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**VISA LIBERALIZATION FOR GEORGIA – A WAY TO  
FURTHER EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?**

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since obtaining independence and separating from the former Soviet Union in 1991, the political course of Georgia has been aiming at integration with the the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Sustaining some internal pressure from a certain range of political parties, the Georgian government, whichever post-Soviet period is taken into analysis, have been continuously seeing the country's future to be associated in cooperation with the EU and NATO.

Visa liberalization, which was granted to Georgia by the EU at the beginning of 2017, broadened the integrative framework for the two sides. Keeping this development as a context for further analysis, this research dwells on liberal intergovernmentalism, whereas a case study research method has been used to analyze this evolution in relationships from the perspective of Georgia. More specifically, the inevitability for the country to manage the process in a meticulous has been emphasized. Considering the context, this research work argues that the proper institutional and operational management of the visa liberalization-related process by the Georgian government is a key element in ensuring the country's credibility as an Association Agreement party, and this factor is affecting the whole integrative framework of the EU-Georgia cooperation.

**Keywords:** the European Union, Georgia, visa liberalization, EU integration, liberal intergovernmentalism.

## INTRODUCTION

On 28 March 2017, Georgian citizens became eligible for visa-free travel to the European Union (EU). In other words, Georgia was granted visa liberalization by the EU, lifting visa restrictions for Georgians, allowing them to travel to most of the EU Member States for short periods. European Council President Donald Tusk admitted: “It is a very special day for both the EU and Georgia. [...] It has been a long journey, but one that has brought us closer together” (Jozwiak 2017). Indeed, the newly obtained freedom back then had united the whole Georgia, publicly celebrating the country’s latest historic achievement. The second half of the Tusk’s quote is also evidently objective – it was a long ‘journey’ for Georgia, and the country’s aspiration and attempts to approach Europe have significantly bigger history. For example, back in the XVIII century, ambassador Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani was sent by the order of the King of Kartli, Vakhtang the Scholar, to reach the European west. The ambassador travelled to many countries (for example, France and different Italian duchies and republics), seeking help for the then Kingdom of Kartli against Asian conquerors. Sulkhan-Saba visited Louis XIV of France in Paris, Pope Clement XI in Italy. They had acknowledged, that he was the father of the whole Georgia, so accepted him as an honoured guest. It is known that the diplomat had multiple audiences with the French King. With his solidity and eloquence, which spoke about his high-class skill in diplomacy, the Georgian ambassador impressed French nobility, but Louis the Great died soon, the leading circles of France changed, and the relations with Near East exacerbated. Specific historical conditions made the journey of Sulkhan-Saba unsuccessful, his efforts to fraternize Georgia with major European powers turned out to be groundless (Gogoladze 2014).

In 1991, when Georgia gained (some would use the verb ‘regained’) its independence after being part of the Soviet Union for 70 years, the new stage in regards of the country’s European integration began. To date, the nation remembers “I am Georgian, and therefore I am European!”,– these words were said by Zurab Zhvania in 1999 when the then country’s Prime Minister was making his speech before the UN General Assembly. From then on, Georgia has arguably made significant achievements in the framework of integrating its practices with the EU. On 27 June 2014, the agreement between European Atom Community and EU, as well as association with Georgia was signed, which includes Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade component (DC FTA).

Apart from the concept of enlargement, an Association Agreement is the main instrument that can get the EU and a country in question to become more integrated. After signing the Agreement, the

relationship between Georgia and the EU has entered a new level. In accordance with the process, Georgia was given a masterplan, which Georgia has begun to fulfil immediately. Changes and planned steps have done a new successful result – on 28 March 2017, Georgia was granted visa liberalization – an opportunity for Georgia to approach Europe, giving youth better perspectives to study and work in the EU and they will have an opportunity to use this knowledge and experience for the benefit of their homeland. It is noteworthy, that one of the first countries to congratulate Georgia on this geo-strategic advancement was Estonia, and Paul Teesalu (2017), the Estonian MFA's Undersecretary in Political Affairs noted that “Georgia expressed its firm commitment to EU integration”.

Regarding this development, a research was conducted to answer a set of questions about prospective benefits that visa liberalization could bring to Georgia, as well as possible risks Georgian government needed to avoid as much as possible (Kalandadze 2017). The analysis and discussion were based on examining the corresponding literature including acts of law and expert opinions. The research also included the method of interview, using simple inquiry, asking the group of respondents (which consisted of Georgian residents, immigrant, and students from both Georgian and foreign universities) 3 positive and three risk factors visa liberalization would bring to Georgia. The research has successfully answered the research questions, pointing out on a range of the process-associated threats and gains.

Two years have passed since then, but ‘visa liberalization’ is still a ‘buzz expression’ for Georgians. This period has outlined a number of challenges that the country is still facing in the context of maintaining the process, making it serious to discuss even a possible revocation of the historic agreement. However, the proper institutional and operational management of the visa liberalization-related process by the Georgian government is a key element in ensuring the country’s credibility as an Association Agreement party, and this factor is affecting the whole integrative framework of the EU-Georgia cooperation, bringing significant benefits for the citizens of Georgia. What are these benefits on the second anniversary since obtaining visa liberalization and what are the most clear-cut risk factors, correct management of which is essential for the Georgian government to advance the relationship with EU? Therefore, this research is coming back to the same topic and with an academically justified desire to conduct a more comprehensive investigation. To achieve this, a liberal intergovernmentalism-bound theoretical framework to be worked out and used to scrutinize the chosen policy, utilizing a case study research method. As argued, case study assists in turning opinions into facts (Gaille 2018). This paper digests the retrospective selection of pivotal findings, decisions and events during the past two years to

evaluate the path undergone by Georgia since obtaining visa liberalization, as well as its future from a European integration point of view. This part is preceded by the theoretical synopsis of the EU integration, including the underlying background of the organization and the route passed by Georgia to visa liberalization. In the end, a discussion is presented to cognize the essence of the correct management of the processes, based on the prior parts, finishing with declaring the main revelations of the research work.

# **1. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: A POLICY-MAKING PERSPECTIVE**

## **1.1. The EU and its theoretical fundamentals**

The idea on a more integrated European continent was first mentioned after the Second World War by the then former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who spoke about the necessity of establishing the United States of Europe, during his speech in Zurich in 1946, although any substantial development did not follow the idea at that time (Gabel 1998). Then, via monumental Schuman-Monnet initiative, the European Coal and Steel Community was established in 1951, making Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, France, Italy and the Netherlands engaged. In 1953, a common market for steel, coal, ores and scrap metal had been created. In two years, the foreign ministers of the six countries met in Messina, Italy and agreed to continue the integration process (known as Messina Initiative). An intergovernmental committee was created, which prepared the basis for the 'Treaty of Rome', which resulted in the European Economic Community (Allen 2017). An important aspect of the Treaty of Rome was an agreement to create a common market, which would later be followed by the establishment of a customs union. The common market took into account abolishing border barriers between the Member States and free movement of goods, service, capital and people. The Treaty of Rome has also played a major role in setting up agricultural and foreign trade policies. The European Atomic Energy Community also known as 'Euratom' was founded with another treaty, and it aimed to create a common market of nuclear energy in Europe. In particular, development of the nuclear energy industry, sharing energy among the Member States and trading the remaining resource to other countries (Allen 2017). In 1967, the 'Brussels Treaty' merged the executive bodies of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the European Economic Community (EEC) into a single institutional structure, named 'European Communities', and with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 the EU has been founded (Martin 2017). Nowadays, the unique political and economic unification of 28 democratic countries, the EU, ensures peace, well-being and liberty of its 508 million citizens (Wilkinson 2017).

