



**Centar za građansko obrazovanje**  
**Centre for civic education**

Podgorica, 10 February 2009

## **THE ROAD TO EU IS PAVED WITH TANGIBLE RESULTS, NOT PREELECTORAL PROMISES**

**Centre for Civic Education (CCE) welcomes the announcements for the upcoming liberalisation of the visa regimes, but reminds that this is of no substantial comfort to the citizens of Montenegro who are still facing daily violations even of the existing Visa Facilitation Agreement.**

The advent of the 2008 Visa Facilitation Agreement was good news for the citizens of the Western Balkans. **However, for the most part the joy and the encouragement quickly turned to disappointment. Acquiring visas is still a long, tortuous and often humiliating process for our citizens.**

These conclusions were substantiated by the research conducted simultaneously in 5 countries of the Western Balkans (Macedonia, B&H, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia). In Montenegro, CCE conducted a field study with support of the FOSI ROM and operated a telephone line for citizens' comments and complaints in order to monitor implementation of the VFA. The findings of the study suggest that a great number of citizens doesn't know much about the advantages of the VFA, but, more disturbingly, is also deprived of the advantages supposedly brought by this Agreement.

The citizens mostly complained about the lack of professionalism of the consular service, whose employees often provided them with incorrect information and requested documents that are not required by the Agreement. The staff in the consulates frequently failed to observe the schedules they themselves created and lacked even the rudimentary politeness in dealing with applicants. In a substantial number of cases when visas were refused the consulates provided no justification at all, although the citizens claimed that they submitted all the required documents. In other cases, citizens applying well in advance could only get the appointment for the submission of their documents after the desired date of travelling.

The costs of the visa are frequently higher than 35 euros stipulated by the VFA for the citizens who have to pay high charges for the telephone calls to the consulates waiting for consulate operator to respond on call for getting an appointment. If they live outside of Podgorica, they also undergo additional expenses for repeated travels in order to procure additional documents. The situation was somewhat improved in the case of the Joint Application Centre, since this summer, when the citizens had to queue on the staircase in front of the consulate for hours, hoping to get ahead of the tourist agencies which cause long delays by submitting numerous applications at



*Centar za građansko obrazovanje*  
*Centre for civic education*

once. The Joint Application Centre has now introduced interviews on appointment, but a high number of complaints still indicates that the Centre is not fulfilling its mission adequately.

CCE urges the Government of Montenegro, EU institutions and member states to dedicate greater attention to the implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement, inform the citizens more effectively about its advantages and increase the level of professionalism among the employees. At the same time, we urge the Government of Montenegro to step up its efforts towards fulfilment of the priorities from the European Commission Roadmap for the Visa Liberalisation for Montenegro.

The importance of the implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement cannot be overstated, as it contributes to the overall process of European integrations by enhancing mobility and interaction between our citizens and the EU, mutual acquaintance and exchange of ideas, practices and values, and in the long run fostering European identity and full democratisation of the society. **It is the responsibility of the Government of Montenegro to offer, instead of pre-electoral promises, tangible evidence of progress in this area in order to bring the citizens of Montenegro closer to European Union.**

Petar Đukanović,

Programme coordinator