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EASO publishes Country of Origin Information reports on Western Balkan countries and Turkey



Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. These reports, drafted upon request of the European Parliament and the Council, provide factual information on selected topics relevant for safe country designation, more specifically in the framework of the proposal for an EU List of Safe Countries of Origin.

On 9 September 2015, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation establishing a European List of safe countries of origin (COM(2015) 452 final), which would include all Western Balkan countries and Turkey. Negotiations on this proposal are still ongoing. On 26 February 2016, EASO received a request from the European Parliament for a contribution on Turkey, which was followed, on 1 April 2016, by a similar request from the Council on Turkey and all Western Balkan countries. In response to these information requests, EASO has drafted COI reports on all seven countries proposed to be included in the EU List of Safe Countries of Origin. The reports can be downloaded here:

- Albania Country Focus
- Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Focus
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Country Focus
- Kosovo Country Focus
- Montenegro Country Focus
- Serbia Country Focus
- Turkey Country Focus

All seven reports were co-drafted and reviewed by EASO and researchers from a number of national asylum authorities represented in EASO's COI Network (contributions as drafters or reviewers from Finland,

Lithuania, Romania, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, France, Hungary), in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology and EASO Mandate. In line with this methodology, country information from a wide variety of sources is provided, while refraining from making any assessments or policy conclusions. Thus, the reports aim to support the ongoing negotiations on the EU List of Safe Countries of Origin by offering a factual knowledge base for more informed policy discussions.

For the designation of safe countries of origin, Annex I of the Asylum Procedures Directive foresees that: 'A country is considered as a safe country of origin where, on the basis of the legal situation, the application of the law within a democratic system and the general political circumstances, it can be shown that there is generally and consistently no persecution as defined in Article 9 of Directive 2011/95/EU, no torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and no threat by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict'. In addition, 'account shall be taken, *inter alia*, of the extent to which protection is provided against persecution or mistreatment' .

The Country Focus reports at hand cover the most important topics related to the above-mentioned criteria for safe country of origin designation, namely: state structure (Constitution, Executive branch, Legislative Branch, Administration), socio-political landscape (Political parties, Elections, Civil society, Media), rule of law and state protection (Law enforcement, Judiciary), security situation and human rights situation (Legal context, Freedom of expression/religion/assembly, Detention, Situation of specific groups – ethnic or religious minorities, journalists, human rights activists, women, children, LGBTI persons, victims of trafficking, returnees).

Based on feedback received from the institutional actors on the usability of this country information for the purpose of safe country designation, EASO intends to review the terms of reference of these COI reports, as needed, and plans to provide regular updates, taking into account the time-sensitive nature of the information in question.

Please direct any information requests regarding this Press Release to Jean-Pierre Schembri, EASO spokesperson: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu.

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