

BULGARIANS' CHANCES TO TRAVEL WITHOUT VISAS TO THE US

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The outcome of the negotiations between East European countries and the US for cancellation of visas depends on who will be the next American President. What are the attitudes of the Presidential Candidates towards the issue?

All three Presidential Candidates support the general program for lifting visa restrictions for East European countries but regarding Bulgaria its chances are highest with the Republican John McCain, reports Deutsche Welle.

Lifting of visa restrictions for Bulgarians and citizens of other new members of the EU is a project of the present American administration. The administration did her best to move ahead the talks on visas and to speed up the adoption of relevant legislation by the Congress.

The chances that the visa issue continues to move fast ahead are largest if John McCain, the Republican Party Candidate, wins the elections in November. Only a few days ago at a meeting with the American-Baltic Committee in Washington, McCain said that if he becomes President he will take a closer view of the matter. The senator welcomes the bilateral agreements of separate countries with the US on visa negotiations. We are aware that his position includes Bulgaria among the countries towards which visa restrictions have to be lifted.

The idea is supported both by Republicans and Democrats.

The positions of both Democratic Candidates are also in favour of lifting visa restrictions. However, in her "Hillary for President" program, Hillary Clinton supports cancellation of visas for East European allies but in a more limited version which until now mentions only 6 countries - Bulgaria is not among them. For Poland, Romania and Bulgaria it provides for a second phase in the process of lifting visas, in the more distant future.

If Clinton becomes president she promises to help these countries obtain the status of the rest EU member states.

Barack Obama also supports the project for changes in the visa regime but it is not clear if that includes Bulgaria. Obama is informed about Bulgaria's problems with organized crime and corruption which are seen as obstacle towards lifting visas. "Bulgaria still suffers from corruption and impact of organized crime", says the Senator during the debate over the candidature of Nancy McEldowney for US Ambassador to Bulgaria. To what extent Obama and Clinton will be willing to change their positions if

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they win the elections is unknown. But it is slightly probable that they are going to show the same activity in helping US East European allies as the Republicans of President Bush.