

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Between the East and the West: Mobility and migration from the EU's Eastern Partners

Author: Pasquale DE MICCO

ABSTRACT

The Eastern Partners were among the first countries to launch mobility dialogues with the EU. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have also engaged in a process of visa liberalisation, which has been completed in the Republic of Moldova and is in its final stages in Georgia and Ukraine. In addition, the Association Agreements with these countries include provisions, which will be applicable from 2017 for the temporary presence – up to two years – of natural persons in EU Member States.

Notwithstanding the influence of these mobility-fostering legal provisions, legal migration from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine is concentrated in certain Member States as a result of economic opportunities or linguistic ties. However, with the exception of Moldova, the number of migrants from the countries in question is generally smaller in Member States than in the Russian Federation, where specific legal provisions favour internal migration from members of the Eurasian Economic Union (Belarus and Armenia), and to a lesser extent from members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Moldova and Ukraine) and Georgia.

The countries of origin of those large numbers of migrant workers receive a substantial boost to their economies through personal remittances. This precious source of capital has declined recently, however, owing to falling oil prices and, to a lesser extent, to economic sanctions affecting Russia. Personal remittances from the EU are showing a similar trend, with the exception, again, of Moldova.

This paper was requested by the European Parliament's Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly English-language manuscript was completed on 22 April 2016.

Printed in Belgium.

Authors: Pasquale DE MICCO with contributions from Magdalena ALBERS and Faustine FELICI (research and statistics).

Editorial Assistants: Elina STERGATOU - Ifigeneia ZAMPA.

Feedback of all kind is welcome. Please write to the author: pasquale.demicco@europarl.europa.eu.

To obtain copies, please send a request to: poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu.

This paper will be published on the European Parliament website and on the [intranet site of the European Parliament's policy departments](#).

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to the Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

Table of contents

1	EU mobility engagements with the Eastern partners	4
2	Visa liberalisation progress in the associated countries	6
3	Specific provisions for the temporary presence of natural persons in the Association Agreements	7
4	Migration destinations and remittance sources	9
5	Legal and illegal migration in the EU	15
6	Conclusion	18

1 EU mobility engagements with the Eastern partners

Eastern Partnership countries have negotiated different forms of mobility agreements. Some of the EaP countries have also engaged in a more ambitious process of visa liberalisation.

A dialogue on visa liberalisation between the EU and Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine was established.

The Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were among the first countries to sign Mobility Partnerships with the EU, under which the EU and its partners offer mutual commitments and project initiatives covering mobility, migration and asylum issues. All of the Eastern partners except Belarus have also signed visa facilitation agreements and readmission agreements, thereby giving their citizens greater mobility and improving the rules on managing the return of illegal migrants¹. The EU and Belarus began negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements in 2014, and on a Mobility Partnership in 2015.

Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have advanced even further: they have successfully conducted visa liberalisation dialogues with the EU in order to achieve their long-term goal of visa-free travel to the Schengen area.

The dialogue on visa liberalisation between the EU and the three Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries in question required an examination of all the relevant conditions for short-term visa-free travel to the Schengen area and resulted in a Commission proposal requiring the approval of the two co-legislators (already approved in the case of Moldova).

In the light of the existing EU acquis and best practices, the main instrument in place to structure this dialogue is a Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), which includes four blocks of benchmarks: (1) document security, including biometrics, (2) border management, migration and asylum, (3) public order and security and (4) external relations and fundamental rights.

The visa liberalisation dialogue comprises two phases. In the first phase, benchmarks set by the Commission are included in the legislative, policy and institutional framework. In the second phase, the effective and sustainable implementation of this framework is monitored.

The Republic of Moldova was the first country to be granted a visa-free regime. On 14 March 2014, the Council of the European Union approved the necessary amendments to Regulation (EC) No 539/2001, and since 28 April 2014, Moldovan citizens with biometric passports who travel to the Schengen zone

¹ The EU-**Ukraine** Visa Facilitation Agreement and Readmission Agreement entered into force in June 2007.

The EU and **Moldova** signed a Mobility Partnership in June 2008 and the EU-Moldova Visa Facilitation Agreement and Readmission Agreement entered into force in October 2007.

