COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on the signature of the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas

Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. POLITICAL AND LEGAL BACKGROUND

The importance of a dialogue on visa issues, for the Republic of Albania as well as for all the other Western Balkan countries, was reaffirmed in the conclusions of the EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003, which confirmed also the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans. As concerns the visa issues, the "Thessaloniki agenda" confirmed that the perspective of visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries is a long-term goal linked to the progress of the countries concerned in implementing major reforms in areas such as the strengthening of the rule of law, combating organised crime, corruption and illegal migration and the strengthening of their administrative capacity in border control and security of documents.

Given the European perspective of the country, the authorities of the Republic of Albania focused their interest on the possibility of obtaining facilitation of short-stay visa issuing procedures for its citizens as an immediate, transitional step towards the lifting of the visa obligation which remains a medium-term perspective.

For the European Community, visa facilitation agreements represent a new instrument in the framework of the European short-stay visa policy: in the **Hague Programme,** the Council and the Commission are invited to examine with a view to developing a common approach "whether in the context of the EC readmission policy it would be opportune to facilitate, on a case by case basis, the issuance of short-stay visas to third-country nationals, where possible and on a basis of reciprocity, as part of a real partnership in external relations, including migration-related issues". The EU developed and used this instrument for the first time in its relations with the Russian Federation and with Ukraine.

In December 2005, at the level of Coreper, Member States agreed on a common approach for the development of the EU policy on visa facilitation and identified key elements to be taken into account when deciding to open negotiations on visa facilitations with third countries.

The EC-Republic of Albania readmission Agreement entered into force on 1 May 2006.

Following the authorization given by the Council to the Commission on 13 November 2006, negotiations with the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas were opened in Brussels on 13 December 2006. Two further rounds of negotiations were held on 20 February 2007 and on 10 April 2007 in Brussels. Moreover, formal negotiations were occasionally prepared by informal expert meetings.

At the last formal round on 10 April 2007, the final text of the visa facilitation agreement was initialled at technical level. At political level an initialling ceremony took place in Zagreb on 13 April 2007.

The European Commission has already negotiated a visa facilitation agreement with two third countries (the Russian Federation and Ukraine). The experience acquired in previous negotiations has been useful for the negotiations with the Republic of Albania.

Member States have been regularly informed and consulted in relevant Council Working

groups and committees at all stages of the negotiations.

On the part of the Community, the legal basis for the Agreement is Article 62(2)(b), in conjunction with Article 300 TEC.

The attached proposals constitute the legal instruments for the signature and conclusion of the Agreement. The Council will decide by qualified majority. The European Parliament will have to be formally consulted on the conclusion of the Agreement, in accordance with Article 300(3) TEC.

The proposed decision concerning the conclusion sets out the necessary internal arrangements for the practical application of the Agreement. In particular, it specifies that the European Commission, assisted by experts from Member States, represents the Community within the Joint Committee set up by Article 12 of the Agreement.

Under Article 12(4), the Joint Committee may adopt its own rules of procedure. The Community position in this regard shall be established by the Commission in consultation with a special committee designated by the Council.

European citizens are exempt from the visa obligation by the Republic of Albania. In this respect, the draft agreement on visa facilitation states in Article 1(2) that if the Republic of Albania would reintroduce the visa requirement for EU citizens, the same facilitations granted under the agreement to the citizens of the Republic of Albania would apply automatically, on the basis of reciprocity, to EU citizens.

2. OUTCOME OF NEGOTIATIONS

The Commission considers that the objectives set by the Council in its negotiating directives were attained and that the draft visa facilitation agreement is acceptable to the Community.

