

On January 1st 2008 the Agreements for Visa Alleviation for the citizens of Republic of Macedonia entered into force. Their aim is to alleviate the procedure for acquiring Schengen visa for traveling in the EU member countries (so-called Schengen Zone). The benefits which are offered by the Agreement, predominantly, refer to the unified visa fee of 35 EUR, free visa for certain types of applicants and deadline for response to the visa application, 10 days from the day of the submission of the application documents. On this basis, the traveling through 24 countries, signatories to the Schengen Agreement, should be improved, including the acquisition of visa for short period with several entries (so called multi-entry visa).



BCSDN is a network consisting of 14 civil society and ecumenical organizations from 10 countries from the Balkan (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia and Serbia).

The main goal of the network is strengthening of the efforts aimed at coordination, cooperation and capacity building of the organizations members and other partners in South-East Europe (SEE). MCIC manages the Secretariat of the network.

The objective of the project was to improve the access for citizens to alleviated Schengen visa regime.

The target group is the citizens of Republic of Macedonia. Specific target group were citizens which fall in the categories for alleviated visa regime (students; participants at scientific, research, cultural and art events; members of CSOs; journalists; sportsmen; businessmen; drivers; close relatives; members of railroad line; members of religious communities; first aid representatives; visitors to funeral; tourists).

The main activities of the project were: monitoring, i.e. research; info line (hot line) and presentation of the results on a workshop in Brussels. The monitoring consisted of surveying visa applicants in certain embassies of EU member countries, i.e. countries which apply the Schengen visa regime determined with Agreement between Republic of Macedonia and EU for alleviation of the visa regime. The survey was based on the methodology and experience in the same activity of the Batori Foundation in the Eastern Europe countries. The survey was conducted with surveyors – volunteers in front of the embassies or consulates, using face to face methodology with the applicants. 774 citizens were surveyed in total, i.e. proportionally allocated in front of embassies, depending on the number of submitted applications. Moreover, the surveys were sent to relevant organizations, e.g. Alliance of journalists, CSOs, students, etc. The survey was realized in June and lasted 2-3 weeks.

The info line (hotline) served for sharing positive/negative experience related to implementation of the alleviated visa regime and information related thereof. It functions through volunteers stationed in MCIC, who provided information during specific time periods in the day. The info line consisted of a phone line, opened internet subpage and e-mail to which the concerned citizens could write. In order to introduce the public with this service, the info line was opened with a press conference for the media and promotion (through posters, leaflets) ensued. The info line was opened from June to September, wherein the greatest interest for it was registered in the first month. 105 calls from citizens were received, 55 of which requested information, 6 offered praises and 44 complained. A report consisting of analysis of problems and recommendations for improvement of the visa regime was prepared and presented. A report, interim and final, was published on the project's internet site www.vizainfo.org.mk.

The last activity was presentation of results from the survey and info-line on the joint conference on December 10th 2008, together with the partner organizations from the Western Balkan countries, which conduct the same activities in their countries and the organization ECAS from Brussels. At the conference approximately 140 representatives of the CSOs took part, media, embassies from the Western Balkan countries and the European Commission.

Cooperation

In the framework of the project there was regular coordination with ECAS and regional partners. Exchange of information and experience was realized with other organizations active in this field of work (e.g. ESE, CRPM), as well as the EU Delegation, embassies and consulates of the member countries (presentation of the project on September 25th), the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and Parliament (presentation of the results on public debate of the Commission for European Affairs on December 5th).

Good cooperation with the media was established in order to inform the public on the info line and the project, as well as their outcome. The opening of the info line on June 10th was realized through press conference whereas the initial results were presented through press release. The press release was published in 6 newspapers (12 stories) which published information on the info line (Dnevnik, Utrinski Vesnik, Večer, Shpic, Vest and Vreme), several national and local television stations (Channel 5, Alsat – M, Alfa, Telma, MTV1, A1, Sitel) and radio stations such as Channel 77, Deutsche Welle (DW) and Antennae 5.

Project Organization

MCIC was responsible for implementation of all project activities in Macedonia. The project became part of the working programme of RBM for 2008 in April 2008, after it was decided that there was need for monitoring of the alleviated visa regime. The project officer responsible for the projects in the RBM Programme was responsible for the project.

Reporting, monitoring and evaluation

The progress of this project was monitored through regular meetings of the project team composed of head of department and project officer, and, if required (second activity), additional public relations officer was included. Project Officer was Zdenka Videnova, whereas Tanja Hafner-Ademi was responsible for the project management. As public relations officer Gonca Jakovleska was included. The Head of Department for Cross-Sector and International Programme directly followed the project realization.

No separate assessment of the quality and relevance was undertaken. Great interest from the citizens (through info-line) was registered, media coverage of the project and presentation of the project on various debates are elements which point out to quality and relevance of the project.

Follow-Up activities

At the final conference the partners agreed to continue with the cooperation on this topic, however, with focus on visa liberalization. Presently, preparations are undergoing for joint project proposal. An activity which was proposed is study of the migration from the Western Balkan to EU, which is considered as one of the main arguments against visa liberalization.

[Извршно резиме од проектот](#) .