority in the Council agreed.

However, the European Commission considers that the existence of the possibility of suspension mechanism, has had a great impact on addressing the problems and significantly reducing the number of unfounded asylum seekers, although it has never resulted in a decision.

According to the European Commission, in the case of Albania, this problem has already been solved and country no longer represents a significant risk for the EU.

“While the visa liberalization suspension mechanism has never resulted in a suspension, its very existence has played an important role for reforms in countries that enjoy visa-free movement in the EU related to migration management, rule of law and fundamental rights.”

The very existence of the possibility of suspending the liberalization of visas is mentioned by the European Commission and many member states as a protective measure in case of misuse.

The suspension mechanism can be activated in case of a significant increase, over 50 percent, of the number of people who illegally entered from the respective countries, including those who stay illegally (more than 90 days), or denied entry at the border. Another reason could be the increase of over 50 percent of asylum requests, in case of refusal of cooperation during the readmission of those who must leave the territory of the EU or, what would be more difficult to define, in case the liberalization represents a threat for the national security of an EU member state.

In the period since the visa liberalization dialogue between Kosovo and the European Union began, there have been phases when migrations from Kosovo have been large and this has caused concern in the EU countries as well.

But Kosovo has proven to be very willing to address this problem and has demonstrated good results in repatriation, often even more than the countries that have visa liberalization.

Considering the size of Kosovo, the total number of inhabitants, the fact that the EU has exempted the visa requirement for much larger countries such as Ukraine, Brazil, etc., the fear of mass migration from Kosovo seems exaggerated.

But Kosovo, in cooperation with member countries and the European Commission, has continuously addressed all concerns so that no doubt remains.

# Kosovo has addressed all the concerns of EU member states

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EU officials, including those from the European Commission and the Parliament, but also from the member states, have confirmed that for years Kosovo has demonstrated full readiness to address all the concerns of the EU member states. Some countries have established direct contacts between their experts from the ministries of internal affairs with colleagues from Kosovo. They have also sent missions to Kosovo. The best example is Germany, which, after several meetings of representatives of its Ministry of the Interior with experts from Kosovo, removed all doubts and expressed unreserved support for the liberalization of visas. This was also confirmed by the then Interior Minister Schehofer after the meeting with the then Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj.

Since then, Germany has maintained unreserved support for visa liberalization for Kosovo. This support was expected to be a big turning point, since Germany undoubtedly has in its territory the most Kosovar citizens and people of Kosovo origin compared to all other European Union states. But the conviction of the Kosovars that “the work is done” after Germany said yes, did not hold.

Even after that, France, the Netherlands and some other countries kept their reservations. Kosovo was suggested to “do what it did with Germany through bilateral cooperation” with other countries.

Such cooperation on the part of Kosovo has continued with France but also with other EU countries. Germany, even when it had the presidency of the EU, did not find the courage to push forward the visa liberalization file for Kosovo.

Meanwhile, considering that there is no need for a new report, the European Commission, has confirmed in a “non-paper” sent to member countries that Kosovo, even after confirming the fulfilment of the criteria in 2018, had continued to fulfil the criteria and had made even more progress.

The European Commission confirms in technical detail that Kosovo has met all the criteria for visa liberalization and that the proposal for the visa liberalization remains fully valid. In this working document, which served as the basis for the discussion in the Visa working group in the Council on October 13 in Brussels, the updated report are only presented to inform the EU member coun-

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tries and is not a formal report on the implementation of the roadmap, since a such a report was made earlier and there is no need for another one. The document mentions in detail the examples that prove that even after 2018, when the Commission had confirmed the fulfilment of the criteria, Kosovo has continued to make progress in all areas that are included in the liberalization roadmap, also addressing some concerns of the member states.

“Kosovo has established a strong legal and operational framework to fight corruption, organized crime and to face security and migration risks. This was also confirmed through the Commission’s annual reports within the enlargement package,” the document concluded.

According to European Commission experts, Kosovo has in recent years strengthened the legal and institutional framework in areas such as document security, border and migration management, public order and security, and fundamental rights related to freedom of movement, bringing them closer to EU standards.