The final content of it can be summarised as follows:

– in principle, for all visa applicants, a decision on whether or not to issue a visa will have to be taken within 10 calendar days. This period may be extended up to 30 calendar days when further scrutiny is needed. In urgent cases, the period for taking a decision may be reduced to three working days or less;

– the visa fee for processing applications of Albanian citizens shall amount to €35. This fee will be applied to all Albanian visa applicants and concerns both single and multiple-entry visas. Moreover, certain categories of persons benefit from a full waiving of the visa fee: close relatives, officials participating in government activities, students, disabled persons, journalists, representatives of the religious communities, representatives of civil society, members of the professions, members of train crews, pensioners, children under the age of 6, humanitarian cases, drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services, persons participating in scientific, cultural, educational exchange programmes and sport or cultural events and persons politically persecuted during the communist regime;

– the documents to be presented regarding the purpose of the journey have been simplified for some categories of persons: close relatives, business people, members of official delegations, students, participants in scientific, cultural and sporting events, journalists, persons visiting military and civil burials, representatives of the religious communities, representatives of civil society, members of the professions, drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services, persons visiting for medical reasons, tourists in organized trips and persons politically persecuted during the communist regime. For these categories of persons, only the documents listed in the agreement can be requested for justifying the purpose of the journey. No other justification, invitation or validation provided for by the legislation of the Member States is required;

– there are also simplified criteria for issuing multiple-entry visas for the following categories of persons:

a) for members of the Council of Ministers, Parliament, Constitutional and Supreme Courts, permanent members of official delegations and spouses and children visiting citizens of the Republic of Albania legally residing in the Member States: visa valid up to five years (or shorter, limited to the period of the validity of their mandate or authorisation for legal residence);

b) participants in scientific, cultural, official exchange programmes and sport events, journalists, business people, representatives of the religious communities, representatives of civil society, members of the professions, professional drivers and train crews, students and persons visiting for medical reasons, provided that during the previous two years they have made good use of a 1 year multiple-entry visa and the reasons for requesting a multiple-entry visa are still valid: visas valid for a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 5 years are issued;

– citizens of the Republic of Albania who are holders of valid diplomatic passports are exempted from the visa requirement for short-stays;

– for citizens of the Republic of Albania who are holders of valid service passports the bilateral Agreements signed before 1 January 2007 continue to apply for a period of 5 years. A Declaration attached to the Agreement provides the assessment of the service passports system at the latest 4 years after the entry into force of the Agreement;

– a protocol was agreed stating that Member States that do not fully apply the Schengen acquis yet, may unilaterally recognise Schengen visas and residence permits issued to Albanian citizens for the purpose of transit through their territory in accordance with European Parliament and Council Decision N°895/2006/EC of 14 June 2006[1]. A reference to the future amendment of the Decision N°895/2006/EC for covering Bulgaria and Romania is added;

– a European Community Declaration is attached to the Agreement on access of visa applicants to information and harmonisation of information procedures for issuance of short-stay visas;

[1] OJ L167, 20.6.2006, p.1.

– replying to the specific requests formulated by the Republic of Albania, European Community Declarations are attached to the Agreement on facilitations for family members (not covered by the legally binding provisions of the Agreement) and for bona fide applicants.

For all issues that are not covered by the Agreement the normal Schengen rules or national law continue to apply, such as the refusal of the visa, recognition of travel documents, proof of sufficient means of subsistence, the possibility in the case of doubts to invite applicants for a personal interview in individual cases but also the already existing flexibilities for bona fide travellers.

The specific situations of Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland are reflected in the preamble and in two joint declarations attached to the Agreement. The close association of Norway and Iceland to the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis is likewise reflected in a joint declaration to the Agreement.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the above-mentioned results, the Commission proposes that the Council

– decide that the Agreement be signed on behalf of the Community and authorise the President of the Council to appoint the person(s) duly empowered to sign on behalf of the Community;

– approve, after consultation of the European Parliament, the attached Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas.

Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on the signature of the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 62(2)(b)(i) and (ii), in conjunction with the first sentence of the first subparagraph of Article 300(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission[2],

Whereas:

(1) By its decision of 13 November 2006, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate an agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania regarding the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas.

(2) Negotiations on the agreement were opened on 13 December 2006 and concluded on 10 April 2007.

(3) Subject to its possible conclusion at a later date, the Agreement initialled at technical level in Brussels on 10 April 2007 and at political level in Zagreb on 13 April 2007, should be signed…..

