

VISA FACILITATION FOR WESTERN BALKANS

- ☒ Bosnia and Herzegovina initialed the agreement concerning visa facilitation with the European Union. Just like the agreements initialed by Montenegro earlier this month and Macedonia last year, the agreement will allow for easier issuance of visa for certain groups, such as: diplomats, students, sportspersons and researchers/scientists, as well as cheaper fees and more multiple-entry visas. Serbia, however, postponed the visa facilitation agreement. The negotiations between the Serbian government and the European Commission reached a deadlock regarding the readmission clauses of the agreement. The readmission process could be very cumbersome and expensive for Serbia which has more than 100,000 citizens who reside illegally on EU territory and whose status needs to be resolved. Visa facilitation negotiations are part of the overall EU integration efforts of the Western Balkan states. [*B92 10.4; FoNet 10.4; SEEnet 11.4; Makfax 12.4*]

BOSNIA AND MONTENEGRO ON A COMMON ROAD TO EU

- ☒ During an official visit of the Bosnian political delegation to Montenegro, representatives from both states reaffirmed the good relations between the two Balkan states and claimed that Bosnia and Montenegro are a rare example of two European states with no unresolved issues. In addition, Montenegrin

President, Filip Vujanovic, and Bosnian Chair of Presidency, Nebojsa Radmanovic, reiterated the Euro-Atlantic orientation of their states and claimed mutual support for each other on the road to the EU. Both Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina are part of the Stabilization and Association Process of the EU. The two states recently established mutual diplomatic relations and initiated cooperation regarding fight against terrorism, organized crime and illegal trafficking. [*Vijesti 11.4; Avaz 11.4*]

POLICE REFORM IN BOSNIA STALLS EU INTEGRATION EFFORTS

- ☒ The sluggish pace of police reform in Bosnia may threaten its efforts regarding EU integration. The EU has set police reform as the crucial condition for Bosnian signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. Although late in 2005 political parties from both political entities in Bosnia, Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croatian federation, reached consensus regarding police reform, implementation is slow. The most contested issue concerns the unification of the Bosnian police force, a proposal that politicians from Republika Srpska find unacceptable. In March, EU Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, criticized the Bosnian government for the slow pace of reforms and warned that 2006 was not a year of success for Bosnia. [*Balkan Times 11.4*]

REGIONAL FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

- ☒ Albania hosted a regional conference on the fight against corruption, where representatives from the states in the region along with international organizations such as OSCE and the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe debated the best practices of combating corruption. Experiences from other states in the region were shared and compared in a quest for the best legislative solution for Albania. The conference comes partly as an answer to Commissioner Rehn's earlier suggestions for speeding up reforms in the areas of fighting corruption and organized crime. [*Balkan Times 11.4*]

EU ASKS FOR ADVANCED REFORMS IN CROATIA

- ☒ At a recent meeting with the Croatian government, EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Franco Frattini, said Croatia needs to show further progress in combating corruption. Mr. Frattini emphasized that legislative reforms need to be implemented and also respected in practice. He also recommended further efforts regarding reform of the judiciary. Croatia started EU accession negotiations in late 2005, however the Justice, Freedom and Security chapter is not opened yet. Prime-minister Ivo Sanader said he plans that by the end of 2007 Croatia will open all remaining chapters for negotiation with the European Commission. [*Jutarnji 13.4; SEEuropeNet 13.4*]