



A Migrant's diary: not good enough for a tourist, good enough for a spouse

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Abstract:

Nowadays a lot of people are leaving their home countries with decisions to find their happiness in some other European state or even farther out in the world. Most of them decide to do such a thing in order to get a job they could not have at home. My reason for coming to Slovenia was not connected with a job search, as a matter of a fact, in my home country I had everything I needed: a university degree, a job in my profession, loving family and good friends. I came to Slovenia to join with my life partner.

I do recall that as a high school student I had dreamed about living in one of English speaking countries. However, as a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country demoted by war, I as the rest of my compatriots had very limited possibilities of movement, because of visas and lack of financial resources. Therefore I quickly gave up on my desire. My destiny though, had a surprise for me. It so happened that I moved to Slovenia at the end of my twenties and started my life from a scratch.

Engagement and disappointment at the embassy

It all began in 2008 when I met a man who would soon become my husband. It was in my hometown of Bihać, he was my friend's cousin, Bosnian in origin but Slovenian by citizenship. We engaged and decided to get married in September 2009. Then our dealings with administration began, I got to know first hand the procedure of marriage with me as *a foreign citizen* in that equation.

My first step was to go to the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Sarajevo and submit an application for a visa. Let me hereby describe that my hometown Bihać lays on the far west of Bosnia and is physically closer to the Slovenian capital Ljubljana than it is to the Bosnian capital. Taking a six hours drive to Sarajevo, my intention was to ask for a three month tourist visa so I could go and spend a summer there. I didn't plan to talk much about my fiancé, but decided to act

as a curious Slovenia loving tourist. The silent part of the plan was to get married in Slovenia at the end of that summer. We had it all planned out, but our plans came to nothing because I did not get a visa.

I remember my fear and discomfort when I went to the Slovenian Embassy. I remember the long lines of people in front of the building with a Slovenian flag on and the procedure that I had to go through, long hours of waiting and an interview with the cold faced officer. I felt so small and insignificant while this young but very strict gentleman questioned me why am I going to Ljubljana, who will I visit, how I met a person I am planning to visit, where else have I previously travelled, for how long am I planning to stay and a million of other questions I did not have a good prepared answer to.

I felt like I was on a cross-examination, or like sitting on a defendant's chair, not really charged, but somehow guilty for being Bosnian. Like the rest of my countrymen during the war and many years after it, we lived in a kind of a »ghetto«. We couldn't go anywhere without visa and even when one did get a visa, they were giving it out with a heavy heart. It seemed that we were all under suspicion that if left out of our ghetto, we will never return, but rather remain an eternal burden for their country's budget. The fact that I was a teacher with a permanent employment in my country did not help at all. Summer holidays in Slovenia proved to be an impossible mission. I felt miserable and humiliated. I asked myself why do I need this for. I was disappointed and strongly discouraged.

Marrying earlier than planned

Although embassies are not required to explain why they denied visa to somebody, they sent me a written explanation in which they wrote that my visa was rejected because I did not state the real reasons for my trip to Ljubljana. And this was actually true so I stopped blaming the officer at the embassy for my poor tourist fortunes. I did not state the real reasons: a visit to my fiancé, because I thought that they will not give me a visa. Ironically, that was exactly what I was supposed to say.

Since I was not able to go anywhere farther than Croatia without visa, my fiancé was visiting me in Bihać. After my fiasco at the embassy, he called them, explained our situation and asked straight forward which documents do I need to provide in order to qualify for a visa. The answer was: a marriage certificate and a new passport with a new surname.

And so it happened. We got married three months earlier than we planned and we married in Bosnia instead of Slovenia where most of my husband's family lives. I got a new passport with a new surname and arranged a term for another visa submission in the Slovenian Embassy.

Happy reunification

This time I did not apply for a tourist visa but a family reunification one. I had to go to Slovenian Embassy one more time. Another six hours on the bus, another long line in front of the Embassy and one more interview with an officer. The interview and the whole paper work were much faster this time. They did not ask much. Our marriage certificate, the fact that my husband was a Slovenian citizen and that I applied for a family reunification visa, were sufficient. It all went so smoothly that I almost could not believe it. The day when my brother called and said that a postman just brought home my approved family reunification visa, I was the happiest person in the world. My husband could have been the second. He came to Bosnia right away, picked me up and in few hours we were in Ljubljana.

After our successful reunification, my integration started, but that is a story on itself. Looking back at all of it, I can say that I have left all I had in my home country and started my life all over again. It was so brave of me, a little bit silly at times, but still brave. I don't regret it because as the saying goes: »Home is where the heart is« and my heart is here in Ljubljana with my husband and our daughter. Now, four years later, I am also a Slovenian citizen and by the birth of my daughter Slovenia has become my second homeland.

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