It is confirmed by the European Commission that the Ministry of the Interior of Kosovo has ensured that all travel documents, passports, are biometric and are in accordance with international and European Union standards. According to this report, Kosovo has adapted its legislation even more with the EU in the field of coordinated border management. It has also made significant progress in the functioning of the judicial system, including efficiency, professionalism, responsibility and integrity. Kosovo has achieved progress in the investigation and punishment of cases of organized crime. Kosovo has also fulfilled the conditions for the readmission of its citizens who have sought asylum in the EU and have made the decision to leave. The European Commission notes a positive trend in the number of refusals to grant visas to citizens of Kosovo from EU countries, as well as the reduction in the number of false asylum seekers.

# The process is now in the final stage, but without deadlines

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The summer of 2022 marked a turning point in the Council of the European Union that created an appropriate moment to put visa liberalization for Kosovo on the agenda. This is for geopolitical reasons, but also for the fact that Kosovo has proven that it will not hesitate to take any step to address the concerns of member states in case of misuse of visa liberalization.

The war in Ukraine had made the EU itself feel that it should strengthen ties with all the countries of the Balkan region and advance the process of bringing these countries closer to the EU.

The EU had seriously damaged credibility in the region due to two pending cases. It had not opened membership negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, even though these countries had met all the conditions, and it had not liberalized visas for Kosovo, even though four years had passed since the conditions had been met.

These two cases were also the main topics of a joint EU summit with the Western Balkans that took place in Brussels on June 23. In this meeting, for the first time, according to the President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani, no voice

was heard against the liberalization of visas for Kosovo, and promises were made that “the process will move forward”.

In the summer, the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia were also opened, which was considered a “historic turning point in the EU enlargement process”.

This even more motivated the Czech Presidency of the EU to put the liberalization of visas for Kosovo on the agenda.

The credibility of the EU and geo-strategic reasons were also mentioned by the Czech Republic when it invited the member states to start discussions in the working group for visas in the Council.

The expressed desire of the Czech Republic as the upcoming chair was that all member states reach internal consensus to support visa liberalization for Kosovo. In this letter, the Czech Republic refers to the foreign policy reasons for visa liberalization, recalling that the European Commission has also issued its confirmation.

“Since the Czech Presidency thinks that the reasons related to foreign policy for the estab-

lishment of visa liberalization for Kosovo are convincing, it hoped that all EU member states will reach internal political agreement on this matter.”

“The EU’s geo-political approach to the Western Balkans is indispensable. The region needs a clear signal that the EU enlargement process is credible, and that the EU is ready to reward the reform efforts made by the countries of the Western Balkans,” states the letter, in which the Czech Presidency specifically mentions visa liberalization for Kosovo as an example of how the EU can increase credibility in the region.

“Visa liberalization is a key element in the process of Kosovo’s integration into the EU, which is already long overdue. Kosovo is the only country in the Western Balkans (and one of the few countries in Europe) which has not yet secured the visa-free regime with the EU. This fact has a significant negative impact on the atmosphere in the country and on the attitudes of the citizens of Kosovo regarding the correctness and credibility of the EU,” said the Czech Presidency in this letter sent to the member states.

“The ambition of the Czech Presidency is to build support among the member states and start the relevant legislative procedure, which will result in the relaxation of the visa regime with Kosovo,” it said.

In this letter, the Czech Republic, which holds the current presidency of the EU, states that it also understands the concerns of some member states about the implications that visa liberalization for Kosovo may have for their internal security.

For this reason, the ministries of internal affairs of the member states are more reserved to approve the liberalization of visas than the ministries of foreign affairs. But the Czech Republic nevertheless refers to the assessment of the European Commission to quell these concerns.

“The European Commission, however, is convinced that the granting of visa liberalization for Kosovo does not pose a risk to member countries in the form of a wave of immigration,” argues the Czech Presidency, recalling that Kosovo has also taken measures to address these concerns. “It is also worth noting that the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo approved the resolution on the liberalization of visas on August 3. With this Resolution, the institutions of Kosovo pledge to implement all reforms to guarantee the rule of law, including those related to the fight against corruption and the protection of human rights. The Czech Presidency highly appreciates the adoption of this Resolution, which is an important proof of commitment on the part of Kosovo,” the letter states.

An important message was also a joint statement by Germany, France and Poland after the meeting of the so-called “Weimar triangle” where they together called for progress in the liberalization of visas for Kosovo.