(4) In accordance with the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, the United Kingdom and Ireland do not take part in the adoption of this Decision and are therefore not bound by it or subject to its application.

(5) In accordance with the Protocol on the position of Denmark annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty establishing the European Community, Denmark does not take part in the adoption of this Decision and is therefore not bound by it or subject to its application

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

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[2] OJ C, p. .

Sole Article

Subject to a possible conclusion at a later date, the President of the Council is hereby authorised to designate the person(s) empowered to sign, on behalf of the European Community, the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas and the related documents consisting of the text of the agreement, a Protocol and the declarations.

Done in Brussels, the

For the Council
The President

2007/0148(CNS)

Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of issuance of short-stay visas

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 62(2)(b)(i) and (ii), in conjunction with the first sentence of the first subparagraph of Article 300(2) and the first subparagraph of Article 300(3) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission[3],

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament[4]

Whereas:

(1) The Commission has negotiated on behalf of the European Community an Agreement with the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas;

(2) This Agreement has been signed, on behalf of the European Community, on …….2007 subject to its possible conclusion at a later date, in accordance with Decision……../……/EC of the Council of [……..]

(3) This Agreement should be approved.

(4) The Agreement establishes a Joint Committee for the management of the Agreement, which may adopt its rules of procedure. It is appropriate to provide for a simplified procedure for the establishment of the Community position in this case.

(5) In accordance with the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, the United Kingdom and Ireland do not take part in the adoption of this Decision and are therefore not bound by it or subject to its application.

(6) In accordance with the Protocol on the position of Denmark annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty establishing the European Community, Denmark does not take part in the adoption of this Decision and is therefore not bound by it or subject to its application.

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

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[3] OJ C…

[4] OJ C…

Article 1

The Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas is hereby approved on behalf of the Community.

The text of the agreement is attached to this Decision.

Article 2

The President of the Council shall give the notification provided for in Article 14(1) of the Agreement[5].

Article 3

The Commission, assisted by experts from Member States, shall represent the Community in the Joint Committee of experts established by Article 12 of the Agreement.

Article 4

The position of the Community within the Joint Committee of experts with regard to the adoption of its rules of procedure as required under Article 12(4) of the Agreement shall be taken by the Commission after consultation with a special committee designated by the Council.

Article 5

This Decision shall be published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done in Brussels, the

For the Council
The President

[5] The date of entry into force of the Agreement will be published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* [by the General Secretariat of the Council].

Annex

AGREEMENT

between

the European Community and the Republic of Albania

on the facilitation of the issuance of visas

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY hereinafter referred to as "*the Community*";

and

THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA,

hereinafter referred to as the Parties

Having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Community and the Republic of Albania, which was signed on 12 June 2006 and which currently governs the relations with the Republic of Albania;

Reaffirming the intention to cooperate closely within the framework of the existing SAA structures for the liberalization of the visa regime between the Republic of Albania and the European Union, in line with the conclusions of the EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003;

Desiring, as a first concrete step towards the visa free travel regime, to facilitate people-to-people contacts as an important condition for the steady development of economic, humanitarian, cultural, scientific and other ties, by facilitating the issuing of visas to citizens of the Republic of Albania;

Bearing in mind that, as from 4 August 2000, EU citizens are exempted from the visa requirement when travelling to the Republic of Albania for a period of time not exceeding 90 days per period of 180 days or transiting through the territory of the Republic of Albania;

Recognising that if the Republic of Albania was to reintroduce the visa requirement for EU citizens, the same facilitations granted under this agreement to the citizens of the Republic of Albania would automatically, on the basis of reciprocity, apply to EU citizens;

Recognising that visa facilitation should not lead to illegal migration and paying special attention to security and readmission;

Having regard to the entry into force of the agreement between the Republic of Albania and the European Community on the readmission of persons residing without authorization;

Taking into account the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland and the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, annexed to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community and confirming that the provisions of this agreement do not apply to the United Kingdom and Ireland;

Taking into account the Protocol on the position of Denmark annexed to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community and confirming that the provisions of this agreement do not apply to the Kingdom of Denmark;

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1 - Purpose and scope of application

1. The purpose of this Agreement is to facilitate the issuance of visas for an intended stay of no more than 90 days per period of 180 days to the citizens of the Republic of Albania.