The creation of the EU is mostly based on practically implementing concepts, like institutional liberalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and globalization theories. For example, institutional



liberalism is based on liberal worldviews, according to which conflicts and wars are not immutable. Despite the fact, that institutional liberals agree with the basic statutes of realism about the states being the main actors in the international system and they are rational egoists, they do also believe, unlike the realists, that there is enough space for cooperation and that the institutions and organizations support the mutual effort (Keohane 1989, 2). Institutional liberals believe that institutions and organizations reduce the destructive influence of anarchy in terms of publishing information between the member states, which provides less agitation about the unexpectedness of others' actions. Institutions also create negotiation forums for the states, increasing the possibility for them to monitor the quality and level of how others accomplish their obligations.

Institutional liberals note that institutions deliver standards and rules, around which the interests of the actors coincide. The rules help the states overcome the problems of treason and lack of information. They help the states compromise short-term loss in exchange for long-term gain. Briefly, institutions can form cooperation. Institutional liberals argue that international institutions, including the military alliances, ease the states to benefit from the common advantages gained from the cooperation, they reduce the expenses of the negotiations, provide transparency, which is used to reduce the mistrust to states, and this helps to compile mutually beneficial treaties.

The central argument for institutionalists is, that after their establishment institutions are characterized by preserving the viability, as it is much easier to modify an institution than to create a new one (Keohane 1984). So, when the institutions stand against new problems, which have not been foreplanned when setting up the organization, the states strive to customize them according to the new challenges. Such institutions are international organizations like the UN, OSCE, NATO and indeed the EU. Accurately these organizations represent the behaviour of particular states in various fields, like jurisprudence, ecology, aviation, education etc.

Another theoretical foundation for the creation of the EU is the theory of 'liberal intergovernmentalism' (LI), which is a little bit modern and was proposed in 1993 by Andrew Moravcsik. In short, he argues in his book (Moravcsik 1998, 4) that "a tripartite explanation of integration – economic interest, relative power, [and] credible commitments – accounts for the form, substance, and timing of major steps towards European integration". What is more, LI implies international cooperation to be exclusively for the national leaders (Hooghe and Marks 2019, 4), which underlines the important role of the national government's decision-making in aforesaid major steps of European integration process.

In the end, when speaking about the creation of the EU and looking at the theoretical foundations of euro-integration from modern tendencies point of view, globalization theories cannot be avoided, as in terms of globalization, political, economic, cultural and social events in the world are a lot more interrelated and gain significance not only for specific country but also for others too and often for the whole world, what provides demand for new cooperation possibilities.

## **1.2. The EU enlargement – perspectives for Georgia**

In 2004, the 5<sup>th</sup> enlargement of the EU created a new geo-strategic reality. A significant segment of the so-called former Communist bloc, together with some other nations, turned out to be much closer to the EU geographically. Correspondingly, their impact on EU security and stability has also increased. With the adoption of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the EU presented more deliberate and effective views and instruments. Primary mechanisms of this policy, like action plan and progression reports, are directly derivated from the instruments established in the Enlargement Policy, and this made the ENP resembling the process of expanding and enlarging. As argued, Europeanization of the neighbouring countries has developed into being the aim of the policy – transformation, in a way, that their legal and institutional environment become suitable to the EU (Dolidze 2017, 9).

The unification of Germany could be counted as the roots for the wave of the EU's large (5th) expansion. Merging East- with West Germany and integrating the territory in the EU consolidated already existing opinions, that the whole Central and East Europe could also possibly become integrated into the union. Politic and expert circles discussed that the Enlargement of the EU would speed up the ongoing reforms in East Europe (Dolidze 2017, 37). Questions were asked if German Democratic Republic could join the EU, why could not Czechoslovakia do the same? In summer and autumn 1990 the involvement of the European Commission in the unification of the two countries resulted in the decision to expand to East Europe, which was adopted after several reports of the Commission shifted into an idea to associate with East Europe. This idea did not include the membership perspective at that time. Meanwhile, the EU had intense debates, whether it should expand or not. The discussion was mainly about the dilemma of deeper integration. The governments and their leaders from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland conducted intense campaigns to convince the Member States to acknowledge their membership perspectives, expressing their desire to join the EU by 2000s. The three abovementioned states from Central Europe established the Visegrad Group – V3 at the beginning of 1991, the aim of which was to

intercoordinate the cooperation about their membership in the EU. In 1992, the members of V4 (due to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993) signed The Central European Free Trade Agreement, in other words – established CEFTA (Dolidze 2017, 38). This decision was correct indeed, as it supported the rise of credibility towards these countries, and probably determined the outcome of the debate about the EU membership of the Visegrad group countries. The discussions resulted in shaping the idea of so-called ‘concentric circles’, according to which distinctive layers of integration should be created and the membership affairs of different countries should be held on different speeds (Moussis 2016). Besides the V4, Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic States and Slovenia have unofficially expressed their desire to join the Union. The negotiations about the Association Agreement with Bulgaria and Romania were decided at the end of 1991. The Association Agreement might not be signed with them for a longer time, as the European Commission and range of countries revealed their dissatisfaction about human rights and lack in the supremacy of law. The failed 1991 August coup in Russia (formally still within the Soviet Union) speeded up the developments. Security and geopolitical priorities became more important for the Member States than everything else. The Association Agreement with Bulgaria and Romania has happened one year later than the V4, and it is noteworthy, that authorization of their European perspective advanced the elaboration of Accession Criteria, better known as ‘Copenhagen Criteria’ (Dolidze 2017, 40). 21-22 June 1993, the rules about the membership eligibility of the new countries were ratified at the European Council in the capital of Denmark. It was one of the most preeminent events in the integration history of Europe. The conditions were divided into three directions and included: a) Political criteria – stable institutions, which represent a guarantee for democracy, law supremacy, human rights and respect for the minorities’; b) Economic criteria – active market economy and an ability to be involved in the EU policies; c) Institutional conditions – the ability to effectively work out the membership obligations, be loyal to the Union and its goals (Sawe 2017). These criteria did not only precise but also complicate the membership conditions for future candidate countries.

To overview the membership perspectives of Georgia, the example of Balkan countries could be useful, as their political situation and ethnopolitical conflicts before meeting the criteria are similar to Georgia. Currently, two states from the region – Slovenia and Croatia are the Member States. While Slovenia joined the EU with its largest expansion of 2004, Croatia became the latest state to join the EU in 2013 and had a much harder path than the other ones, having survived the disastrous disintegration of the former Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s, just like Georgia in regards of the former USSR. Also likewise, the country had to fight wars. In 2003, Britain and

the Netherlands refused to ratify the associate EU membership deal, because of insufficient cooperation with the tribunal, as during the prior years, they refused to hand over their former army chiefs to the UN, which were accused of war crimes. Although Croatia had formally applied for the membership, the negotiations progressed very slowly during the next five years. By the end of 2008, Croatia had closed only seven of the 33 negotiating chapters of the EU legislation, while also having an unresolved border issue. But just three years from that on, and in 2011 the European Commission said, Croatia met all criteria, including the judiciary and competition policy chapters. Since, then it was a formality, before voting a referendum and joining the Union in 2013 (Cutler 2013). What concerns other Balkan countries, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia are candidate countries and although the talks of their accession have been popular from time to time, because of strong pro-Russian attitudes, problems with corruption, organized crime, inner- and inter- disputes, ethnic quarrels and slow polit-economic progress, enlargement in this direction cannot be seen in the nearest future.

