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**EU Use Offer of Free Visas for Serbians to Influence Election Votes**

*EU members have announced plans to offer the people of Serbia free visas. The offer hopes to aid overthrowing the country's powerful nationalists in the forthcoming elections.*

**/24-7PressRelease/** - May 10, 2008 - EU members have announced plans to offer the people of Serbia free visas. The offer hopes to aid overthrowing the country's powerful nationalists in the forthcoming elections.

The May 11th elections are seen by many as a watershed for future ties with the European Union. The results will determine whether Serbia chooses to pursue closer ties with the EU, as advocated by President Tadic, or adopts the nationalist policies of Serbia's Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica. Brussels is clearly hoping that the prospect of easier travel will give Serbia's pro-European camp the edge come voting day.

It is hoped that the offer will become a major factor in getting a political boost over nationalists, whom remain angered at the EU support for the independence of Kosovo. At present it is thought that 7.5 million citizens will prosper from the free visas. Eligibility for the visas will depend on various administrative restrictions, however it is estimated that around 80% of Serbians will be able to accept the offer.

Seventeen countries have been prompted to come forward and propose the free visas. The offer was announced in France and has been supported by Slovenia, Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Sweden, the Czech Republic and non-EU member Norway.

For a long time the concept of freedom to travel has been a major benefit for Serbia to create closer ties with the EU. Since Yugoslavia's break-up in the 1990's, Serbians have required visas when wanting to travel. This, along with low salary incomes has produced a generation of young citizens which have never been abroad and whom would greatly benefit from the offer.

The offer announcement came merely a week after the bloc signed a long-stalled pact which aims to pave the way for Serbia to have EU membership. The EU views such membership of the bloc as crucial to securing long-term stability in the Balkans.

The meeting of the bloc also meant that EU members were able to overcome political differences and signed what is known as the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The agreement relates to political and economic ties with Belgrade; however its implementation has been halted until Serbia agrees to co-operate with the UN war crimes tribunal.

Should the offer of visa-free-travel become accepted - strengthening the Serbian - EU relationship, it will take months or possibly years for implementation. Serbia will first need to meet strict EU standards on border controls, the fight against crime and issuing biometric passports.

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