And finally, on October 13, the first discussion in the visa working group in the Council of the European Union took place in Brussels. Since the European Commission and the European Parliament have had no reservations for years, the initiation of the discussion in a working group in the Council is seen as the “beginning of the end” of this process.

# No one against, but some countries have reservations

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The first discussion, after four years, in the EU Council on visa liberalization for Kosovo took place on October 13 in the visa working group.

Such meetings are by nature working meetings, attended by representatives of member countries, mainly related to the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the countries they come from. In the meeting dedicated to the liberalization of visas for Kosovo on October 13, they were joined by the representatives/diplomats from the group for the Western Balkans, who deal more with political issues, that are related to their respective Foreign Ministries.

This was the meeting where for the first time the countries expressed their initial positions. Such meetings are closed, and information can be obtained only through informal diplomatic sources in order to construct what happened.

This discussion brought several facts to the surface.

The first and positive thing was that no country spoke against visa liberalization.

And secondly, some countries gave some proposals to link liberalization with some other issues.

As a result of visa liberalization for Kosovo, discussions will continue in the visa working group in November, while until then the member states will hold bilateral consultations among themselves as well as with the Kosovo authorities. EU member states will also send their comments in writing.

What came out from this meeting is that the great majority of the EU member states support without any reservation the decision to liberalize visas, but there are still countries, led by France, that want the decision, or its entry into force, to be connected with some other issues such as the implementation of the ETIAS system, but also the alignment of Kosovo visa policy with the EU, the increase of border control and the continuation of work on the readmission of those who have to leave the territory of the EU.

France, one of the countries that for years has been sceptical about the liberalization of visas for Kosovo, this time has not expressed itself against the liberalization of visas for Kosovo but has proposed that the liberalization of visas be linked to the ETIAS system, which is an electronic system of the EU that is not yet functional.

Therefore, France's request, according to some interpretations of diplomats, could postpone

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the entry into force of visa liberalization for Kosovo until November 2023, or even later if the full implementation of this system is postponed.

Several countries and the European Commission consider unnecessary and unreasonable to link visa liberalization with the ETIAS system. These countries and the Commission have argued that it is a technical system, the entry into force of which depends on the EU's own technical readiness, and visa liberalization for Kosovo should not be linked to this issue.

Some countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Spain, have expressed understanding for this French proposal, but many other countries, including Germany, have opposed it. In this meeting, some countries have not expressed their position, and among them are Cyprus, Romania and Slovakia, which have not recognized Kosovo's independence. Greece, which has not recognized Kosovo, has expressed itself strongly and without reservations in favour of visa liberalization. Meanwhile, Spain has not expressed a position, but has announced that it will agree with the decision of the majority.

Some countries that did not express their position in this meeting justified it by the fact that they had elections and are waiting for the formation of the government or are on the verge of elections.

The countries that strongly and unreservedly supported visa liberalization, according to diplomatic sources, are Germany, Finland, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Poland, Malta, Luxembourg and Slovenia. Austria expressed "in favour of continuing the process" but said that additional technical reports are needed. The Czech Republic, since it has a presidency over EU, had to maintain a neutral position in such meetings, but according to the letter it had sent to the member states, it clearly states that the time has come for the liberalization of visas.

The impression of the diplomats is that the meeting proved that there is a large majority in favour of visa liberalization, while now the concerns of the countries that have expressed reservations and made proposals must be addressed. This is expected to be done in direct meetings that experts from some of these countries will have with representatives of the Ministry of Interior of Kosovo.

Even the Czech presidency of the EU, seeing the extraordinary interest of the public in this issue, announced through a press release that this was only the first meeting, and that some issues will be clarified in the future.

"On October 13, the visa working group in the EU Council held the first discussion on the

visa liberalization for Kosovo under the presidency of the Czech Republic. The European Commission presented a technical update on the issue confirming that Kosovo continues to meet the criteria for visa liberalization. The working group broadly welcomed the opening of discussion on this topic and generally supported the visa liberalization process. In order to make progress on this file, it will be necessary to clarify a number of issues related to this and continue the discussion,” said the announcement of the Czech Presidency.

The Government of Kosovo, based on continuous contacts with the Commission and other countries, seems to have anticipated that someone could propose the connection of visa liberalization for Kosovo with the full implementation of the ETIAS system. Therefore, even before this meeting, the Kosovo authorities had sent their arguments against the connection of ETIAS with the decision to liberalize visas for Kosovo.

