

REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

March 2011

Information on measures undertaken by the Republic of Serbia with regard to the increased number of asylum seekers in the EU member states

Government of the Republic of Serbia is expressing its readiness to undertake all measures that fall within the competence of the Republic of Serbia, as well as to cooperate with the EU member states, with the aim of efficient resolution of this issue and prevention of future abuses of right to asylum.

Government of the Republic of Serbia undertook relevant measures immediately after it was discovered that there was an increased number of asylum seekers in certain EU member states (Sweden, Belgium and Germany). Institutions in charge of asylum and migrations in the EU member states concerned were contacted, as well as embassies of these member states seated in Belgrade; upon having collected all information, a substantial media campaign was carried out on the topic of visa-free regime and its implications.

The first wave of asylum seekers was recorded in March 2010 and it was soon stopped by efficient campaign realized by the Republic of Serbia in cooperation with the countries most affected by the large number of asylum applications.

The second wave of fraudulent asylum applicants from Serbia to the EU started in July, which was also followed by appropriate measures.

Overall number of Serbian citizens who applied for asylum in the EU territory in the period from September 2009 to September 2010 is **10 850** (source: Eurostat). In the course of 2010, **4 254** citizens were returned on basis of Readmission Agreement, whereas we are not familiar with the number of citizens who returned with their personal passport.

Government of the Republic of Serbia will establish a Commission for Monitoring the Enforcement of Visa Liberalization, as a mechanism to monitor the increased number of asylum seekers. The Commission will be tasked with constant control of illegal migrants' issue, with proposing particular short- and long-term measures with a view to overcome and suppress the problem. The Commission will include representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Integration Office, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Finance, Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, and it will be chaired by the Ministry of the Interior. If required, Commission shall involve experts in its work, as well as representatives from other institutions and areas. Commission met twice during March, and proposed additional concrete measures that were required to be taken in aim of suppression of this phenomenon. In that regard, for example, was announced strengthening of information campaign, through distribution of material, holding platforms and forums etc., regular introduction of the public with work results of the Commission, strengthening of bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries, specially with their respective border services...

Representatives of the Ministry of Interior partake in the Frontex working groups, including the working group for risk analysis. We hope that the latter will soon incorporate the mechanisms for quicker operational information exchange with the EU member states, which was often lacking so far. The introduction of system for regular exchange of statistical information on fraudulent asylum applications, early warning system and exchange of intelligence information would significantly contribute to suppression of this form of abuse.

In addition, according to statements of EUROPOL representatives who also participate in Frontex working groups, there is no information indicating any form of organized approach when it comes to abuse of visa-free regime. We consider measures laid down in Frontex report, specially shortening of procedures for making decision upon asylum requests in Member States and prohibition of entry into the Schengen zone for persons whose asylum request was denied due to obvious abuse of rights and distribution of data through SIS (Schengen Information System), would be extremely efficient and we hope that European Commission shall recommend their implementation to Member States.

The measures undertaken or to be undertaken by the Republic of Serbia:

- **Awareness-raising and information campaign**

With the aim of informing Serbian public on the asylum issue and the fact that asylum is not a solution to economic problems and even before the Decision on Visa Liberalisation became enforceable, the Ministry of Interior has, in cooperation with the EU Delegation to Serbia, printed and distributed the information on requirements for legal and safe travel i.e. it was explained what visa liberalization entailed and what it did not entail, and the information was printed in all daily papers in the territory of Serbia. Such information are still distributed on the border crossings in the Republic of Serbia to all passengers who are Serbian citizens.

- **Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia provides urgent response at readmission applications under the Readmission Agreement**

Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia, being the authority in charge of implementation of Readmission Agreement, applies the urgent procedure mechanism for daily resolution of all applications for return of Serbian citizens under the Readmission Agreement, among other by accelerated checking of biometric data in issued travel documents database, by provision of relevant person' fingerprints from international authorities.