The EU and **Georgia** signed a Mobility Partnership in 2009 and the EU-Georgia Visa Facilitation Agreement and Readmission Agreement entered into force in March 2011.

The EU and **Armenia** signed a Mobility Partnership in 2011. The Visa Facilitation Agreement was signed in December 2012 and the Readmission Agreement in April 2013. Both agreements entered into force in January 2014.

The EU and **Azerbaijan** signed the Visa Facilitation Agreement in November 2013 and the Readmission Agreement in February 2014. Both agreements entered into force in September 2014. The Mobility Partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan was signed in December 2013.

In 2014, the EU and Belarus began negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. In 2015, they also began to negotiate a Mobility Partnership.

for a short stay no longer need a visa.

The Republic of Moldova was granted a visa-free regime by the EU in 2014.

Despite visa liberalisation, the number of Moldovans entering the EU under the visa-free regime remains lower than expected: a total of 460 000 persons had entered as of February 2016. The reasons are diverse: on the one hand, a large but undefined number of Moldovans already owned a Romanian passport, which allowed them to stay in the Schengen area without any restrictions². On the other hand, economic considerations also play an important role, as many Moldovans have stated that they do not have the financial means to travel to the Schengen area. A third and perhaps more important reason is the fact that Romanian passports are widely available to Moldovan citizens, which has enhanced intra-EU mobility and the legal migration of Moldovans. This important factor is exclusive to Moldova (see chapter 3).

In December 2015, Georgia and Ukraine met all the benchmarks set in their Visa Liberalisation Action Plans.

On 18 December 2015, the European Commission stated in its fourth progress report on Georgia's implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation that Georgia met all the benchmarks set according to the four blocks in the second phase of the VLAP. On 9 March 2016, the Commission accordingly presented a legislative proposal to grant Georgian citizens the right to visa-free travel in the Schengen area.

Likewise, on the same date, the Commission stated in its sixth progress report on Ukraine's implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation that Ukraine met all the benchmarks set under the four blocks in the second phase of the VLAP. The conditions for judicial cooperation in criminal matters and the conditions and procedures for the issuance of travel and identity documents were deemed to have been fulfilled. Further steps and commitments were required with regard to fighting corruption and regulating the banking system. (see chapter 2)

Nevertheless, President Juncker stated on 17 March 2016³ that a legislative proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 could be expected in April 2016. This statement followed the adoption by the Ukrainian Parliament of a law on the electronic declaration of personal assets by public officials.

A month later, on 20 April, the European Commission finally adopted the legislative proposal, to be adopted by the Council by qualified majority and by the European Parliament.

² No official figures are available on the number Moldovans holding Romanian passports. Estimates range between 400 000 and 500 000. See [In the shadow of history. Romanian-Moldovan relations](#). OSW September 2015 and [Romanian Passports for Moldovans: Entering the EU Through the Back Door](#), der Spiegel July 2010.

³ [European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's remarks at the joint press point with European Council President Donald Tusk, and Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine](#), 17 March 2016.

2 Visa liberalisation progress in the associated countries

The visa liberalisation dialogues with the three countries in question began at different times. Ukraine was the first to engage in a visa liberalisation dialogue, on 29 October 2008. The Republic of Moldova followed on 15 June 2010, and Georgia's visa liberalisation dialogue was launched on 4 June 2012. Ukraine's VLAP was presented on 22 November 2010, Moldova's on 24 January 2011 and Georgia's on 25 February 2013.

To monitor the implementation of the action plans, the Commission has published regular progress reports. Furthermore, an exchange between senior ranking officials from DG HOME and the partner countries has ensured further monitoring.

To monitor the implementation of the Action Plans, the European Commission published regular progress reports.

To monitor the progress made by Moldova, five reports were published (on 16 September 2011, 9 February 2012, 22 June 2012, 21 June 2013 and 15 November 2013). In its most recent report, the Commission came to the conclusion that the Republic of Moldova had met all the benchmarks.

Georgia made the fastest progress. Only four progress reports were published (on 15 November 2013, 29 October 2014, 8 May 2015 and 18 December 2015), and after three and a half years the Commission stated that Georgia had met all the benchmarks.