2. If the Republic of Albania was to reintroduce the visa requirement for EU citizens or certain categories of EU citizens, the same facilitations granted under this agreement to the citizens of the Republic of Albania would automatically, on the basis of reciprocity, apply to EU citizens concerned.

Article 2 - General clause

1. The visa facilitations provided in this Agreement shall apply to citizens of the Republic of Albania only insofar as they are not exempted from the visa requirement by the laws and regulations of the Community or the Member States, the present agreement or other international agreements.

2. The national law of the Republic of Albania, or of the Member States or Community law shall apply to issues not covered by the provisions of this Agreement, such as the refusal to issue a visa, recognition of travel documents, proof of sufficient means of subsistence and the refusal of entry and expulsion measures.

Article 3 - Definitions

For the purpose of this Agreement:

a) "*Member State*" shall mean any Member State of the European Union, with the exception of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom;

b) "*Citizen of the European Union*" shall mean a national of a Member State as defined in point (a);

c) "*Citizen of the Republic of Albania*": shall mean a person who possesses Albanian

citizenship;

d) "*Visa*" shall mean an authorization issued by a Member State or a decision taken by such State which is required with a view to:

– entry for an intended stay in that Member State or in several Member States of no more than 90 days in total,

– entry for transit through the territory of that Member State or several Member States.

e) *"legally residing person*" shall mean a citizen of the Republic of Albania authorized or entitled to stay for more than 90 days in the territory of a Member State, on the basis of Community or national legislation.

Article 4 - Documentary evidence regarding the purpose of the journey

1. For the following categories of citizens of the Republic of Albania the following documents are sufficient for justifying the purpose of the journey to the other Party:

a) for members of official delegations who, following an official invitation addressed to the Republic of Albania, shall participate in meetings, consultations, negotiations or exchange programmes, as well as in events held in the territory of the Member States by intergovernmental organisations:

– a letter issued by an Albanian authority confirming that the applicant is a member of the Albanian delegation travelling to the territory of the Member States to participate in the aforementioned events, accompanied by a copy of the official invitation;

b) for business people and representatives of business organisations:

– a written request from a host legal person or company, organisation, or an office or branch of such legal person or company, state or local authorities of the Member States or organising committees of trade and industrial exhibitions, conferences and symposia held in the territories of the Member States, endorsed by a Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Albania;

c) for journalists:

– a certificate or other document issued by a professional organisation proving that the person concerned is a qualified journalist and a document issued by his/her employer stating that the purpose of the journey is to carry out journalistic work;

d) for persons participating in scientific, cultural and artistic activities, including university and other exchange programmes:

– a written request from the host organisation to participate in those activities;

e) for representatives of civil society organisations when undertaking trips for the purposes of educational training, seminars, conferences, including in the framework

of exchange programs:

– a written request issued by the host organisation, a confirmation that the person is representing the civil society organisation and the certificate on establishment of such organisation from the relevant Register issued by a state authority in accordance with the national legislation;

f) for pupils, students, post-graduate students and accompanying teachers who undertake trips for the purposes of study or educational training, including in the framework of exchange programmes as well as other school-related activities:

– a written request or a certificate of enrolment from the host university, academy, institute, college or school or student cards or certificates of the courses to be attended;

g) for participants in international sports events and persons accompanying them in a professional capacity:

– a written request from the host organization: competent authorities, national sport federations or National Olympic Committees of the Member States;

h) for participants in official exchange programs organized by twin cities:

– a written request of the Head of Administration/Mayor of these cities;

i) for close relatives – spouse, children (including adopted), parents (including custodians), grandparents and grandchildren, – visiting Albanian citizens legally residing in the territory of the Member States:

– a written request from the host person;

j) for visiting military and civil burial grounds:

– an official document confirming the existence and preservation of the grave as well as family or other relationship between the applicant and the buried;

k) for persons politically persecuted during the communist regime in the Republic of Albania:

– the certificate issued by the Institute for the Integration of the Persecuted Persons in accordance with Article 3 of Law no 7748 of 29.07.1993, indicating the status of being a person politically persecuted during the communist regime in the Republic of Albania and a letter of invitation from a competent authority, national or international organization including NGO of a Member State or by a European institution for participating in activities as appropriate including activities related to their status;

l) for drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services to the territories of the Member States in vehicles registered in the Republic of Albania:

– a written request from the national association (union) of carriers of the Republic of Albania providing for international road transportation, stating the purpose, duration and frequency of the trips;

m) for persons travelling for tourism:

– a certificate or voucher from a travel agency or a tour operator accredited by Member States in the framework of the local consular cooperation confirming the booking of an organized trip;

n) for persons visiting for medical reasons and necessary accompanying persons:

– an official document of the medical institution confirming necessity of medical care in this institution, the necessity of being accompanied, and proof of sufficient financial means to pay for the medical treatment;

o) for members of the professions participating in international exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars or other similar events held in the territory of the Member States:

– a written request from the host organization confirming that the person concerned is participating in the event;

p) for members of train, refrigerator and locomotive crews in international trains, travelling to the territories of the Member States:

– a written request from the competent railway company of the Republic of Albania stating the purpose, duration and frequency of the trips;

q) for persons visiting for burial ceremonies:

– an official document confirming the fact of death as well as confirmation of the family or other relationship between the applicant and the buried;

r) for representatives of the religious communities:

– a written request from a religious community registered in the Republic of Albania, stating the purpose, duration and frequency of the trips.

2. The written request mentioned in paragraph 1 of this Article shall contain the following items:

a) for the invited person – name and surname, date of birth, sex, citizenship, number of the identity document, time and purpose of the journey, number of entries and where relevant the name of the spouse and children accompanying the invited person;

b) for the inviting person – name, surname and address; or

c) for the inviting legal person, company or organisation – full name and address and

– if the request is issued by an organisation, the name and position of the person who signs the request,

– if the inviting person is a legal person or company or an office or a branch of such legal person or company established in the territory of a Member State, the registration number as required by the national law of the Member State concerned.

3. For the categories of persons mentioned in paragraph 1 of this article, all categories of visa are issued according to the simplified procedure without requiring any other justification, invitation or validation concerning the purpose of the journey, provided for by the legislation of the Member States.

Article 5 - Issuance of multiple-entry visas

1. Diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States shall issue multiple-entry visas with a term of validity of up to five years to the following categories of persons:

a) members of the Council of Ministers, Parliament, Constitutional Court and Supreme Court, if they are not exempted from the visa requirement by the present Agreement, in the exercise of their duties, with a term of validity limited to their term of office if this is less than 5 years;

b) permanent members of official delegations who, following an official invitation addressed to the Republic of Albania, shall regularly participate in meetings, consultations, negotiations or exchange programs, as well as in events held in the territory of the Member States by intergovernmental organizations;

c) spouses and children (including adopted), who are under the age of 21 or are dependent, visiting Albanian citizens legally residing in the territory of the Member States with the term of validity limited to the duration of the validity of their authorization for legal residence.

2. Diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States shall issue multiple-entry visas with the term of validity of up to one year to the following categories of persons, provided that during the previous year they have obtained at least one visa, have made use of it in accordance with the laws on entry and stay of the visited State and that there are reasons for requesting a multiple-entry visa:

a) members of official delegations who, following an official invitation addressed to the Republic of Albania, shall regularly participate in meetings, consultations, negotiations or exchange programmes, as well as in events held in the territory of the Member States by intergovernmental organizations;

b) business people and representatives of business organizations who regularly travel to

the Member States;

c) persons participating in scientific, cultural and artistic activities, including university and other exchange programs, who regularly travel to the Member States;

d) participants in international sports events and persons accompanying them in a professional capacity;

e) journalists;

f) participants in official exchange programmes organised by twin cities;

g) drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services to the territories of the Member States in vehicles registered in the Republic of Albania;

h) persons needing to visit regularly for medical reasons and necessary accompanying persons.

i) members of train, refrigerator and locomotive crews in international trains, travelling to the territories of the Member States;

j) students and post-graduate students who regularly travel for the purposes of study or educational training, including in the framework of exchange programs;

k) representatives of the religious communities in the Republic of Albania, who regularly travel to the Member States;

l) representatives of civil society organizations travelling regularly to Member States for the purposes of educational training, seminars, conferences, including in the framework of exchange programs;

m) members of the professions participating in international exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars or other similar events who regularly travel to the Member States.

3. Diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States shall issue multiple-entry visas with a term of validity of a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 5 years to the categories of persons referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article, provided that during the previous two years they have made use of the one year multiple-entry visas in accordance with the laws on entry and stay of the visited State and that the reasons for requesting a multiple-entry visa are still valid.

4. The total period of stay of persons referred to in paragraphs 1 to 3 of this Article shall not exceed 90 days per period of 180 days in the territory of the Member States.

Article 6 - Fees for processing visa applications

1. The fee for processing visa applications of citizens of the Republic of Albania shall amount to €35.

The aforementioned amount may be reviewed in accordance with the procedure provided for in Article 14(4).

If the Republic of Albania was to reintroduce the visa requirement for EU citizens, the visa fee to be charged by the Republic of Albania shall not be higher than €35 or the amount agreed if the fee is reviewed in accordance with the procedure provided for in Article 14(4).

2. Fees for processing the visa application are waived for the following categories of persons:

a) close relatives – spouses, children (including adopted), parents (including custodians), grandparents and grandchildren of Albanian citizens legally residing in the territory of the Member States;

b) members of official delegations who, following an official invitation addressed to the Republic of Albania, shall participate in meetings, consultations, negotiations or exchange programmes, as well as in events held in the territory of the Member States by intergovernmental organisations;

c) members of the Council of Ministers, Parliament, Constitutional Court and Supreme Court, if they are not exempted from the visa requirement by the present Agreement;

d) pupils, students, post-graduate students and accompanying teachers who undertake trips for the purpose of study or educational training;

e) children under 6 years of age;

f) disabled persons and the person accompanying them, if necessary;

g) persons who have presented documents proving the necessity of their travel on humanitarian grounds, including to receive urgent medical treatment and the person accompanying such person, or to attend a funeral of a close relative, or to visit a seriously ill close relative;

h) participants in international sports events and persons accompanying them in a professional capacity;

i) persons participating in scientific, cultural and artistic activities including university and other exchange programmes;

j) participants in official exchange programmes organised by twin cities;

k) politically persecuted persons during the communist regime;

l) pensioners;

m) representatives of civil society organisations travelling to attend meetings, seminars, exchange programs or training courses;

n) journalists;

o) representatives of religious communities registered in the Republic of Albania;

p) drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services to the territories of the Member States in vehicles registered in the Republic of Albania;

q) members of train, refrigerator and locomotive crews in international trains, travelling to the territories of the Member States;

r) members of the professions participating in international exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars or other similar events held in the territory of the Member States.

Article 7 - Length of procedures for processing visa applications

1. Diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States shall take a decision on the request to issue a visa within 10 calendar days of the date of the receipt of the application and documents required for issuing the visa.

2. The period of time for taking a decision on a visa application may be extended to up to 30 calendar days in individual cases, notably when further scrutiny of the application is needed.

3. The period of time for taking a decision on a visa application may be reduced to 3 working days or less in urgent cases.

Article 8 - Departure in case of lost or stolen documents

Citizens of the European Union and of the Republic of Albania who have lost their identity documents, or from whom these documents have been stolen while staying in the territory of the Republic of Albania or the Member States, may leave that territory on the grounds of valid identity documents entitling to cross the border issued by diplomatic missions or consular posts of the Member States or of the Republic of Albania without any visa or other authorization.

Article 9 - Extension of visa in exceptional circumstances

The citizens of the Republic of Albania who do not have the possibility to leave the territory of the Member States by the time stated in their visas for reasons of *force majeure* shall have the term of their visas extended free of charge in accordance with the legislation applied by the receiving State for the period required for their return to the State of their residence.