Kosovo argued that the decision and entry into force of liberalization should in no way be related to ETIAS because this system was delayed several times, other countries in the region enjoy liberalization although this system is not in force, and when it will enter into force , it would also apply to the citizens of Kosovo.

In the same letter, Kosovo stated that the new postponement of visa liberalization, in addition to many delays that have already happened, using the ETIAS system as a justification, would seriously damage the credibility of the EU among the citizens of Kosovo.

The next meetings in the Council of the EU, first in the working group and later at other

levels, are expected to advance the process which, realistically, will be able to be completed in a few months. But despite all the optimism which seems real, in the EU no one wants to mention time limits for when the process can be concluded.

**OCTOBER  
13**

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# Potential risks for liberalization



Although liberalization has never been closer, based on Kosovo's experience so far, this should be taken cautiously because unexpected new obstacles can always appear.

It is not expected that there will be new obstacles of a political nature. A small risk could be the eventual connection of visa liberalization with the dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia. This would be unfair to Kosovo, because Serbia already enjoys visa liberalization and it would not be equal treatment, but it would also be a departure of the EU from the position until now that these two processes are not connected.

So far, there has been no warning from any relevant EU source that this could be connected, but in case of tensions of the situation in Kosovo, any member state can use this as an excuse.

Another potential risk could be the growing problem of EU countries not aligning to EU policy visa regime for the third countries. The EU expects the countries of the region to align to the EU visa policy. This has also been repeated in the annual country reports. Kosovo is also expected to adapt its visa policy to that of the EU.

The European Union is concerned about the phenomenon of the increase in the number illegal migrants from distant countries through

the Balkan countries. This concern is greater in the case of Serbia, which, for political reasons related to the stance of these countries towards the status of Kosovo, has removed visa requirements for several countries for which the EU requires visas. Among them are Cuba, Tunisia, Belarus, the Russian Federation, China, Burundi, India and several other countries.

Although Kosovo has no influence on these attitudes of the member countries, it may again be a victim of "bad experience".

Some circles in the EU also mention what they call "the potential for mass migration from Kosovo" as a possible risk. This may influence some countries to be reluctant to support the Council's quick decision on visa liberalization. But this concern is exaggerated. The EU already has the mechanisms to address these concerns, as well as punitive measures for those who would misuse visa liberalization for illegal stay or illegal work in the EU.


The Government of Kosovo has proven its willingness to return those who abuse liberalization. The EU can even ban people from entering the EU for 5 years. While, based on the experience of other countries, those who will travel to EU countries after the visas are

lifted, will be subject to a check at Kosovo's airports, where proof of the reasons for the trip and sufficient means for travel and stay will be required.

Kosovo authorities should launch a new campaign to inform the public about what visa liberalization is in order to clarify that visas will be exempted only for touristic purposes and not for employment in EU countries. There have been such campaigns in the past, but they should restart now that the process has entered its final phase.

Potential internal developments in some EU member states can also pose a risk. In some of them, far-right parties that for years have had a radical stance against foreigners are entering the government. At the moment, there are no signs that any country may change its position, such as Italy and Sweden, but internal debates in the past have also influenced the positions of some countries regarding the liberalization of visas for Kosovo.

Therefore, this, however unlikely, should be considered as a potential risk.



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# Stages of the process



**MAY 2016**

The European Commission recommended the liberalization of visas for Kosovo, underlining two conditions that have not yet been met: the ratification of the demarcation with Montenegro and track-record in the fight against organized crime and corruption

**JULY 2018**

The European Commission confirms that Kosovo has met all the criteria for visa liberalization for Kosovo

**AUGUST 2018**

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament (LIBE) voted on the European Commission's recommendation for visa liberalization for Kosovo