Ukraine took the longest to meet all the benchmarks. In total, six progress reports were published (on September 2011, February 2012, 15 November 2013, 27 May 2014, 8 May 2015 and 18 December 2015). Although the Commission believed that Ukraine had met all the benchmarks, it expected concrete commitments from the Ukrainian leadership with regard to preventing and fighting corruption. Five points were underlined in the sixth progress report:

Although Ukraine met all the benchmarks, further commitments with regard to preventing and fighting corruption were necessary.

- the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and specialised anti-corruption prosecution need to be fully operational in the first quarter of 2016;
- amendments to the law 'On Prosecution' must ensure the selection and dismissal of the specialised anti-corruption prosecution office's leadership and thereby the independence and integrity of the office;
- the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption needs to be fully operational in the first quarter of 2016 and investigations about assets and potential conflicts of interests among public officials must begin immediately after the agency becomes fully operational.
- the institutional capacity on recovery and management of assets needs to be improved and legislation on procedures concerning seizures of assets and special confiscation need to be fully effective. (see press 29.3)
- the state budget for 2016 and the financial resources needed for the anti-corruption institutional framework to function need to be ensured.

The European Commission casted a favourable eye on the developments in

Ukraine following the sixth report. The issuing of biometric passports in consulates and the new biometric ID cards fulfilled the requests made in the first chapter on document security. In the context of integrated border management, migration management and asylum, the Commission noted that the State Border Guard Service (SBGS) was on track to become a modern law-enforcement agency in line with EU best practices. The Ukrainian authorities have ensured access to Interpol databases at border crossing points and, in November 2015, a law on external labour migration was adopted and signed by the President. According to the Commission, block 3 progress on public order and security resulting from legislative and institutional changes requires further monitoring and can only bring significant end results if fully implemented. Lastly, the external relations and fundamental rights benchmark was deemed to have been met, as Ukraine has removed HIV/AIDS from its list of contagious diseases and has significantly developed its key institution for dealing with anti-discrimination issues.

On 15 March 2016, the Verkhovna Rada passed the President's proposal on the electronic declaration of assets by public officials, a law which plays a key role in the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. It is considered a good means of reaching a balance between new prosecution methods and the current state of affairs of the national justice and law enforcement institutions.

These developments were reported in the declaration by President Juncker of 17 March 2016 about a forthcoming proposal for visa liberalisation with Ukraine in April. Conversely, Law no 4057, known as the 'confiscation law' and adopted in February 2016, was deemed not to contain enough solid guarantees of property rights protection in line with EU standards⁴.

However, without concretely assessing the measures taken by Ukraine in the last month, the Commission issued the visa free proposal on 20 April.

3 Specific provisions for the temporary presence of natural persons in the Association Agreements

Association Agreements allow natural persons for business purposes.

The Association Agreements (AAs) offer Moldovans, Georgians and Ukrainians new and more substantial opportunities to work and stay in the European Union. All three AAs include a section on the temporary presence of natural persons for business purposes. Under specific provisions, citizens of the countries in question are entitled to enter the EU and receive residence and work permits for a specific period. Five types of individuals are specified: key personnel, graduate trainees, business service providers, contractual service suppliers and independent professionals.

Key personnel, employed by legal persons, subsidiaries, branches or representative offices, can be granted residence and work permits for a period

⁴ See the [EU Delegation's assessment of bill 4057 \(on confiscation\)](#), 28 March 2016

of employment of up to three years. **Graduate trainees**, employed by legal persons, subsidiaries, branches or representative offices, can stay in the EU for up to one year. A period of up to 90 days in any 12-month period is granted to business service providers. For **contractual service suppliers** and independent professionals, more specific rules apply. Contractual service suppliers must be employed by a legal person with a service contract not exceeding 12 months. The service supplier must have at least three years of professional experience in the sector stipulated in the contract, a university degree or a qualification demonstrating knowledge on an equivalent level, and the necessary professional qualifications. The stay should not exceed a cumulative period of more than six months (25 weeks in the case of Luxembourg) in any 12-month period. **Independent professionals** must be engaged in the supply of a service on a temporary basis as self-employed persons under a service contract for a period not exceeding 12 months. They must have at least six years of professional experience in the sector stipulated in the contract, a university degree or a qualification demonstrating knowledge on an equivalent level, and the necessary professional qualifications. The stay may not exceed a cumulative period of more than six months (25 weeks in the case of Luxembourg) in any 12-month period.

