



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

October 4, 2019

His Excellency Donald Tusk
The Delegation of the European Union to the United States
2175 K St NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear President Tusk:

We write to express our concerns regarding the withholding of visa liberalization for citizens of the Republic of Kosovo by the European Union and its member states.

As you are aware, the European Union has granted visa liberalization to every country of the Western Balkans, except for Kosovo. This permits all citizens of the former Yugoslavia and Albania, with the exception of Kosovo, to travel visa free to the European Union.

On July 18, 2018, the European Commission confirmed that Kosovo had fulfilled all of the benchmarks required for visa liberalization -- described to us on many occasions as a technical, non-political process. If treated like citizens of every other Balkan country, Kosovars would already be traveling visa free into the Schengen area. But, the inability to grant visa liberalization seems to show there is a second standard being applied to the people of Kosovo.

We have heard that certain EU member states are concerned that, unlike citizens of neighboring countries, Kosovars would abuse visa free entry, overstay visits, and seek asylum status. However, that has proven to be untrue. According to the European Commission's report of last July, Kosovo has significantly reduced the number of its citizens seeking asylum status within the EU, with applications decreasing by 36% from 11,675 in 2016 to 7,410 in 2017 and by 90% when compared to 2015. The July Report also highlighted that Kosovo is sponsoring "comprehensive awareness raising campaigns across all Kosovo municipalities aiming at informing citizens about the rights and obligations deriving from visa-free travel." Additionally, the July report confirms that Kosovo's anti-corruption efforts exceed those required to achieve

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visa liberalization, and Kosovo formally approved the demarcated border with Montenegro – a condition applied to Kosovo only.

Adding to the conclusions of the European Commission, we are pleased to note that our colleagues in the European Parliament have overwhelmingly voted to support extending visa-free travel to Kosovars more than once. These votes were endorsed by the Parliament's Special Rapporteurs for Kosovo and Serbia, Igor Stoltes and David McAllister, who have both asserted that Kosovo citizens deserve visa liberalization.

Regardless, certain member states have yet to deliver on their end of the bargain. EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahns has gone so far as to suggest that visa liberalization could be delayed until 2020 or even until normalized relations between Kosovo and Serbia are reached. Not only does this 'move the goalposts' for Kosovo once again, we find it hard to understand how such a standard could be applied to one party in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and not the other.

Let us be clear: the realization of fully normalized relations between Belgrade and Prishtina is and should remain a prominent goal of the US and Europe. However, slapping on additional requirements after previous standards were met, disregarding the recommendations of various EU institutions, and refusing to live up to promises is unacceptable and only undermines the EU's credibility in the Balkans. As members of Congress who care deeply about the region, we believe that it is critical to maintain the partnership between the U.S. and the EU to promote a resolution to the Kosovo-Serbia conflict. Unfortunately, the EU's indefinite delay and uneven standards on visa liberalization for Kosovo only further a growing sense of abandonment among Kosovars and losing leverage as a negotiator.

We, therefore, urge EU member states and the EU Council to adhere to the recommendations of the EU Parliament and Commission, certify Kosovo's fulfillment of the Visa Liberalization Plan, and grant visa liberalization to Kosovo without further delay.

Thank you for your consideration of our thoughts. We look forward to working with you on the matter and hope to see its resolution soon.

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Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Ranking Member