

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMAN CONTACTS**

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Hofburg, Vienna**

**SESSION II: Benefits of cross-border human contacts and strengthening of  
co-operation among OSCE participating States in this field**

**Tanja FAJON**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,

It is my great pleasure to be here today participating at this conference, where very important matters are being discussed which also take a great part of my work in the European Parliament, particular in the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE).

Please allow me also to thank the OSCE and H.E. Ambassador Janez Lenarčič (Officer for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) for organizing this event and for the invitation.

The fact that Ambassador Lenarčič is from Slovenia makes me feel being here with you even more at home, as you can imagine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my view, two most important developments have contributed, so far, to European integration with direct and immediate impact on the European citizens:

- 1) The introduction of our common currency, the Euro; and
- 2) The establishment of our borderless area, the “Schengen Area”

I have been dealing professionally with European affairs for more than 15 years – first as journalist and correspondent for Slovenian National TV in Brussels, and now as Member of European Parliament.

In my experience, European debate used to be dominated by the questions of further enlarging and integrating the Union. Since the EU is confronted with its biggest challenge, the financial crisis, you hear more discussion, even in public, about the failure of the Euro, or even about of a possible disintegration or even dissolution of the EU as a whole.

In addition, citizens in most EU-Member States openly express an increased level of euro-scepticism, while the support of public opinion in the EU to this great European plan has significantly decreased. A look to the recent findings of the “Eurobarometer” is more than alarming.

And coming back to the topic of today's meeting and discussion:

Recently, we have even witnessed efforts by specific EU-Member States to re-introduce border controls within the "Schengen Area" and visa requirements for third countries, thus abolishing one of the major achievements for the citizens, namely free movement within Europe. Let me inform you that this move has already become a major source of friction in the cooperation between the EP and the Council.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The distinct phenomenon of constant border changes is very European, indeed. **Since the First World War, small or rather significant border changes occurred at least 33 times.** My own country Slovenia offers a good and interesting example in this respect. A Slovene who was born in 1918 has to this day lived in 8 different state entities and changed 8 different currencies without moving a single time.<sup>1</sup> (These state entities were – just in order to refresh everybody's memory: See names below at footnote 1)

In the European Union, free movement of people is one of the core values and freedoms, on which the Union has built its *area of citizens' rights, human rights and fundamental rights*, including the protection of minorities, as laid down in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This, finally, led to the establishment of the "Schengen Area".

Furthermore, by harmonising visa rules, the EU seeks to render entry requirements and duration of stays in the Schengen Area more efficient, whilst increasing their transparency.

Through the *Schengen Visa Code*, EU States have set up harmonised conditions and procedures for issuing short-stay visas and have also established a list of countries (Regulation 539/2001), whose citizens are subject to visa requirement when entering the EU, as well as a list of countries, for which visa requirement is waived.

To facilitate residents who frequently travel across the external borders of the Union, a **Local Border Traffic Regime** has been established. It enables EU-Member States to conclude bilateral agreements with their neighbouring non-EU countries so that the border residents can travel back and forth without a Schengen visa and, therefore, without any impediment to trade, social and cultural interchange in the region concerned.

May I mention, as a most prominent example, the **Local Border Traffic Regime**, which was established between Slovenia and Croatia after Slovenia had joined the EU, in order to facilitate cross-border human contact by allowing free travel between the two countries only with Identity Cards.

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<sup>1</sup> Austrian-Hungarian Empire; Independent country of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs; Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs; Kingdom of Yugoslavia; Italian Occupation; German Occupation; Federative Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia; Federative Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia; Republic of Slovenia.

Croatia, soon the 28<sup>th</sup> Member State of the EU, is seeking a similar regime for the citizens living along the long border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And allow me, also from this podium, to wholeheartedly welcome Croatia to our European family.

The EP, and I personally, have already expressed full support for these efforts between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to appeal, once again, to the other EU-institutions, namely the European Commission and the Council, to follow the example set by the EP.

The EU recognises the benefits of cross-border travel and human contact. Therefore, bilateral agreements, so-called “Visa Facilitation Agreements”, are regularly signed between the EU and third countries to facilitate travel for particular groups of citizens, such as students, journalists, academia or NGO representatives. Such agreements have been concluded with all Western Balkan countries, except Kosovo.

And only last week in Strasbourg, the EP adopted a similar agreement on visa facilitation for Ukraine.

In February 2013, the European Commission proposed legislation establishing the ***Registered Traveller Programme*** to further facilitate the fluid access to the Union of pre-screened travellers, without undermining security. This would offer simplified, automated border checks to non-EU nationals, who comply with certain criteria, and an Entry/Exit System that would make it possible to identify so-called "over-stayers" (These are people, who entered the EU lawfully, but have stayed longer than they were entitled to).

Finally, a number of information sharing mechanisms is facilitating European cooperation on border management. Over the past years, the EU has been striving to embrace new technologies and create large-scale IT systems in a coherent and proportional way to improve these tools.

SIS and VIS are prominent examples of this.

They permit European authorities throughout the Schengen Area to efficiently share and use data necessary for the execution of their tasks.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am convinced that cross-border human contact is essential in many respects.

It is essential especially for young people, as it offers to them numerous opportunities for their education, their work and other life experience.

It is also vital for the development – not only in economic terms – of often forgotten remote border regions and areas.

It is vital for local businesses.

And after all, it is most important for maintaining good neighbourly relations.

Therefore, when talking about cross-border travel and human contact we need to look at the limitations to it and what can we do to further liberalise it. Bearing in mind also the drawbacks, such as cross-border organized crime, human and drug trafficking.

It is crucial to review good practices and also apply them to facilitate cross-border human contacts especially on humanitarian grounds and for vulnerable groups of migrants such as asylum seekers.

Let me remind you what big and tangible step visa liberalization has been so far for the citizens of five Western Balkan countries.

Thank you for your attention, and I will be happy to answer to any of your questions.