**SEPTEMBER 2018**

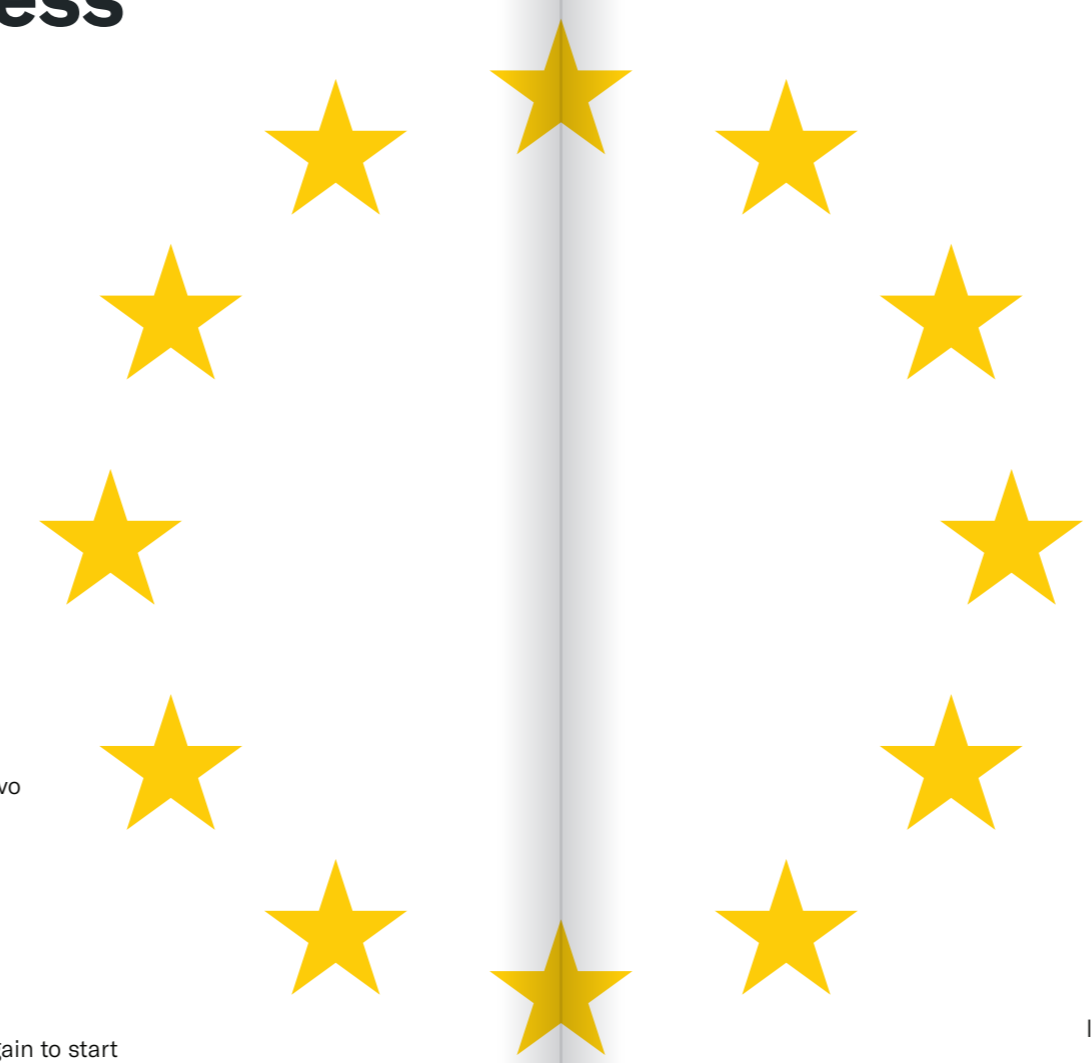
The European Parliament confirmed the mandate for negotiations with the EU Council on visa liberalization

**SEPTEMBER 2019**

The LIBE Committee voted again to start negotiations with the EU Council to proceed with the remaining steps to grant Kosovars visa-free entry to the Schengen Area

**OCTOBER 2022**

- The European Commission has presented a "technical update on the roadmap for visa liberalization for Kosovo." The Commission confirms the recommendation for visa liberalization "remains strongly valid"
- The working group on visas met for the first time on October 13 where they studied the latest EC document. The purpose of the meeting was to verify whether there is a qualified majority to initiate the relevant legislative procedures. The working group meets again in November 2022



The decision is published in the official journal, usually a day or two after signing. The publication includes information on when visa liberalization enters into force

The legal act is signed in a ceremony usually held in the European Parliament. Representatives of the EU institutions take part: the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament

The EU-Western Balkans summit is held in December. It is hoped that the decision on visa liberalization for Kosovo will be presented as one of the results of the EU's engagement in the region

The EU Council of Ministers approves by qualified majority for visa liberalization

