



Marrying a husband with an EU green card

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Abstract:

Coming to Slovenia as a Serbian citizen was not an easy task. It took a lot of time and patience to deal with all the administration and paperwork. It also pulled quite some money out of my empty student pockets. Last but not least it changed my perception of marriage too.

Cross border partnership

I first came to Slovenia in 2002 to visit my then boyfriend and now husband. My boyfriend/husband-to-be had got a job in an IT company and had moved to Slovenia. We didn't believe in marriage so getting married was not very high on our list. In the beginning, he would come to Serbia so we could see each other but when he used all of his vacation days, I had to go to Slovenia. For each trip, I had to obtain a visa, which cost 35 Euros in the Slovenian Consulate in Belgrade and in order to get it I needed to have a pile of additional documentation: a letter of guarantee from the firm of my boyfriend/husband-to-be, his pay checks, commercial health insurance (the Agreement on social insurance between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Serbia wasn't signed back then), a document from my faculty certifying my student status. One could usually get a visa for a period of 15 days but at times I managed to get a three months multiple entry exit visa.

Trunk roads can make you think of marriage

Even the bus trips weren't easy or cheap. Due to the Croatian visa regime, we travelled through Hungary, via trunk road, through woods and decrepit villages, a road right next to the Croatian border, still Croatia was far out of our limits. The Croatian visa was expensive (60 Euros), it could only be used for a single entry and was even harder to obtain due to the strained relations between Serbia and Croatia. So as not to stay completely isolated, Hungary lifted the visa regime and thus the only and the shortest

way from Serbia to Slovenia was through Hungary. Halfway, in the middle of nowhere in Hungary, passengers had to transfer from the Serbian into the Slovenian bus. Serbian buses couldn't get into Slovenia due to high taxes and insurance rates and then Serbia introduced taxes on Slovenian buses as an inevitable reciprocal action. The trip lasted for 16 or more hours, while constantly worrying whether you forgot something on the other bus. And after one such trip which lasted for more than 24 hours and after a three months visa being declined, we realised it was high time we started believing in the institution of marriage. Moreover, my boyfriend and future husband had been outsourced to a firm in Graz therefore seeing each other became even more complicated: I couldn't get into Austria with a Slovenian visa (back then Slovenia wasn't neither in the EU neither in Schengen zone), and as a member of the most unreliable category - a student with no means of subsistence, I wasn't the best candidate for a Schengen visa.

Marrying to reunify

We got married impromptu, without pomp or celebration. My boyfriend came from Graz in the morning and at noon we were already married. Right after the wedding, we started gathering all the necessary papers. First, my passport and ID card needed to be replaced because I had added my husband's surname to my own. Adding my husband's surname wasn't necessary but we applied some strategic thinking: assuming that different surnames would provide us with a constant need to carry around a marriage certificate, we chose to have that one common surname which would in itself be a proof of our marital status. In many later cases we were proven right: it was often enough for a clerk to see the same surname and we weren't asked for additional proof.

According to the Family Reunification Policy, I had a right to temporary residence in Slovenia but only when my husband got the temporary residence permit for a one year period of validity. At the time, a foreign worker in Slovenia got his first permit for a three months period of validity, second for six months and only the third would be for one year period of validity.

Besides this condition, I needed all the usual certificates and documents to obtain my new status: international marriage certificate, birth certificate, marriage certificate, citizenship certificate, a basic health insurance policy... and the inevitable proof of means of subsistence: my husband's employment certificate, his income certificate and his written statement confirming that he wanted and accepted to support his new wife. It wasn't hard to gather all the documents and, paying the customary taxes, I had all of them ready in about a week.

Final obstacle: finding an apartment

A problem occurred with the proof of residency. My husband had up to that time lived in a flat his company had been renting for foreign workers from the south, mostly from Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, etc. Those were three or four bedroom flats where multiple workers lived, each of them having a “bachelor room”. The firm made sure the landlords registered the occupants and had proper contracts with them. And even though many married couples kept on living in these communes of sorts, we didn't want roommates. However, while some landlords didn't want to sign a contract with us and have us registered, reasons for that being a complicated registration procedure, higher taxes and even an open reluctance to accept foreigners into their flat, others wanted impossible guarantees and enormous deposits. In the end, we managed to find landlords willing to register us and an excellent flat under acceptable conditions and this is a flat where we still live in.

When we finally obtained all the necessary documents and their Slovenian translations, we submitted them to the Slovenian Embassy Consulate in Belgrade. And then the waiting period began. Despite all the promises and optimistic prognoses from the Consulate, the residence permit wasn't coming. I waited with my suitcases packed for three whole months for the holidays and summer vacations to end so I could finally immigrate to Slovenia.

After the immigration, I had to get my Taxpayer Identification Number, Unique Master Citizen Number and health insurance which I got through my husband's health insurance. Being so experienced with clerks and paperwork, I got them all with no bigger problems.

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