It is also noteworthy that during 2009-2012 all West Balkan countries except Kosovo were granted visa liberalization to the Schengen Area. The EU institutions act with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with the same logic. The process of Georgia approach to the EU is similar to abovementioned countries with the path undergone, reforms done and transformation dynamics.

### **1.3. The road undergone by Georgia – approaching the EU**

The EU-Georgian relations have begun since 1992. Georgia was entering a deep crisis at that time and had to advance against the collapsed economic connections of the Soviet Union, against the internal conflicts, political instability, social poverty and many more negative developments. GDP of Georgia had reduced by 76.4% just in few years since declaring independence in 1989 (Fischer, Sahay, Vegh 1996). Despite this, the EU started helping Georgia selflessly. The EU supportive programs and projects played a huge role in forming Georgia as a modern country, developing market economy and settling democratic principles. From 1999 to 2004, there were three main directions of the EU aid – humanitarian, financial and technical. In this period, the EU has spent more than one billion euros for Georgia (Dolidze 2017, 7). Since 2004 the economic and social condition in the country has markedly been stabilized, and the humanitarian aid, which helped vulnerable groups with nutrition products, curative supplies and other necessary things had already completed its mission. Besides solving the social and economic problems, no lesser was the political support from the EU in terms of defending the sovereignty and independence of Georgia,

as well as integrating them in international friendship. The position of the EU on OSCE summits in Budapest (1994) and Lisbon (1996) could be considered as such support, where the ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were documentally acknowledged (Dolidze 2017, 8). Political and technical support has also helped Georgia to join the Council of Europe in 1999 and the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Visa permission to the Schengen area, which was granted to Georgia 2 years ago in March 2017, was another significant step towards membership. As mentioned earlier in the text, one of the three major motives towards European integration is “credible commitment[s]”, which highlights the claim of the research, and visa liberalization should be the corresponding instrument for it. European integration is conceived as a “series of rational choices made by national leaders” (Moravcsik 1998, 18), and as this research work argues, this means managing the process in a decent and correct way for the government of Georgia to achieve the final aim. To confirm these claims, the following research questions have to be answered:

- What are the benefits on the second anniversary since obtaining visa liberalization?
- What are the most clear-cut risk factors, correct management of which is essential for the Georgian government to advance the relationship with EU?

## **2. RESULTS OF VISA LIBERALIZATION FOR GEORGIA– IN MONTHS AND NUMBERS**

This part will cover retrospective analysis of visa liberalization in Georgia since the beginning until the present time following the timeline of significant developments and challenges. The retrospective analysis aims to find the main trends so that future view is worked out and developed based on them.

### **2.1. Three months results – first steps – first problems**

Experts stated, that the first three months of visa liberalization turned out to be emotionally loaded, what was both successful as well as stressful. To underline the historical significance of visa liberalization and the aspiration of Georgia towards EU integration for Georgian citizens, the first time since obtaining the permission, on 28.03.2017, official Georgian delegation, led by prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili set out with Georgian students and journalists with the very first flight (Jozwiak 2017). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia stated that the delegation would visit Athens as the cradle of European civilization, where they would take part in the conference ‘Georgia from Europe to Europe’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017). The article also underlined the fact, that it was a historic visit indeed when a citizen of Georgia travels to the EU/Schengen area with a Georgian passport, but without any visa or restriction. The report also stated that visa-free travel offers Georgian citizens a broad spectrum of possibilities. Students can freely get in touch with European friends and colleagues. Businesspeople will be able to search for partners throughout the 500 million European market. Also, it is a possibility for the representatives of the cultural field, who will potential to take part in European programs, have reached to European foundations and cooperate with European partners for different projects, what will help them express their talent.

Initial steps could be called successful, because many Georgian citizens used the new possibilities connected to visa liberalization, which means travelling to European countries without any barriers – for touristic aims, for deepening business connections, to bolster student exchange programs, etc. So, if we review touristic point of view, according to Georgian National Tourism Administration data, specifically between March and May saw a sharp increase of passengers on

boards to European destinations. In more details, the number of Georgian passengers to Southern Europe increased by 20%, passengers to Western Europe – 30%, to Northern Europe – 40% compared to the previous year (see *Appendix 1*). The second largest airport of Georgia – David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport, which offers more low-budget flights saw 172% increase of Georgian passengers to Europe in April 2017 and this number was more prominent than all other passengers from all nationalities and to all destinations (except Europe) combined (Bakhtashvili 2017). The increased flow of Georgian tourists to Europe, since the initial stage of visa liberalization, could be underlined with another proof. As visa liberalization came to operation, the demand for touristic packages has increased. Since then, the price of such packages has increased by 15-20%. The reason for this is a high price for flight tickets. It is true that the value for hotels and other services remained unchanged, but a sharp leap of flight tickets has raised the overall price of the package. Despite this fact, interest has never slowed down (Djincharadze 2017). According to IPM research, the demand for European destinations has increased by 30-40%. The highest demand was reached by Cyprus, where the flights are accomplished from Kutaisi Airport. The research states that 'Wizz-Air' entering the market and offering concessionary flight alternatives has resulted very effectively.

Another exciting and worthwhile data, which confirms the development of tourism from Georgia to Europe and has been cut out from the first months of visa liberalization is the statistics describing the amount of money Georgians spend in Europe since visa liberalization. Per National Bank data, transactions of 112 million Georgian Lari (~37 million EUR with 20.03.2019 exchange rate) was completed with the debit cards issued in Georgia. This indicator was recorded highest and was 30% bigger than a year earlier (Djincharadze 2017). In particular, April 2017 saw 95,864 million, May – 103,073 million and June – 112,67 million Georgian Lari being spent by Georgian issued card in Europe. Together during these three months, in other words, since citizens of Georgia started benefiting with visa liberalization, 311,607 million GEL has been spent abroad, and 55 thousand Georgians have used visa liberalization. It comes out that an average Georgian spends 5,665 GEL since obtaining the visa-free travel permission (Djincharadze 2017). It is also noteworthy that the money spent by foreign visitors to Georgia in June 2017 compiled 165 million GEL (Bakhtashvili 2017).

What concerns the problems, as probably it was expected, these first three months were hard, too. Reason for this was that those citizens of Georgia, who were willing to use visa-free travel to stay in Europe illegally tried to use the possibility on the first chance. It is true, that three months

statistics would not be able to show the reality, but was enough indication for the Georgian government to identify possible threats and analyze them to avoid further complications. More specifically, first three months of visa liberalization saw 55.000 citizens of Georgia using newly acquired permission ('55,000 Georgians use Georgia-EU visa-free benefit' 2017). Unfortunately, 3.000 of them did not return to Georgia. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia – Shalva Khutsishvili admitted that the act should not be labelled as breaking the 90-days visa-free regime. Those citizens of Georgia could have moved to other countries, where Georgians do not need a visa either. In the interview with 'Georgia Online,' the Deputy Minister said, that they could have gone to Belarus, Turkey or Ukraine, which would not mean violating the visa-free regime with the EU. Although, the group of 3.000 was still put in the potential risk pool and were being monitored, which region they were from, who they were, what contacts they had, what might be their interest field, etc. It is worthwhile noting that, according to Shalva Khutsishvili, this data does not include those, who have used overland borders (112.International 2017). He presented an example, that if someone arrives in Belarus, stays there for a week and then comes in Lithuania, such people would not be included in the data. However, it should be noticed, that generally during the first three months, Georgia avoided having significant risks, as the mass of people who left the country have mostly returned as well, by that moment.