However, all three AAs include a list of 'reservations' in which Member States have defined additional regulations and requirements in certain sectors.

As an example, this can be seen in the section of the Association Agreement with Georgia on services provided by nurses, physiotherapists and paramedical personnel⁵, in which almost every Member State has made a specific reservation. Austria, for example has stipulated that foreign service suppliers in this field are only allowed to work as nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, logotherapists, dieticians and nutritionists. Furthermore, individuals must have practised the profession for at least three years before they set up their professional practice. Other reservations concern Ukrainian and Moldovan entertainment service providers, who are only allowed to stay for seven days per event in Slovenia. In Cyprus, Moldovan live bands and discotheque service providers must undergo an economic needs test.

Compliance with an economic needs test is an increasingly common requirement in Member States. These tests enable them to make the granting of full or partial market access to third-country workers contingent on the fulfilment of certain economic criteria.

Figures on temporary presence of natural persons for business purposes are not yet available, as the first reference year for key personnel and graduate trainees is 2017. It is expected that the first statistics will be available in mid-2018.

⁵ [Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, 30 August 2014.](#)

A list of reservations specifies additional regulations and requirements.

4 Migration destinations and remittance sources

The EAEU offers free movement to all nationals of its member states.

So far, the European Union has not been the most popular destination among the Eastern partners, with the exception of Moldova.

Current data show that the European Union has not yet been the main destination for EaP migrants.

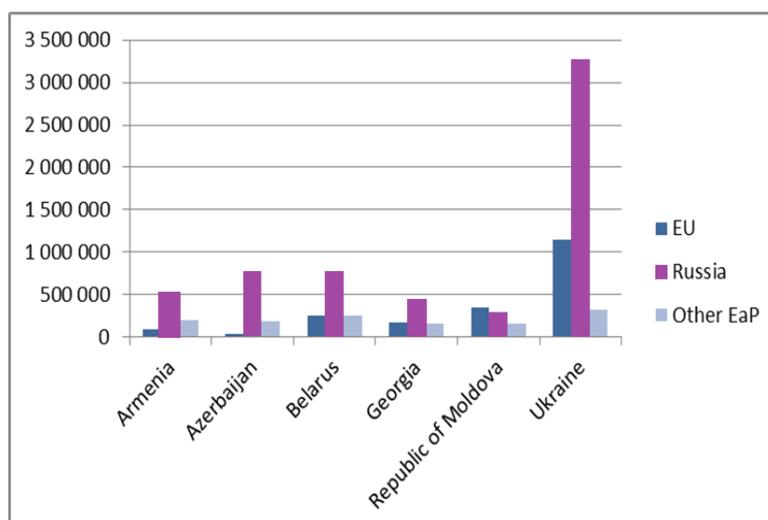
Labour integration, first in the Soviet Union then in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), has resulted in the consistent migration of nationals from EaP countries to the above-mentioned blocs – in particular the Russian Federation. As regards the latest developments, it must be noted that among CIS members, bilateral agreements have favoured visa liberalisation, but working permits are a precondition for working in other CIS countries. This legal framework has been replaced, for its members, by the more recent EAEU (created by a treaty signed on 24 May 2014 that entered into force on 1 January 2015), which includes an agreement on migrant workers⁶. The EAEU offers its members, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation, the free movement of persons: working permits are not needed and medical assistance and social protection are granted to workers in their country of employment.

On the other hand, the regulations in place in many EU Member States are not favourable towards migrants from the Union's external partners. Mobility, temporary presence and visa-free regimes may improve migrants' chances of finding legal and stable employment in the future, but they will still be subject to the national provisions of individual Member States, which can include quota systems and stricter requirements. For this reason, figures on the migrant stock of the six Eastern partners show that only the Republic of Moldova has recently had a higher number of migrants residing in the EU than in Russia or the other EaP countries. This is probably down to the fact that the Republic of Moldova is the only country that has been granted a visa-free regime so far. Furthermore, the current practice of dual citizenship, i.e. owning both a Moldovan and Romanian passport at the same time, makes it easier for Moldovans to stay in the EU and look for a job.