EU ambassadors vote by qualified majority on visa liberalization

The European Parliament votes for visa liberalization in one of the next plenary sessions

Voting in LIBE for the triologue agreement

EU ambassadors approve the agreement reached by the three institutions

The ambassadors of the EU member states take over the visa file from the working group and give the green light for the start of the so-called "trialogue" with the European Commission and the European Parliament

The "trialogue" between the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament is held. In this case, only one meeting may be necessary to reach an agreement as the positions are known and it is not a complicated legal document

**2023**

Visa liberalization enters into force (2023)

# Conclusions:

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After more than ten years of expectations, hopes, trust and disappointments of the citizens of Kosovo, the visa liberalization process has entered the final phase.

After the continuous and strong support of the European Parliament and the European Commission, discussions have finally started in the Council of the EU, where this process had remained stuck for years.

Support has been expressed at the highest levels of the EU and its member states for the decision that would conclude the process and it would add Kosovo to the list of countries whose citizens will not need visas to travel to EU countries, and in the other countries of the Schengen area.

With this, what the citizens of Kosovo have rightly considered as injustice and discrimination against them will be stopped. In the more than ten years that the visa dialogue between the EU and Kosovo has lasted, many countries, not only European but also from the Middle East, Latin America and Oceania, have received visa liberalization from the EU, and the case of Kosovo has remained pending.

In the EU, there is already agreement that liberalization should take place, that there are no more serious obstacles, and that an appropriate moment has been created.

The European Commission has reiterated that Kosovo continues to fulfil all the criteria and that the proposal for the decision on visa liberalization is valid in its entirety. The Commission, with an additional technical update, in October 2022, has informed the member countries in detail that Kosovo has made progress even after 2018, when visa liberalization was recommended by the Commission.

But, although there are no objections to this decision from the member states, there is a difference about when the decision should take place and when it should enter into force.

France, a country which, deservedly or not, has stood out as a leader of sceptics in the EU towards visa liberalization, has proposed that the entry into force be linked to the full use of the ETIAS system.

Some countries have supported it, but most have not. But these were the initial positions and now it will be necessary for the European Commission, other member countries and the authorities of Kosovo to work to clarify this as well, so that it does not become a trigger for new postponements of the process which, as the EU now admits, is delayed for too long.

Besides fulfilling the criteria and addressing the concerns of some member countries on the part of Kosovo, the political circumstances also give the EU a push not to delay this

decision any longer. Kosovars are the only ones in the region, and among the few in Europe, who still do not enjoy visa liberalization. Therefore, the EU must take the final step and take the decision.

An electronic technical system, such as ETIAS, whose implementation depends only on the EU and not on Kosovo, should not be an obstacle for this decision.

The decision would benefit all citizens of Kosovo, including Serbs who also have Serbian citizenship. They too, like Albanians and all other residents of Kosovo, were discriminated against. Although they also have citizenship of Serbia, visa liberalization for citizens of Serbia does not apply to them. Because Serbs living in the territory of Kosovo, who have citizenship of Serbia, get their passports in an office in Belgrade and with that document they cannot enter the EU without a visa. This, among other things, has influenced many illegal actions, of double and fictitious addresses in the territory of Serbia, to enable obtaining passports for travelling to the EU without visas.

By liberalizing visas, the EU would do a great service for citizens and reduce the possibility of illegal migration.

Kosovo, for its part, should start a new information campaign so that there are no misuses by citizens when liberalization occurs.

There have been misuses by many countries in the region in the past, especially Albania. There have been too many cases of illegal stays beyond the visa-free entry period. There was also a large number of asylum requests. But the EU has solved these problems even with these countries and now the trends are positive. The number of asylum seekers has decreased, while the readmission of those who have made the decision to leave the EU has been largely successful.

Kosovars should be informed again that the exemption from visas does not mean travel to work in the EU, or to seek asylum. And they should become familiar with the consequences they may have if they misuse liberalization. Likewise, Kosovo authorities must constantly keep in mind that the EU will monitor the implementation of the guidelines even after visas are lifted, and there is always the possibility of suspension of liberalization.

The final decision on visa liberalization would be mutually beneficial, both for the EU and for Kosovo.

Considering all the data and attitudes that have been mentioned in this paper, the spring of 2023 is seen as the real final date for the entry into force of visa liberalization for the citizens of Kosovo.