## **2.2. Six months results – first positive evaluation**

Georgia received first positive feedback and recommendations about visa liberalization already on six months anniversary. EU ambassador to Georgia – Janos Herman held a press conference, where he presented the results of the first six months of visa liberalization (Mikadze 2017). The ambassador admitted:

We can conclude that the visa-free regime is a great success. In the first six months of the liberalization close to 90.000 Georgians benefited from the Visa Free movement when travelling to the EU ... Only 230 citizens out of nearly 90.000 mentioned earlier were refused entry.

He thinks that such a low refusal number is a result of Georgian government's effective campaigns to inform citizens about regulations and entry rules. Although asylum applications remained significant for the Georgian population, the increase was not big and keeping the trend is thought to be an essential aspect. Herman has also mentioned cooperating with Georgian government in the process of implementing the visa-free regime trying to minimize misuse of the system.



The EU ambassador has also discussed the decisions about the rules for non-EU residents travelling through Schengen area, which means introducing ETIAS system from 2020 on, increasing security measures of EU via other countries, which will be necessary for everyone willing to travel to EU.

The ambassador has additionally presented vital outcomes from the 2017 EU OPEN opinion inquiry on Georgia and the other five nations of the Eastern Partnership. He admitted that according to the poll results, Georgia showed the highest support of EU, among Eastern Partnership countries and he linked the noticeable developments with the introduction of visa liberalization just six months earlier.

If we get deeper into this survey, we can see the results of the visa liberalization effect, even for as little as just six months. Firstly, the Pro-EU attitude has risen to 59% of Georgians, which is 6% more than in 2016 and is highest among all Eastern Partnership countries. What is more, 83% of Georgians (compared to 75% one year earlier) think, that relationship with the EU is good. It is far ahead than the average of 61% if the region. Another noteworthy part is 66% of Georgians having the trust of the EU. The UN and NATO resulted in 56% and 54% respectively. In addition to this, 58% is aware that Georgia is receiving financial support from the EU and almost 75% of them think, that this support is useful. In 2016 the number was 59% and 53% a year before ('OPEN Neighborhood Annual Survey Report: Georgia' 2017, 5)

The results show, that opening European borders affected Georgian attitude to the EU very positively. Firstly, more people have a positive image of the EU, which is an essential factor and cornerstone to other positive future developments for the country like Georgia, ideology, and route of which was pro-Russian for a very long time, due to very understandable reasons. What is more, Georgia as a traditional country often criticized Europe for liberal views on various issues. So, the development in this direction is, and indeed, the visa-free regime plays its role. Another critical factor is many more Georgians thinking that relations with the EU are excellent in comparison to other countries in the region. Visa liberalization is already part of history books for Georgia, indeed, and people acknowledge it. They see how much easier life is with open borders and how many more opportunities they are offered. And they appreciate it. But the most important part is trusting the EU more than the UN and NATO. The United Nations has a lot of projects in different regions of Georgia, so this intergovernmental organization is quite popular in Georgia, and as an undisputed and independent state Georgia is its member. What concerns NATO, due to geopolitical location and neighbourhood, especially from the northern side, which has currently

occupied 20% of Georgia, cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization has long been a subject of interest to feel safer. So, joining MAP (Membership Action Plan) is one of the top wishes in Georgia. But still, people seem to have more trust towards the EU. Why? Because citizens of Georgia are already feeling their benefits and it affects their personal lives. They know more about the EU than other organizations mentioned above and visa liberalization is the main contributor to this scene.

### **2.3. After one year – time to analyse the problems and deliver findings**

Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia data describes the situation at that moment very well. According to the data, during the one year of visa liberalization, the Schengen Zone was visited 258,663 times by 192,453 Georgian citizens, while only 1001 Georgians were refused to enter the EU territory (Morrison 2018). But not long before, the situation was not desirable. For example, EASO which stands for The European Asylum Support Office reported a 113% increase of monthly applications by Georgian citizens to EU countries. In more details, the number of applications in January 2018 was 1,859 which is more than twice as much than 874, the figure from September 2017, just four months earlier (Morrison 2018).

At the end of 2017, the EU has presented a report about first results since granting Georgia visa liberalization. Though the document states, that overall criterion connected to visa liberalization continue to be accomplished, further improvement is expected. Additionally, the report addresses Georgia to focus on the implementation of the verification mechanism of asset declarations, cooperation with Europol and several other reforms. But what is no less critical, Georgia was criticized for being one of the most frequently involved non-EU nation involved in organized and severe crime (SWD(2017) 480, 11).

As a matter of fact, the first anniversary of visa liberalization shaped not only positive results but also made risks and problems clear. The consequent advancements from Georgian government were imminent to preserve control and avoid these problems in future, as at the end of 2017, the situation took a rather unpleasant direction when the talk about visa liberalization suspension became common. One of the influential Georgian newspapers published an article entitled 'Germany requests suspending visa-free travel for Georgia,' which was written according to WDR, the public broadcaster of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), a state in the western part of Germany. This initiative is connected to this state's Integration Minister – Joachim Stamp. He had even asked

the federal government of Germany to review how rational visa liberalization was for Georgia. The reason for this was both abovementioned problems combined, as WDR reported, that the number of asylum seekers from Georgia had increased with visa-free permission, though the chance for Georgians getting asylum in Germany is meagre (Sarjveladze 2018). NRW government consider Georgians were abusing the visa liberalization system and before their application for asylum is under review, they use this period for criminal acts. The thing is Oerlinghausen asylum houses about 400 men, women and children and although the exact numbers are unavailable, many of them are Georgian. The number of criminal acts has increased with the number of Georgian asylum seekers, so Federal Ministry of the Interior responded Joachim Stamp's letter and confirmed to the media, that ministry was already working on the issue and acknowledged that the increasing number of Georgian asylum seekers was problematic indeed (Wirtz 2018). But it is also a fact, that Germany has always put Georgia in the list of safe countries and the crime by Georgians is not big enough to cause suspension of visa liberalization.

What is more, after this period of Joachim Stamp's activeness and federal government's comment, nothing more exciting has happened. Another interesting fact is, though, Joachim Stamp is a member of FDP – Federal Democratic Party, which is not part of the federal government. So, sanctions of Georgia was requested not by Germany or its government, but by the North Rhine-Westphalia government (Sarjveladze 2018). Nevertheless, these conversations, comments, and misconception about Georgia was only shameful and displeasing for all Georgians.

It is also notable that the reaction by Georgian authority was well-timed and precise to improve the circumstances. Georgian government was undoubtedly trying to meet all needed benchmarks requested by the EU. Bodies like the EU Home Affairs Council Thomas de Maiziere and the European Council President Donald Tusk have embraced the engagement of Georgian government to taking all essential measures to avoid worrisome situations (SchengenVisaInfo.com 2018). One of the good examples of Georgian government's commitment is Justice Ministry, with the help of the Georgian Foreign Ministry, the EU and International Centre for Migration Policy Development creating a Schengen/EU application for smartphones, which helps to prevent overstay (90 days in any 180-day period) in EU (Justice Ministry creates Schengen/EU app to prevent overstay in EU 2018). This app helps Georgian citizens compute their remaining days in the Schengen area and stay away from violating limits of legal stay. It is available in 3 most popular languages of Georgia – Georgian, English and Russian. Though the app has no legal force, it is free of charge and offers users additional exciting features, like saving travel history, sharing it on

social networks, etc. Georgian government continued putting appropriate effort to manage eventuated risks during the second year of visa liberalization as well.