In three cases (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus), fewer migrants reside in the EU than in both Russia and the other EaP countries.

⁶ Migrant workers from EAEU members benefit from the same rights in all the member states. This legal provision is based on an agreement signed by Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in November 2010, eliminating the need for working permits for workers from these three countries. It was later extended to Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. See [When choosing means losing: the Eastern partners, the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union](#), p59. Policy Department DG EXPO, March 2015.

Figure 1:
EaP migrant stock in the EU,
Russia and the other EaPs,
2015



Source: United Nations, *Trends in International Migrant Stock*, 2015

Labour opportunities are a decisive factor for the economies of the EaP countries.

Labour opportunities are a decisive factor for EaP countries because personal remittance payments play a crucial role in their economies, as shown by the proportion of their GDPs which comes from remittances. For example, 17.85 % of Armenian GDP is earned abroad and more than two thirds of Armenia’s remittances are earned in the Russian Federation. In the case of Moldova, the total share of remittances in the GDP is even higher: 26.06 % of its GDP was earned abroad in 2014, including 9.65 % in the EU and 8.70 % in Russia (the rest was earned in the US and other CIS countries, particularly Ukraine).

The level of personal remittances is directly related to the level of migrants

The following table shows the correlation between the number of migrants and the level of remittances, comparing the EU and the Russian Federation in 2014 (remittances) and 2015 (migrants).

Table 1:

EaP migrant stock in the EU, Russia and other EaP countries, and remittance payments to EaP countries from the EU and Russia, 2014/2015

	Migrants in EU	Migrants in Russia	Migrants in other EaP countries	Remittances from Russia (USD million, % GDP)	Remittances from EU (USD million, % GDP)	Total Remittances (USD million, % GDP)	GDP (USD million)
Armenia	85 648	527 287	203 518	1 334 11.46 %	213 1.83 %	2 079 17.85 %	11 644
Azerbaijan	42 677	767 339	188 342	1 078 1.43 %	62 0.08 %	1 846 2.45 %	75 198
Belarus	255 121	764 279	257 919	572 0.75 %	246 0.32 %	1 248 1.64 %	76 139
Georgia	171 030	450 221	165 876	1 180 7.14 %	330 1.20 %	1 986 12.01 %	16 530
Republic of Moldova	350 205	294 314	159 849	693 8.70 %	768 9.65 %	2 075 26.06 %	7 962
Ukraine	1 142 015	3 269 992	317 468	3 834 2.91 %	1 563 1.19 %	7 354 5.58 %	131 805

Sources: United Nations, [Trends in International Migrant Stock, 2015](#); World Bank, [Bilateral Remittance Estimates for 2014, October 2015 version](#); World Bank, [GDP at market prices, 2014](#)

The Russian labour market remains attractive notwithstanding the crisis engendered by the decline in oil prices.

The figures in table 1 are the most recent available. Several papers have been published in recent years investigating migration and remittance trends⁷. The main question underlying recent observations concerns the attractiveness of the Russian labour market in the current crisis, marked by the 3.7 % contraction of Russia's GDP in 2015.

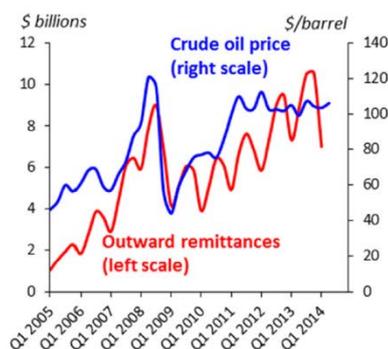
This contraction is largely the result of the decline in oil prices (since the impact of EU and US sanctions was estimated at 'only' 1-1.5 % of GDP)⁸. The Bank of Russia demonstrated a direct correlation between oil prices and remittances in 2014⁹.

