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Subject: Open letter on behalf of young people of B&H

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We are writing on behalf of many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who fear they will once more be faced with humiliation and discrimination because of the inefficiency of their own elected officials, but also because of misguided policies of the EU. With precious little time for discussion on visa liberalization, we call upon you to again consider the implications if BiH is left out of this process, and if a number of BiH citizens become the only inhabitants of former Yugoslavia without the ability to travel without visa limitations.

We fear the EU could turn its back on the very people it should support. Leaving BiH out of the process would primarily affect young, educated and Europe-oriented persons, who should be the driving force of BiH's integration process. These are the ones who wish to travel more and bring EU values back home. But if they are not allowed to "spread their wings," if they are left at the mercy of self-centred politicians, then this endless circle will simply continue indefinitely. These persons count on the EU's support, since they are not able to change circumstances at elections. The EU should offer a helping hand, not act as a distant, cold and bitter professor. We know the Road Map has not been implemented in full, and are aware of the irresponsibility of the ruling parties in BiH. But this is not the right way to sharpen EU's principles. There will be many more opportunities for conditions, requirements and standards as BiH moves along the EU path. Freedom of movement should not be used for such conditions! There will be adequate reasons to enforce discipline onto BiH, its politicians and citizens. Visa liberalization should not be one of them, because it is simply unfair.

On May 13, Mr. Jelko Kacin stated that the EU does not wish to punish citizens, but to "relay a clear message to these citizens that their politicians did not fulfil their tasks" (translated from a Deutsche Welle article in Bosnian). However, if BiH is left out, the EU will punish the citizens - in fact those who deserve it the least. All the politicians in BiH have visa-free access to the EU either by having other citizenships or by having diplomatic benefits from the visa facilitation process. Meanwhile, Serbia's Consular Office stated it has already received 3,500 individual and family applications for Serbian citizenship. Persons who voted for current politicians, drawn by their nationalistic and separatist rhetoric, are the ones standing in lines for Croatian and Serbian passports. Instead of teaching them a lesson, as Mr. Kacin implies, these persons and their politicians of choice will in fact be rewarded. The EU will inadvertently condone the anti-BiH policies of Serb and Croat officials by leaving only Bosniaks out of the visa liberalization process.

In the past, Croat officials in BiH showed no interest for the visa liberalization process simply because most Croats in BiH already have Croatian passports and can move freely across the EU. If Serbia is awarded visa liberalization before BiH, we can easily expect the same approach from Serb politicians. In fact, they will be offered another tool for manipulation and conditioning, especially as we move towards another general elections and a likely surge of nationalistic and separatist rhetoric. Such outcome is imminent, as Serb MPs in the BiH Parliament are already delaying the Road Map implementation claiming that too much authority is being given to the state level. Conditioning EU candidate status with laws on weapons or border control would be far more efficient in BiH. Obviously, visa liberalization is abused too much for daily political purposes, as it concerns only one ethnic group. Furthermore, this is an issue of human rights, and not efficiency of a country! We do not need to remind that marginalization and discrimination of a single ethnic group goes against all European values and principles. This becomes even worse when we take into consideration that this very ethnic group went through discrimination, war camps and even genocide in recent history.

Sadly, we must note that the EU is not applying its principles equally. Bosniaks are expected to accept that Ratko Mladic's passport will offer better travel opportunities than their own. Serbia still does not have an operative Stabilization and Association Agreement, and is still falling behind on cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, even after the International Court of Justice concluded it did not do enough to prevent genocide and arrest those responsible. Serbia is the only country in the region where embassies of EU member states were attacked and set on fire very recently. Singling Bosniaks out as the only community without the right to visa-free travel would leave a bitter feeling of abandonment and isolation. This would inevitably give rise to a feeling of Euro-scepticism, which is the last thing BiH needs at this time.

We should also bear in mind that BiH had visa-free regime when it was part of Yugoslavia. BiH citizens also had visa-free access to most of current EU members immediately after the war - when there were several armies, several currencies and several passports in use. All citizens of BiH should have freedom of movement! Allow us to be tourists, to leave our money in the EU. Let us experience the ways of the EU firsthand so we could apply them back home. Enable us to open up to new ideas more easily, to new sights and sounds, to European values and principles that seem too distant now - behind strict border guards and dozens of stickers in our passports. The EU should not protect itself from BiH by erecting a new iron curtain. Instead, it can expect tourists, persons wanting to see and experience, young people wishing to learn, but also share their own experiences in the process.

I sincerely hope you will take into consideration the aforementioned arguments, and avoid the possibility of deepening the conflict and bitter feelings among ethnic groups and citizens in BiH.

Best regards,

Tarik Limo, Emir Čaušević, Amar Bašić, Amila Spahić