## **2.4. The second year of visa liberalization**

2018 started with problems, as mentioned above the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Germany reported an increased number of Georgian asylum seekers in comparison to the previous year. *Die Welt* wrote that because of the particular problem Germany considered taking measures not only on national but also on the EU level (Hasselbach 2018). Georgian government reacted immediately on this threat and to deal with the challenges connected with visa liberalization to stall the increasing number of asylum seekers throughout EU countries and avoid this to be the reason for visa liberalization suspension. The measures have been toughened, which meant legislative changes, which resulted introducing a range of prevention steps, including obliging readmission fees to readmitted persons; hardening the procedures for changing surname, etc. (Zalkaliani 2018). Georgian government put much effort to manage the process of visa liberalization better, in particular – regulation and in future – with prevention aim: In February 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia has begun third wave of informational campaign, goal of which was reminding society about visa-free travel regulations, as well as forestalling malicious use of asylum seeker's applications. In campaign frameworks, many meetings have been organized in Tbilisi and regional professional groups, with tutors, students, local self-governments and civil sector to raise awareness about the abovementioned topics.

The end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019 stood out with decisive steps. On 19 December 2018, The National Assembly of France ratified legal employment for Georgian specialists and graduates of high education institutions (Gabekhadze 2018). The indicated agreement provides Georgian citizens, interested in getting a job or upgrading qualification skills in France, with temporary residence and working permits. The quota for job seekers is 500 annually, whereas for qualified specialists – 150. Both sides have already started cooperating about the practical part of the agreement, which means identifying the labour needs of the French market and seeking the appropriate specialists in Georgia (Gogolashvili 2019).

The government of Germany is working on one-sided legislation (after the 2018 visit of Angela Merkel) to create a legal quota for Georgian migrants gone to Germany for work, as 3000-4000 citizens of Georgia try to stay in EU for jobs (mostly illegal). In case, if 16 EU states, which have

signed the EU-Georgia Mobility Partnership declaration, assign annual quotas of several hundred migrants for legal work, this will reduce the number of illegal migrants significantly.

Georgia is working on agreements, cooperation and development of projects, the aim of which is to obtain residence/work permit quotas in the indicated countries and study supply/demand possibilities in dispatcher/recipient states. Besides France and Germany, several more countries – Portugal, Greece, Israel, and Bulgaria have accepted similar agreements. Also, Georgia has ongoing consultations with Poland. Recently, the State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia has even presented research, which evaluates the demands of the EU labour resources and potential of Georgian specialists supplying that deficit (Gogolashvili 2019).

The EU publishes an annual list of most demanded professions of several states. Georgian politics should consider these requirements. According to abovementioned research, the potential of Georgian labour supply is appropriate for countries, like Austria, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Finland, Sweden and Croatia (Diakonidze 2018). Some of these countries have schemes for circular migration, but it is vital to persuade governments to sign the agreement with Georgia.

At the end of 2018, particularly on 10 November, Georgians once again realized the advantages of visa-free policy. The thing is, on that date Georgian National Rugby team was playing against rivals Italy in Florence. This remarkable match was a historical event not because of the result of the game, especially the prominent performance of athletes or tension on the field, but because about 10,000 Georgian citizens attended the match in the heart of Italy and most of them have certainly used their right to travel without visa in EU countries (Marketer.ge 2018). It was an unprecedented event, as in the rich history of Georgia, the country has never seen their so many citizens together, outside the borders. Stadio Artemio Franchi, the stadium where the game was held will always remain as a historic place in terms of Georgian way to European integration, as such unofficial gatherings like sport or cultural events highlights the disappearance of stereotypes between the citizens of Georgia and the EU, reduces the barriers and what is more, supports mutual understanding.

## **2.5. Summarizing tendencies**

What has the retrospective of 2 years of visa liberalization demonstrated, what trends have been revealed, how can the research questioned be answered?

1. What are these benefits on 2nd anniversary since obtaining visa liberalization?
2. What are the most clear-cut risk factors, correct management of which is essential for the Georgian government to advance the relationship with EU?

Certainly, these two years have shown different benefits, a short review of which look like this:

It seems that visa liberalization supports Georgian citizens to assimilate with European values. Visa liberalization allowed Georgians to break the stereotype, when older generations recall the Soviet Union period with their flights to Moscow for just 37 Soviet Rouble and made Europe and European cities available for them and of course, for younger generations. Georgian National Tourism Administration data (see *Appendix 1*) shows the scales of potential capacity very clearly. Moreover, these two years confirm, that visa liberalization promoted Georgian image on European scope, as well as increasing awareness of European democratic values for Georgia citizens. This means accumulating informal education in a casual environment.

Because of the belligerent history of the country, being part of different empires, fighting to preserve religion, traditions, and language, because of a particular Soviet background and pervasive censorship, evoking patriotism and nationalist perceptions made Georgians think, that everything local is perfect, is enough and that the country does not need any partner. Such beliefs are always stalling the process of development, as it hinders the implementation of modern facilities, which are essential to advance, in particular in the XX and XXI centuries. This attitude was undoubtedly scattering from time to time, but with the introduction to European family via visa liberalization was probably the most significant blow to the repressive complex of the nation. Such upgrades to the nation's mentality are critical to catching up with more advanced states to ease the partnership in the future, and visa liberalization has done precisely this: getting country prepared for more in-depth cooperation.

What concerns the problems and the risk factors, management of which is crucial, the picture looks like this: previous two years revealed problems with illegal stays, the proportion of big number of Georgian asylum seekers and crime in the same regions, etc. but it was also visible, that in case of governments manages everything correctly, these problems are beatable, which is why at the end of the second year of visa liberalization Georgia had fewer obstacles. It should be noted, that to solve the problems of illegal migration, the Georgian government is again making new steps. In present days, the parliament is reviewing legislation initiative summarily, according to which, helping a citizen of Georgia stay abroad illegally for financial advantage will become punishable

(‘Interpressnews.ge’ 2019). Regarding this reform and other strict punishments by the government, it will be possible to reduce the number of asylum seekers in the EU countries, illegal migrants as well as those, who help them stay. Generally, the past two years of visa liberalization regime, seem to have supported boosted the acknowledgement of Georgia as a worthy and reliable partner by the EU and its Member States and this encourages EU support for Georgia to strive for European family integration.

### **3. DID THE TWO YEARS OLD EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE VISA LIBERALIZATION FULFIL?**

Two years retrospective of visa liberalization showed the contemporary results. It is interesting, how these results correspond to the expectations from 2017. Accomplishing good forecasts is the best motivator for society's firm support. This way, the country won't change its chosen direction to Euro-integration. On the other hand, the ability to determine risks correctly is a good precondition for future prevention and proper management. The expectations about possible positive and negative results, what obtaining visa liberalization could mean for Georgia was analyzed two years ago (Kalandadze 2017). The analysis was based on expert opinions and respondent interviews, revealing such expectations:

Expert views and inquiry results have much in common stated that visa liberalization would have substantial positive outcomes, including: In terms of the liberal visa regime, more Georgian citizens would be able to travel to Europe. Georgians would learn more about the culture and lifestyle of Europe, so trust in EU would raise so that pro-European attitudes would strengthen, pro-Russian would weaken, and tourism would develop and, therefore, the awareness of Georgia in Europe. This would mean a step closer to EU integration and would allow Georgia develop economic and educational connections with Europe, and these would help the country attract better professionals to its labour market, correspondingly intensifying economics and future potential.

What concerns the risks connected to visa liberalization, both expert opinions and interview results indicated the threat of criminal acts and illegal stay as the most noteworthy, followed by brain drain – losing the qualified young labour, but it was also noted, that risks could be minimized, if Georgian government would provide correct management of the process and would take prevention measures orderly.