Article 10 - Diplomatic passports

1. Citizens of the Republic of Albania, holders of valid diplomatic passports can enter, leave and transit through the territories of the Member States without visas.

2. Persons mentioned in paragraph 1 of this Article may stay in the territories of the Member States for a period not exceeding 90 days per period of 180 days.

Article 11 - Territorial validity of visas

Subject to the national rules and regulations concerning national security of the Member States and subject to EU rules on visas with limited territorial validity, citizens of the Republic of Albania shall be entitled to travel within the territory of the Member States on an equal basis with European Union citizens.

Article 12 - Joint Committee for management of the Agreement

1. The Parties shall set up a Joint Committee of experts (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee"), composed of representatives of the European Community and of the Republic of Albania. The Community shall be represented by the Commission of the European Communities, assisted by experts from the Member States.

2. The Committee shall, in particular, have the following tasks:

(a) monitoring the implementation of the present Agreement;

(b) suggesting amendments or additions to the present Agreement;

(c) settling disputes arising out of the interpretation or application of the provisions in this Agreement.

3. The Committee shall meet whenever necessary at the request of one of the Parties and at least once a year.

4. The Committee shall establish its rules of procedure.

Article 13 - Relation of this Agreement with bilateral Agreements between Member States and the Republic of Albania

1. As from its entry into force, this Agreement shall take precedence over provisions of any bilateral or multilateral agreements or arrangements concluded between individual Member States and the Republic of Albania, insofar as the provisions of the latter agreements or arrangements cover issues dealt with by the present Agreement.

2. The provisions of bilateral Agreements or arrangements between individual Member States and the Republic of Albania signed before 1 January 2007 providing for the exemption of the holders of service passports from the visa requirement, shall continue to apply for a period of 5 years from the entry into force of this Agreement without prejudice to the right of the Member States concerned or the Republic of Albania to denounce or suspend these bilateral agreements during this period of 5 years.

Article 14 - Final clauses

1. This Agreement shall be ratified or approved by the Parties in accordance with their respective procedures and shall enter into force on the first day of the second month following the date on which the Parties notify each other that the procedures referred to above have been completed.

2. This Agreement is concluded for an indefinite period of time, unless terminated in accordance with paragraph 5 of this Article.

3. This Agreement may be amended by written agreement of the Parties. Amendments shall enter into force after the Parties have notified each other of the completion of their internal procedures necessary for this purpose.

4. Each Party may suspend in whole or in part this Agreement for reasons of public order, protection of national security or protection of public health. The decision on suspension shall be notified to the other Party not later than 48 hours before its entry into force. The Party that has suspended the application of this Agreement shall immediately inform the other Party once the reasons for the suspension no longer apply.

5. Each Party may terminate this Agreement by giving written notice to the other Party. This Agreement shall cease to be in force 90 days after the date of such notification.

Done in XXX on XXX, in duplicate in each of the official languages of the Parties, each of these texts being equally authentic.

For the European Community *For the Republic of Albania*

ANNEX

PROTOCOL TO THE AGREEMENT ON THE MEMBER STATES THAT DO NOT FULLY APPLY THE SCHENGEN ACQUIS

Those Member States which are bound by the Schengen acquis but which do not issue yet Schengen visas, while awaiting the relevant decision of the Council to that end, shall issue national visas the validity of which is limited to their own territory.

These Member States may unilaterally recognize Schengen visas and residence permits for the transit through their territory, in accordance with European Parliament and Council Decision Nº 895/2006/EC of 14 June 2006.

As European Parliament and Council Decision Nº 895/2006/EC of 14 June 2006 does not apply to Romania and Bulgaria; similar provisions will be proposed by the European Commission in order to enable these countries to unilaterally recognize Schengen visas and residence permits and other similar documents issued by other Member States not yet fully integrated into the Schengen area for the purpose of transit through their territory.

