

# Visa Barrier Officially Gone

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EU

Council of Home and Justice Affairs Ministers passed Monday the decision on elimination of the Schengen visa barrier for Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro as of December 19.

"We strongly support this decision, which represents an important stage in the process of the countries' approximation to the EU", said French Minister for Immigration, Integration, National identity and Solidary Development Eric Besson at a press conference in Brussels.

The decision supplements EU Regulation 539/2001, transferring the three countries from the "black" to the "white" Schengen list.

The decision text reads that countries' citizens are exempted from the obligation to get visas for short stay, up to 90 days within six months and 180 days within a year, but without the possibility to work in EU member-states.

Only individuals possessing biometric passports can travel without visas as of December 19, whereas those having old passports should possess a valid Schengen visa.

Out of the 27 EU member-states, 25 will be accessible without visas, except for Great Britain and Ireland.

Macedonian nationals would also be able to travel to Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, which are not EU members, but are part of the Schengen area. Visa annulment also refers to Greece, but since Athens does not recognize Macedonian passports, passengers will be issued a paper by the customs authorities at the border. Visas will not be required for traveling in Bulgaria and Romania, which have still not met Schengen criteria, but implement EU decisions.

A prolonged stay in the EU requires Type "D" visa, which refers to study of work stay in the Union, whereas applications should be submitted in the embassy of the country-destination.

When entering the Schengen zone, the border officer can ask for an explanation regarding the goal of the travel, place of stay and financial resources. The ones who cannot finance their visit are recommended to present a guarantee letter from the person they will be staying at.

In case entry is rejected, the border officer is obliged to provide a written explanation regarding the decision, which can be used for submitting an appeal to competent bodies in the country.

Information on the conditions for visa-free travel can be found at the website of the EU Mission to Macedonia [www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu](http://www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu).

Recommendations for Macedonian citizens include vigilance when selecting the travel agency, traveling and health insurance, international driving license and green card.

According to MoI data, over 480,000 biometric passports have been issued thus far, which is over 75 percent of the travelling population.

The EC recommended the January 1 annulment of the visa barrier for citizens of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro on July 15, after Commission experts concluded that the three countries had met visa liberalization roadmap conditions. Upon Slovenia's initiative, the visa-free regime decision will be applied ten days earlier, i.e. as of December 19.