It should be noted, that anticipation for such results including the risks at the moment of obtaining visa liberalization or at the beginning of 2017 was a logical extension of 2010-2016 migration profile of Georgia. State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia published the Migration Profile of Georgia in 2017, which reflects migration tendencies and problems very clearly. For example, the report illustrates the increased demand for Schengen visa in corresponding years, and this fact certifies the desire and motivation of Georgian citizens to travel in Europe more, which



certainly result in more Georgian visitors to the EU territory, in case of visa-free agreement. The tendency in numbers would look like this (see *Appendix 2*).

Requesting and receiving residence permit by the citizens of Georgia is also noteworthy and interesting statistics (see *Appendix 3*). It shows the tendencies of Georgian migration profile, which is connected to employment and education abroad, as well as family cases.

Another data from the report is statistics about Georgian asylum seekers in the same years (see *Appendix 4*). On the one hand, the numbers were corresponding to the expectation connected to visa liberalization risks in the abovementioned research (Kalandadze 2017), though on the other hand, the diminishing number of asylum seekers was giving substantial optimism about the issue. Although it should also be noted, that the diminishing tendency was changed with a small increase in 2015-2016 and the intensity increased even more since 2017 (State Commission on Migration Issues 2017, 70). It should also be noted, that 2012 compared to diminishing number of asylum seekers in 2016, these years also see a permanent increase of asylum seekers in Germany, the tendency which was preserved in 2017-2018 too (see *Appendix 5*). The diminishing numbers since 2018 are also remarkable.

What concerns the expectation about the increased crime, fortunately, this prediction turned out to be false, as for example in terms of house/apartment theft, Georgian suspects in 2017 were half the number of 2016, but it is not a reason to calm down, as Georgian criminals are on the 6th place in Germany, after Romanian, Polish, Syrian, Moroccan and Serbian.

So as it has been mentioned above, the expert and resident expectations about visa liberalization was logically connected to 2010-2016 migration profile of Georgia and it should not be astonishing, that as the 2 years retrospective shows, the expectations and predictions since visa liberalization have also fulfilled: In particular, the number of travellers from Georgia to Europe has increased significantly, people saw the sightseeing, visited sport and cultural events, spend vacation on various European resorts, etc., which supported strengthening of pro-European and weakening of pro-Russian attitudes, as well as raising positive awareness about Georgia in European countries. The risks have also come true, mainly connected to illegal migration. Also, the brain drain, which will probably be more visible, after the mechanisms of legal labour quotas for Georgian employees in European countries will fully come into operation. The negotiations are ongoing with several countries.

Another positive expectation about visa liberalization stated in 2017 should be mentioned separately, as per abovementioned research, "both experts and inquiry results say, that visa liberalization could be a step closer to EU integration, If Georgians avoid the mentioned risks, the trust in EU would raise and eventually Georgia could become a Member State" (Kalandadze 2017). It is thought, that this prediction, which is the claim of this research, has been realized, in other words, affirmed in the 2017-2019 period.

## **4. WHAT IS MEANT BY CORRECT MANAGEMENT OF VISA LIBERALIZATION?**

As it has been mentioned, visa liberalization is a path for Georgia to the European integration, in case the process is managed correctly. It is necessary to minimize negative results, as complaints by some Member States could damage the image of the country, which will be badly reflected on the relationship between Georgia and the EU. Moreover, this could cause the suspension of visa-free permission, which will reduce the supporters of the European future of the country. Besides, such a series of events could also be used as manipulation weapon for pro-Russian attitude groups.

What is this correct management, what challenges and tasks stand in front of the Georgian government from this point of view, what should be done?

As the retrospective of the past years has shown, visa liberalization risks, connected to threats of illegal migration, correspondingly crime cases by Georgian citizens, which has even caused the talks about the suspension mechanism of visa-free permission in some EU states at the end of 2017, apparently coincides with the 2 years old predictions, thus these risks and threats should not be unpredictable for the Georgian government and prevention measures could be planned in advance. In principle, it has been seen, that many right and appropriate steps have been done by the Georgian government in terms of prevention, including intense informational campaign about visa-free travel documents, laws, breaking the rules, etc. Furthermore, to deepen the relationship with the EU Member States, the police attaches have been widened, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has actively been cooperating with Europol.

In terms of managing these risks, from the measures taken by the Georgian government, this should be pointed out: on 31 July 2017, Agreement on Operative and Strategic Partnership between Georgia and EUROPOL” has started functioning. On 9 March 2019, Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, together with Europol executive director signed the Memorandum on Cooperation on Secure Communication Channel between Georgia and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement (Gabekhadze 2018).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia) initiated setting up an inter-agency commission/group, which would coordinate topical issues connected to visa-free travel. Georgian Parliament has adopted several laws, which aim to prevent breaking visa liberalization rules. Aforementioned steps are certainly complementary, though the government should not lose grip on this field, should

always control the process, should deepen cooperation with the EU Member States even more to avoid visa liberalization risks and likewise assemble common events with them, as the cooperation format with the EU Member States will convince many countries, that Georgia is ready to take all possible measures to ensure its credibility throughout the EU.

However, visa liberalization is not enough to start thinking about EU membership, though it might be the right tool to establish reliability. To become a Member State, one needs to meet specific requirements, more precisely – Copenhagen Criteria, which includes various gauges for judgment, like human rights, democracy, economic, geographic criteria, etc. (European Commission). The EU wants its potential future members to be more or less on the same level as the other members, as well as useful for the whole union. In Georgian example, parallelly to visa liberalization, the Georgian government has been working on other vital issues as well. One of them is a deep sea port in Anaklia, or as it is called officially – Anaklia Development Consortium, which is going to be the largest and the only deep sea port on the Black Sea (Starr 2019). Considering the geographic location of Georgia, as well as free trade agreements with both the EU (Emerson, Kovziradze 2016, 8) and China (Karelidze 2018), it makes Anaklia port central economic development for Georgia and a great strategic point for the EU on the Eastern coast of the Black Sea. Furthermore, the EU values are based on freedom and human rights, so its policy for many issues is liberal, including drug policy. Doses for recreational use are not criminally punishable throughout the EU. On the other hand, Georgia has long been a country with one of the strictest drug policies in the whole world, but in July 2018, Georgia became the first former Soviet republic to legalize recreational use of marijuana (Lynn 2018), reshaping criminal repression into the liberal approach.

Another important challenge initiated by Georgia is the manufacturing of electric cars. Electrification of transport is supported by the European Commission, making €24.2 million available to 'Green eMotion,' a Europe-wide electromobility initiative (the European Commission). From 2020, Georgia will manufacture 40 000 cars a year, 50% of which are going to be for the EU market (Prime Minister's Press Office 2019). On the other hand, Europe is acknowledging Georgia's achievements and everyone involved in the process. As an act of recognizing authority, the Council of Europe has opened a commemorative star in memory of ex-Georgian PM – Zurab Zhvania (1963-2005). His famous words, already mentioned in this work were pronounced by Zhvania 20 years ago when Georgia was unanimously supported by the Assembly to join the Council of Europe (Morrison 2019). Those words have followed Geo-

European relations as a slogan since then, and it is symbolic, that the commemorative star in Strasbourg has them inscribed in it.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of European unification, which was initiated after the Second World War has been a success despite various problems and is nowadays a unique political and economic alliance. The further developments of the EU are based on theories, like institutional liberalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, process of globalization, which represents not only the exchange of goods and capital, but also shares certain ideas, values and systemic solutions; European integration was appealing for post-Soviet and East European countries, which stated their desire to join the EU with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, as they saw their future perspective and development basis this way. This aspiration was successfully going on during the last three decades. In the 2000s the EU had its largest and fastest expansion. Twelve states have joined: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. What concerns the latest member – Croatia was accepted in 2013.