JOINT DECLARATION CONCERNING DENMARK

The Parties take note that the present Agreement does not apply to the procedures for issuing visas by the diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Kingdom of Denmark.

In such circumstances, it is desirable that the authorities of Denmark and of the Republic of Albania conclude, without delay, a bilateral agreement on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas in similar terms as the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania.

JOINT DECLARATION CONCERNING THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

The Parties take note that the present Agreement does not apply to the territory of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

In such circumstances, it is desirable that the authorities of the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Republic of Albania, conclude bilateral agreements on the facilitation of the issuance of visas.

JOINT DECLARATION CONCERNING ICELAND AND NORWAY

The Parties take note of the close relationship between the European Community and Norway and Iceland, particularly by virtue of the Agreement of 18 May 1999 concerning the association of these countries with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis.

In such circumstances, it is desirable that the authorities of Norway, Iceland and the Republic of Albania conclude, without delay, bilateral agreements on the facilitation of the issuance of short-stay visas in similar terms as the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania.

JOINT DECLARATION CONCERNING SWISS CONFEDERATION AND LIECHTENSTEIN (*if needed)*

If the Agreement between the EU, the EC and the Swiss Confederation concerning the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis and the Protocols to this Agreement concerning Liechtenstein has entered into force by the time negotiations with the Republic of Albania have concluded, a similar declaration will also be made in respect of Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DECLARATION ON ACCESS OF VISA APPLICANTS AND HARMONISATION OF INFORMATION ON PROCEDURES FOR ISSUING SHORT-STAY VISAS AND DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED WHEN APPLYING FOR SHORT-STAY VISAS

Recognizing the importance of transparency for visa applicants, the European Community recalls that the legislative proposal on the recast of the Common Consular Instructions on visas for the diplomatic missions and consular posts has been adopted on 19 July 2006 by the European Commission and addresses the issue of conditions of access of visa applicants to diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States.

Regarding the information to be provided to visa applicants the European Community considers that appropriate measures should be taken:

– In general, to draw up basic information for applicants on the procedures and conditions for applying for visas and on their validity.

– The European Community will draw up a list of minimum requirements in order to ensure that Albanian applicants are given coherent and uniform basic information and are required to submit, in principle, the same supporting documents.

The information mentioned above including the list of accredited travel agencies and tour operators in the framework of local consular cooperation is to be disseminated widely (on the notice boards of consulates, in leaflets, on websites etc.).

The diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States shall provide information about existing possibilities under the Schengen acquis for facilitation of the issuing of short-stay visas on a case-by-case basis, and in particular for bona fide applicants.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DECLARATION ON REVIEWING THE VISA REQUIREMENT FOR HOLDERS OF SERVICE PASSPORTS

As the exemption of the holders of service passports from the visa requirement provided in bilateral Agreements or arrangements between individual Member States and the Republic of Albania which have been signed before 1 January 2007 shall only continue to apply for a period of 5 years from the entry into force of this Agreement without prejudice to the right of the Member States concerned or the Republic of Albania to denounce or suspend these bilateral agreements during this period of 5 years, the European Community will reassess the situation of the holders of service passports at the latest 4 years after the entry into force of this Agreement, in view of a possible amendment of the Agreement to that end in accordance

with the procedure provided in Article 14(3).

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DECLARATION ON FACILITATIONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND BONA FIDE APPLICANTS

The European Community takes note of the suggestion of the Republic of Albania to give a wider definition to the notion of family members that should benefit from visa facilitation as well as of the importance that the Republic of Albania attaches to the simplification of movement of this category of persons.

In order to ease the mobility of an extended number of persons which have family links (in particular sisters and brothers and their children) with citizens of Albania legally residing in the territories of Member States, the European Community invites the Member States' consular offices to make full use of the existing possibilities in the "acquis communautaire" for facilitating the issuance of visas to this category of persons, including in particular, the simplification of documentary evidence requested for the applicants, exemptions from handling fees and where appropriate the issuing of multiple entry visas.

In addition, the European Community also invites the Member States' consular offices to make full use of these possibilities for the facilitation of the issuance of visas to bona fide applicants.

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