⁷ See, for example, [From Russia with love. Remittances are a good thing, except when they stop](#). The Economist, 16 January 2016.

⁸ See [Russian Federation- 2015 Art. IV consultation-Press release and Staff Report](#). IMF, August 2015. Moreover, a US governmental source stated in January that of the total 3.7 % GDP contraction in 2015 (World Bank data), between 1.0 % and 1.5 % was directly caused by the sanctions.

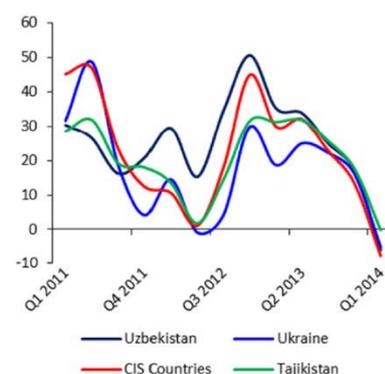
⁹ See [Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook. Special Topic: Forced Migration](#), World Bank, October 2014.

Figure 2: Outward remittances from Russia follow oil prices



Source: IMF Balance of payments

Figure 3: Growth in remittances from Russia decelerate



Source: Bank of Russia

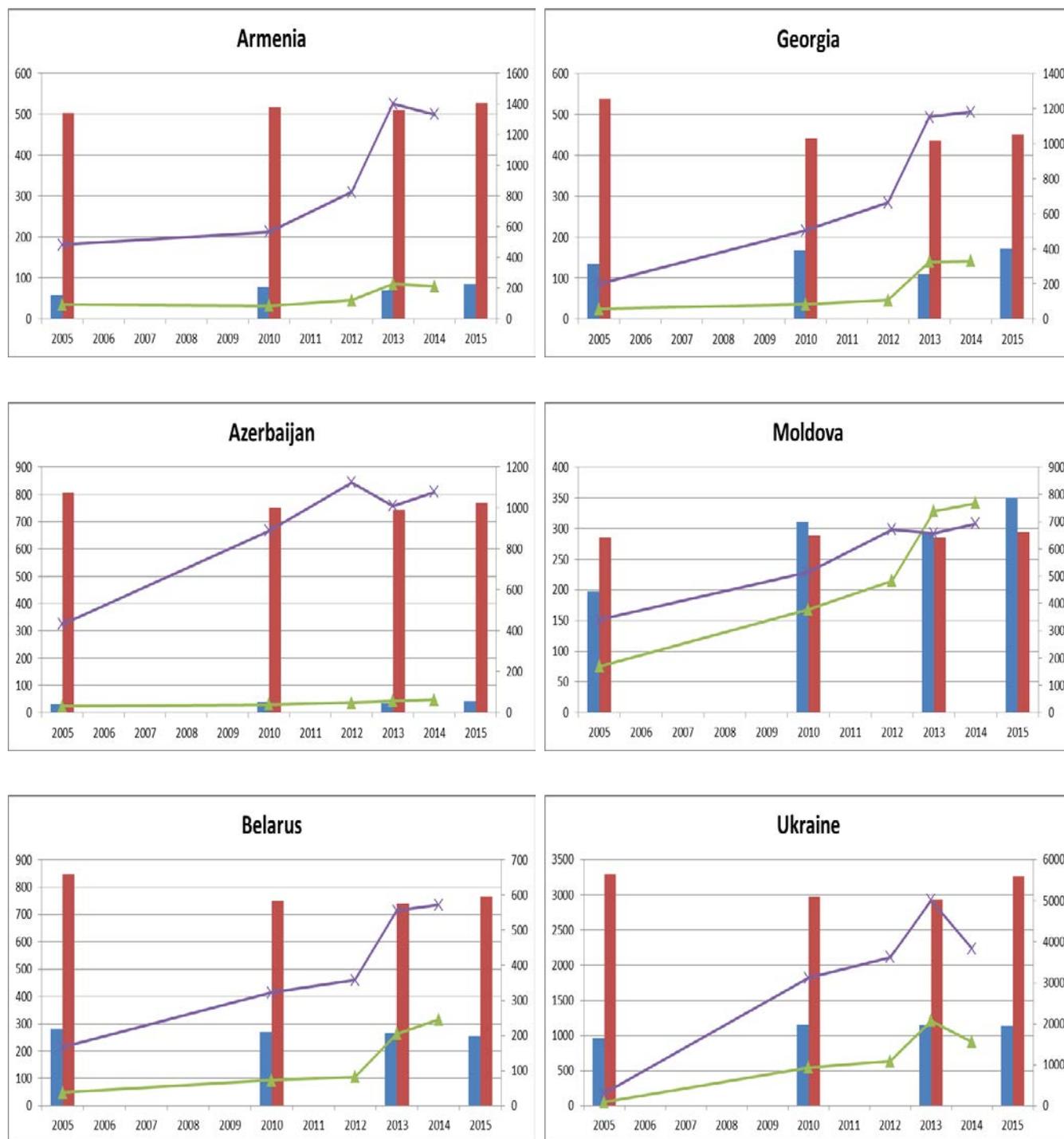
All EaP countries showed an increase in remittances until the peak in 2013, followed by a decline and increased migration to Russia up to 2015.