Moreover, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Turkey are considered as the EU candidate countries, while Georgia, together with Moldova and Ukraine are the EU associate countries. Georgia has experienced a long and complicated road to this stage. Georgian desire for EU integration is even mentioned in the constitution since 1995, particularly in the end, the 78th article states, that constitutional structures should take all possible measures in terms of their authority to secure the EU and NATO integration for Georgia (Constitution of Georgia 1995). It can be said, that Georgia has not been so close to the EU politically, economically or with the integration process, not only at the time of writing this article in the constitution but also in the whole history of the country, as it is now. But to realize this closeness into completed membership, Georgia should use every corresponding mechanism. One of the most significant of those is visa liberalization, which was granted to the country in March 2017.

The paper aimed to conceive, whether Georgian government chose a right track in terms of visa liberalization decisions, meaning getting benefits and minimizing risks, as this process is perceived as a path to the EU integration if managed correctly. The decisions should aim to ensure the credibility of Georgia in European countries, which is essential to proceed in the integration course. To understand the progress, first, the background was presented, which stated a long history of Geo-European relations, starting from the XVIII century, including more post-Soviet and modern developments.

The research work has also presented the retrospective analysis of the past two years of visa liberalization to see the progress of the process and the dynamics of its advances and risks. As a matter of fact, the previous research on a similar topic by the same author (Kalandadze 2017) was used to compare, analyse and assess the two years old expectations about positive results and threats related to visa liberalization.

On the one hand, it turned out, that the past two years of visa liberalization brought many benefits to Georgia, which are explained in the work. The main and significant ones are highlighted, particularly – Georgian citizens assimilating with the European values, and at the same time, some unpleasant stereotypes about Georgia being broken in European countries. The possibility of better communication, touristic, educational and business connections raised the credibility between Georgia and the Member States. The research work also presents the problems from the 2 year experience, in particular, it was clear, that if the abrasive issues connected to visa liberalization, like illegal migration, a big number of asylum seekers and crime connected to it are not solved, the permission might be impeded with the suspension mechanism, what will complicate the road of Georgia to the EU very much. The government of Georgia made many correct and timely steps, taking measures against the abovementioned problems. The research work also covers these successful steps and measures. Moreover, Georgia has also advanced in terms of fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria. However, despite all of this, the problem of refugees and asylum seekers is still remaining as a challenge for the Georgian government, proper settling of which is necessary. Thus, the appropriate management of the visa liberalization related processes should be continued, which includes maximizing the benefits and minimizing the abovementioned problems, the aim of which is to ensure the credibility of Georgia in the EU. Indubitably, this will be positively reflected on the perspective of Georgia pursuing the EU membership.

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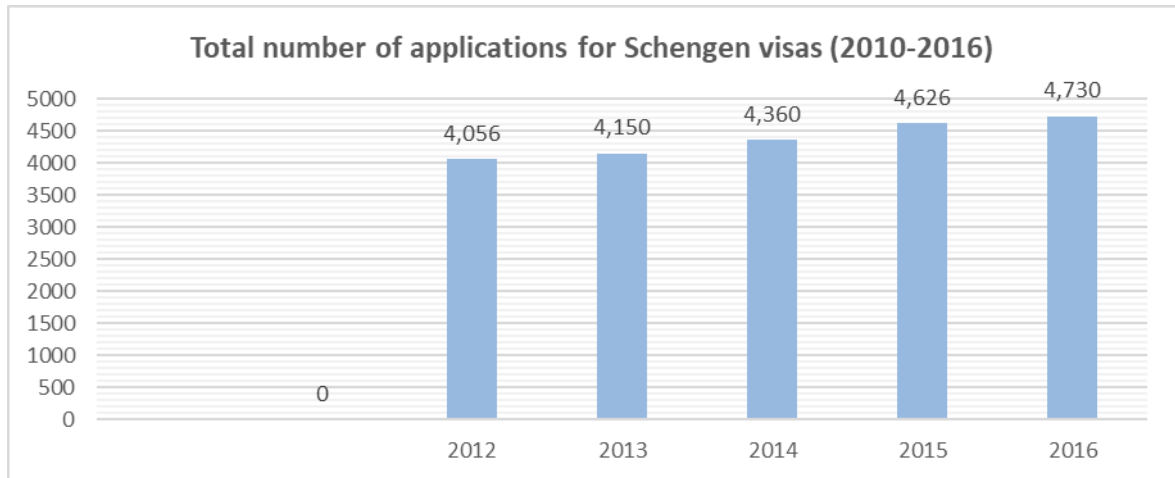
# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Georgian passenger data to European countries

Country	2016	2017	Change	% Change
<b>International Traveler Trips</b>	<b>6,719,975</b>	<b>7,902,509</b>	<b>1,182,534</b>	<b>17.6%</b>
Other (non-tourism)	1,327,159	1,419,679	92,520	7.0%
<b>International Visitor Trips</b>	<b>5,392,816</b>	<b>6,482,830</b>	<b>1,090,014</b>	<b>20.2%</b>
<b>Including:</b>	<b>↓</b>	<b>↓</b>	<b>↓</b>	<b>↓</b>
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>4,641,856</b>	<b>5,440,839</b>	<b>798,983</b>	<b>17.2%</b>
<b>Central and Eastern Europe</b>	<b>3,428,022</b>	<b>4,136,093</b>	<b>708,071</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
Armenia	1,152,234	1,287,168	134,934	11.7%
Azerbaijan	1,075,820	1,301,556	225,736	21.0%
Belarus	32,939	42,149	9,210	28.0%
Bulgaria	11,068	11,022	-46	-0.4%
Czech Republic	7,832	9,435	1,603	20.5%
Estonia	3,954	5,572	1,618	40.9%
Hungary	5,345	5,731	386	7.2%
Kazakhstan	40,895	47,241	6,346	15.5%
Kyrgyzstan	3,703	4,585	882	23.8%
Latvia	9,932	11,805	1,873	18.9%
Lithuania	13,039	14,565	1,526	11.7%
Moldova	6,970	8,164	1,194	17.1%
Poland	41,609	48,913	7,304	17.6%
Romania	3,848	4,466	618	16.1%
Russia	849,265	1,135,057	285,792	33.7%
Slovakia	3,384	3,721	337	10.0%
Tajikistan	1,820	2,271	451	24.8%
Turkmenistan	4,086	9,770	5,684	139.1%
Ukraine	151,630	169,862	18,232	12.0%
Uzbekistan	8,649	13,040	4,391	50.8%
<b>Northern Europe</b>	<b>30,172</b>	<b>42,400</b>	<b>12,228</b>	<b>40.5%</b>
Denmark	2,852	3,282	430	15.1%
Finland	2,529	3,344	815	32.2%
Iceland	201	361	160	79.6%
Ireland	1,566	3,287	1,721	109.9%
Norway	2,797	3,700	903	32.3%
Sweden	4,757	6,034	1,277	26.8%
United Kingdom	15,470	22,392	6,922	44.7%
<b>Southern Europe</b>	<b>41,339</b>	<b>49,808</b>	<b>8,469</b>	<b>20.5%</b>
Albania	407	415	8	2.0%
Andorra	32	4	-28	-87.5%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	594	796	202	34.0%
Croatia	1,045	1,411	366	35.0%
Greece	15,905	18,276	2,371	14.9%
Holy See	22	1	-21	-95.5%
Italy	11,432	13,425	1,993	17.4%
Macedonia	307	377	70	22.8%
Malta	199	228	29	14.6%
Montenegro	226	200	-26	-11.5%
Portugal	1,918	2,412	494	25.8%
San Marino	124	52	-72	-58.1%
Serbia	1,864	2,599	735	39.4%
Slovenia	1,504	2,071	567	37.7%
Spain	5,760	7,541	1,781	30.9%
<b>Western Europe</b>	<b>67,987</b>	<b>88,840</b>	<b>20,853</b>	<b>30.7%</b>
Austria	5,140	6,998	1,858	36.1%
Belgium	4,118	4,972	854	20.7%
France	12,191	16,053	3,862	31.7%
Germany	33,469	43,090	9,621	28.7%
Liechtenstein	22	37	15	68.2%
Luxembourg	214	238	24	11.2%
Monaco	7	8	1	14.3%
Netherlands	8,766	11,646	2,880	32.9%
Switzerland	4,060	5,798	1,738	42.8%

