

**Emergency Resolution Nr. 2 adopted at the EPP Congress, Rotterdam (The Netherlands),
31st May – 1st June 2022**

In Support of Kosovo's Visa Liberalisation Process

Tensions in the Western Balkan region are rising. The momentum of unity of the political West is at stake. The development of Kosovo is strongly connected to the major challenges of this time. That is why we must act urgently.

For the first time in 77 years, the whole of Europe finds itself in defence against a bloody war. The EU has been facing hybrid attacks for many years before. The main precondition for any success in this defence of freedom, dignity, democracy, rule of law and the other values represented by Europe on a global scale, as well as of the security of the Europeans, is unity. Europe's unity has become an essential dimension for our civilisation. Among other things, in practical terms this means each part of the EU must treat the concerns of the Western Balkans more seriously.

Kosovo being a European country in the Western Balkans not recognised by a small number of EU Member States, the EPP stresses the need for further political action in order to contribute to unity under the umbrella of the values represented by Europe, which is of the utmost importance for the future of the continent.

Among other priorities, the EPP strongly demands the immediate decision for visa free travel for the citizens of Kosovo.

Kosovo remains the only country in the Western Balkans whose citizens cannot travel visa free to Schengen countries. The other countries of the region were granted visa-free travel more than a decade ago, while three Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) acquired this right in 2016 and 2017. As such, Kosovo 'remains the only country West of Russia, other than Belarus, not to enjoy freedom of movement within the Schengen zone'. Regarding visa free travel, reports consider Kosovo to be one of 'the most isolated places on earth,' considering that its citizens can travel visa free only to three regional countries, Albania, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro (and Serbia but under various obstacles), as well as Turkey and Haiti. Lack of freedom of movement with the EU continues to hamper Kosovo's EU prospects.

The European Commission has handled the visa liberalisation process through a technical approach, outlining a number of benchmarks that countries need to fulfil. In 2018, the European Commission concluded that Kosovo 'has fulfilled all outstanding visa liberalisation benchmarks'. The two outstanding benchmarks referred to the ratification of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro and a strengthened track record in the fight against crime and corruption. The European Parliament has also supported the process on many occasions. If visa liberalisation process is, indeed, a technical issue, then there are no more impediments why Kosovars should not be granted visa free travel.

By not liberalizing visas, the EU continues to harm businesses, as well as impede student and academic exchange – those who would otherwise want to travel legally to the EU. On the other hand, concerns on the EU side for increased asylum-seekers from Kosovo following visa liberalisation are no longer grounded considering that asylum applications from Kosovo to the EU have 'decreased significantly by 36% from 11,675 in 2016 to 7,410 in 2017 and by 90% when compared to 2015' also due to the great cooperation on return and sustainable reintegration between Kosovo and EU Member States, which should be continued in the future.

Granting visa free travel to Kosovars would set a new dynamic until the country is likely to join the EU, and at the same time, it will set Kosovo on equal footing with other Western Balkan countries. Moreover, research shows that visa liberalisation, in the long run, has a positive impact by enhancing legal cross-border mobility and bringing further economic, social and cultural benefits for both the EU and the partner countries.