Furthermore, with a view to prevent the “fraudulent asylum seekers”, to **all persons who have been issued biometric travel documents by Serbian authorities, and who have, in the course of implementation of Readmission Agreement, stated before relevant international authority that they were not in possession of passport, the Ministry of Interior institutes *ex officio* annulment of such passport in accordance with the Law on Travel Documents.**

Implementation of stringent control on border crossings upon leaving the country in order to prevent the abuse of visa-free regime (control of return tickets, requesting evidence on sufficient means for subsistence in the Schengen area etc.).

- **Regular enforcement of promoted operational controls and investigations at local level**, including the investigation of possible involvement of travel agencies and individuals in organized departures of Serbian citizens to EU countries for the purpose of abusing the right to asylum, implying constant control by the Criminal Police Directorate for investigating possible elements of organised crime.

- **Representatives of Serbian Ministry of Interior and Commissariat for Refugees organized meetings with local authorities and bodies in municipalities that the asylum seekers originate from, with the aim of raising the local population's awareness.**

- **Strategy for reintegration of returnees under the Readmission Agreement**

- Strategy for reintegration of returnees pertains to returnees' information on: where, how and whom to address for assistance, how to obtain personal documents, how to certify diplomas, it provides information on establishment of special Serbian language classes in schools for returnees' children, on accommodation, employment, social protection and health protection.

- National Strategy for improvement of Roma population position in Serbia was also adopted; its significance lies in the fact that majority of asylum seekers and returnees are citizens with Roma nationality

- **Cooperation with EU member states and neighbouring countries:**

- By joint campaign of the Republic of Serbia and the EU, general public in the Republic of Serbia was addressed a clear message that no person shall acquire asylum in EU countries in this manner, as well as that all subsistence based on asylum will be abolished, notably in the Kingdom of Belgium and Federal Republic of Germany

- Police cooperation with neighbouring countries has been improved in relation to the increased number of fraudulent asylum applications

- **Cooperation with the non-government organizations**

- Significant contribution to the campaign against fraudulent asylum applications is provided by non-government organizations through workshops, preparation of info materials and supporting the returnees' children by their inclusion in education system.

- Non-government organization Group 484 entered into the agreement with Swedish Migration Board on implementation of project Support to most sensitive returnees from Sweden and other Western countries – support to returnees' children and information campaign.

- Implementation of the **Action plan** for fulfilling the recommendations under the EC 2010 Progress Report **for the purpose of accelerating the achievement of candidate status**, which was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 29 December 2010, also entails the implementation of measures in the fields of visa, border management, asylum and migrations. These include:

- Follow-up of the information campaign;
- Connection of all border crossings to the central database in the Ministry of Interior and the INTERPOL system. Most border crossings (90%) have so far been connected to the central database in the Ministry of Interior and 50% to the INTERPOL system. Networking of the remaining crossings will be conducted upon provision of technical equipment and software, which is due by the end of the first half of 2011;
- On 9 December 2010, the Ministry of Interior adopted the Action Plan for combating illegal migrations and by the end of the first quarter of 2011, the Action Plan for implementation of Strategy for migration management is due to be adopted, the preparation whereof is in the competence of the Commissariat for Refugees;
- The Council for improvement of Roma population position was established and in charge of implementing the Roma Decade 2005 - 2015. As part of the program for social inclusion of resettled Roma, the Mayor of Belgrade established the Working Group for Coordination, Monitoring and Supervision of Implementation of Resettled Roma Communities Inclusion Program. All of the resettled Roma now have personal documents, which makes it possible for them to participate in health and social programs. Most notably, some of the resettled Roma families are now in the process of being provided social housing. Efforts are under way to arrange employment and engagement of the Roma through the project on Sustainable Waste management Initiative, which is managed jointly by the WHO, UNOPS and the IMO and is financed by the IPA funds. The Working Group and the relevant city administration departments in cooperation with representatives of the EBRD and overcoming many financial, technical and logistical difficulties have successfully completed the resettlement and formation of new communities at locations: Lipovica, Municipality of Barajevo, Municipality of Cukarica, Kijevo, Makis, Municipality of Rakovica, Boljevci, Municipality of Surcin and Varos, Municipality of Mladenovac.