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EU-EaP Visa Liberalisation
Summary of recent developments
May-July 2014

SUMMARY

The Eastern Partnership Visa Liberalisation Index has been updated to cover the period from May-July 2014. The most recent developments can be found below, while detailed information is available on the project's website: http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu. To learn more about the principles of visa liberalisation and facilitation click here. To read about the methodology of our research click here.

It could be said that 2014 is probably the worst year to talk about visa liberalisation with the EU's Eastern neighbours – the revolution in Kiev, the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, war in Eastern Ukraine, growing tensions between Armenia in Azerbaijan in connection with Nagorno Karabakh and sanctions between Moscow and Brussels have dominated public discourse in recent months. But others would disagree: there is no better way of showing how much we care about the faith of our neighbours than to invite them to visit us in the European Union without needing a visa. The EU granted a visa-free regime to Moldova on 28 April 2014, but – despite the appeals of civil society organizations – did not decide to express its support for post-revolutionary Ukraine and waive its visa obligation. Currently it seems that Ukraine and Georgia are at a similar point of visa liberalisation and that the introduction of a visa-free regime is likely in 2015, and only if the pace of the reforms remains the same.

Armenia, which recently took a pro-Russian path and is currently undergoing a period of political transition due to the resignation of the government, expects to launch visa dialogue with the EU after the positive evaluation of the implementation of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements (VF&RA), in the near future. In the period analysed, Yerevan has focused on improving its anti-corruption policies.

Azerbaijan has continued to suppress democratic opposition and civil society and held several trials against top activists. On the other hand, Baku has been consistently working towards visa facilitation and liberalisation with the EU - the VF&RA are going to enter into force in September 2014. Furthermore, border and migration management systems are being modernized to meet international standards.

Belarus, the *enfant terrible* of the Eastern Partnership, has negotiated the VF&RA with the EU. Negotiations were not suspended after the Ice Hockey World Championships, despite international concerns. Over 29,000 foreign tourists used the opportunity to visit Belarus without a visa, based of holding a ticket for a hockey game. It is believed that this partially visa-free regime during the Championships ran smoothly.

Georgia has worked intensively on implementing the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) and on carrying out reforms regarding asylum and migration and the tightening of personal data protection. Tbilisi expects the VLAP to be completed in 2015.

Even though it joined the group of countries whose citizens do not need a visa to enter the Schengen area at the end of April, Moldova continued to implement reforms aimed at bringing it closer to the European Union. During the first 2.5 months of the visa-free regime, over 110,000 Moldovans travelled to the EU. Moldova, together with Georgia and Ukraine, has signed an Association Agreement with the EU.

Ukraine, overwhelmed by the war in its Eastern regions, has been active in implementing many VLAP benchmarks. It strengthened its anti-corruption and anti-discrimination policies and established conditions for issuing biometric documents, which are required for the introduction of a visa-free regime.

List of recent developments by country:

ARMENIA
Block 3:
- A working meeting aimed at discussing the Concept on Fighting Corruption in the System of Public Administration was held (29 April 2014).

Block 4:
- A delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) made an *ad hoc* visit to Armenia (20-23 May 2014).

AZERBAIJAN
Block 2
- The Head of the Azerbaijani State Border Service met the Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs (May 2014).
- A three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) course on International Migration Law (IML) was organized by the IOM Mission in Azerbaijan (13-15 May 2014).
- A training course was organized for the employees of the Baku city Detention Centre for Illegal Migrants and Asylum Seekers by a Representative of UNHCR in Azerbaijan (17-18 April 2014).

BELARUS
Block 2
- A temporary visa-free regime was introduced for the duration of the Ice Hockey World Championships (May 2014).
- Officers in the citizenship and migration departments of the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior were stationed at the Belarusian border checkpoints for the duration of the Ice Hockey World Championships (May 2014).
- Readmission agreement with Turkey came into force (June 2014).

Block 3:
- The CoE Convention on action against the trafficking of human beings came into force (March 2014).

GEORGIA
Block 2
- The SAID system for migration management is now being tested and improved. Its launch is planned for 1 September 2014.
- Amendments were made to the law "On the rules for issuing registration, personal identification cards and residents permits for foreigners living in Georgia and passports for Georgian citizens" (29 May 2014).
- Implementation of the protocols for the EU-Georgia Readmission Agreement. Signed with: Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg; negotiated with: Slovakia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and Portugal. Negotiations initiated with Cyprus, France, German, Greece Italy, Spain, Sweden and Denmark.
- The President issued a decree "On the rules regulating the granting of asylum to foreigners in Georgia" (10 June 2014).

Block 3:
- The Personal Data Protection Inspector prepared a package of amendments to the law "On Personal Data Protection".

MOLDOVA
Block 1:
- From 1 August 2014, Moldovan authorities will start to issue a new type of biometric passport with an integrated chip.
- Employees of "Registru" (a company that issues passports and other breeding documents) participated in a training course about the implementation of the international standard ISO 9001:2008 (May 2014).

Block 2
- The Border Police adopted a Strategic Development Program for 2014-2016.
- Within the Strategic Development Program of the Border Police, in 2014 additional infrastructure elements such as facial recognition, mobile patrolling and others will be developed.
- One round of negotiations was held about the Readmission Agreement projects between Moldova and the Russian Federation and Moldova and Armenia (June 2014).
- The Bureau for Migration and Asylum published the first report for 2013 about the Extended Migration Profile.
- In the period from January to June 2014, 369 people had refugee status, while a decision from the authorities was pending for 79 people.

- The EU funds will be put towards consolidating the asylum area and improving the mechanisms of integration and therefore a better infrastructure.

Block 3:
- A draft law aimed at improving the legislation to combat money laundering and terrorism was submitted to the government by the Ministry of Justice and the National Anticorruption Centre (July 2014).
- In order to prevent human trafficking, the EUBAM office in Moldova held a training course for the Border Police in 2014.
- An advocacy campaign "EU (me) – education through integrity" was launched by the National Anticorruption Centre in partnership with the main universities in Moldova in 2014.
- A cooperation agreement was signed between Eurojust and the Republic of Moldova (10 July 2014).

Block 4:
- A LGBT parade was held in the capital of Moldova for only the second time ever (17 May 2014).

UKRAINE
Block 1:
- A proposal to amend the USRD law, making fingerprints an obligatory biometric feature, was adopted by the parliament in the first reading (19 June 2014).
- The Cabinet of Ministers approved resolutions regulating the issue of travel documents (7 May 2014).

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Block 2
- Resolution № 121 "On the approval of medical assistance for foreigners, stateless persons temporarily residing in the territory of Ukraine and individuals who are recognized as refugees or people in need of complementary protection" was adopted (19 March 2014).
- The amendments to the asylum law required by the EC related to complementary and temporary protection were adopted by the Ukrainian parliament (13 May 2014)
- Due to the Russian occupation of Crimea and the anti-terrorist operation in the Donbas region in 2014, a number of legal acts were adopted to regulate the situation of IDPs.

Block 3:
- The law "On amendments to some legislative acts regarding the recommendations of the European Commission concerning the state anti-corruption policies" adopted (15 May 2014).

- The law "On amendments to article 39 of the Law of Ukraine "On State Procurement" was adopted (6 May 2014).

- The law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine regarding activities by the Ukrainian Parliament's Commissioner for Human Rights in Personal Data Protection" (№ 4551) was adopted (13 May 2014).

Block 4:
- The Superior Specialist Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases issued an interpretation confirming that sexual orientation is implicitly considered to be prohibited grounds for discrimination in the existing legislation (7 May 2014).

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