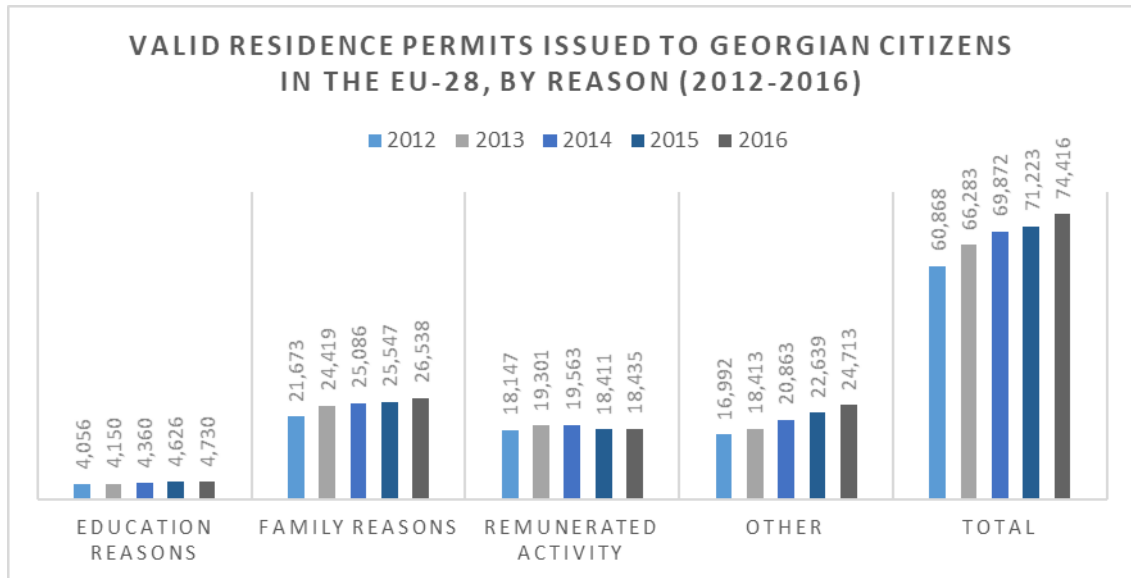
Source: Georgian National Tourism Administration, International Travel Report 2017

## Appendix 2. Total number of applications for Schengen visas



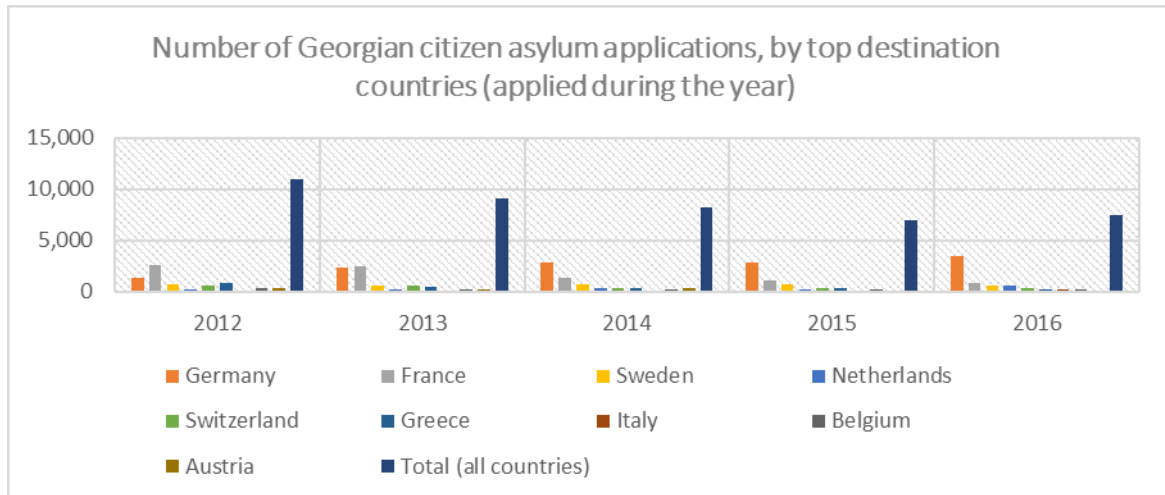
Source: State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017 Migration Profile of Georgia

**Appendix 3. Valid residence permits issued to Georgian citizens in the EU-28, by reason (2012-2016)**



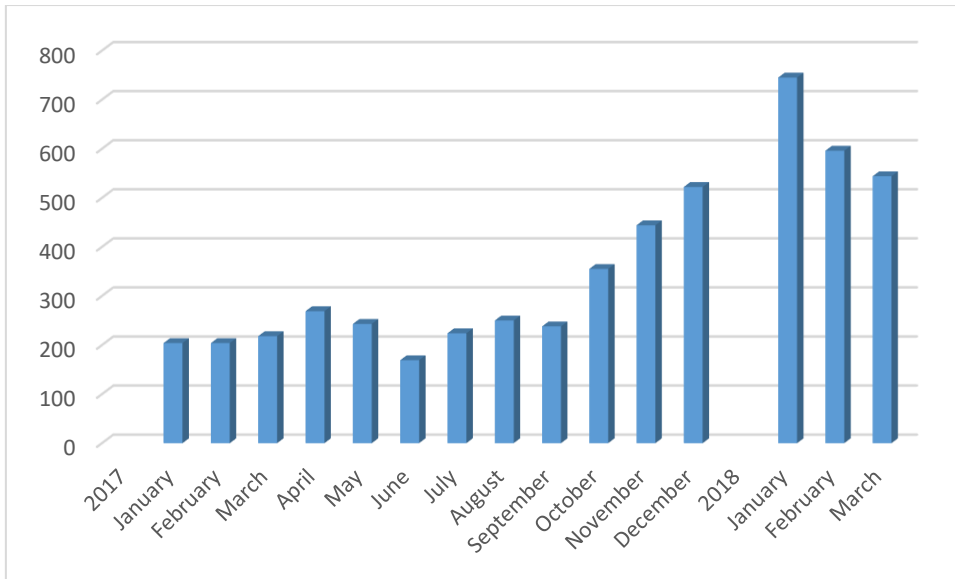
Source: State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017 Migration Profile of Georgia

#### Appendix 4. Number of Georgian citizen asylum applications, by top destination countries



Source: State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017 Migration Profile of Georgia

## Appendix 5. Georgian asylum seekers in Germany



Source: State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017 Migration Profile of Georgia