However, the recent trend in remittances does not fully reflect this correlation and variations in remittances show some surprising results. The graphs below¹⁰ show the statistics concerning migrants and remittances in the six EaP countries. In all cases, the number of migrants in Russia remained relatively stable up to 2015 (in some cases the number has even risen). This seems to confirm that, given the lack of alternatives, the Russian labour market remains attractive for neighbouring countries in spite of the economic situation.

Moreover, in all EaP countries, the level of remittances peaked in 2012-2013, followed by a divergent trend in the different EaP receiver countries. This peak can be explained by an increase in the use of money transfer operators (MTOs) to send money abroad. Several national action plans in those countries actively promoted Russian MTOs. The development of modern technologies to transfer money, the replacement of cash settlements by non-cash transactions and the steady downward trend in MTO commission fees also fostered the growth in the number of remittances made through MTOs. Between 2003 and 2013, the transfer cost of remittances from Russia fell by two thirds.

¹⁰ These graphs were drawn up by the author on the basis of World Bank and United Nations data.

Figure 4: EaP migrant stock in the EU, Russia and other EaPs, and remittance payments to EaPs from the EU and Russia, 2014/2015



Sources: United Nations, [Trends in International Migrant Stock, 2015](#); World Bank, [Bilateral Remittance Estimates for 2014, October 2015 and previous versions](#).¹¹

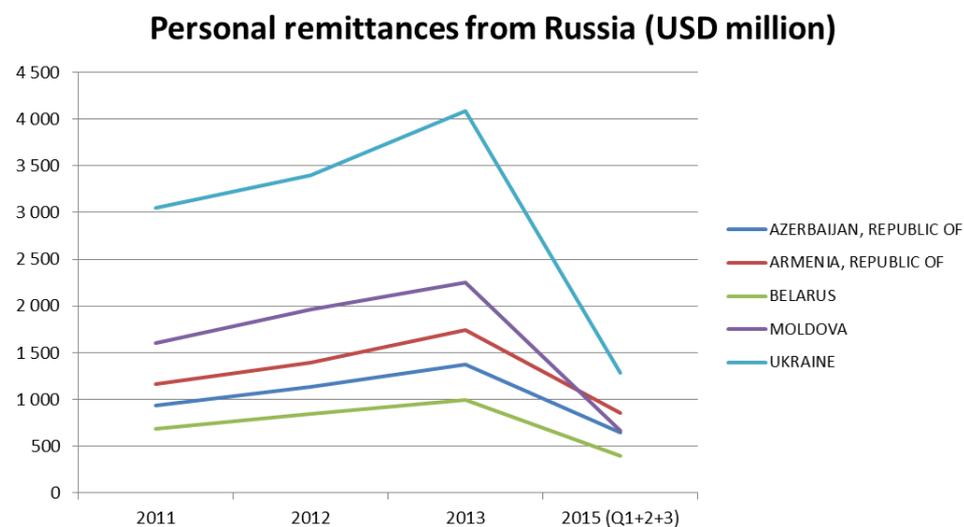
■ Migrants in the EU (thousand people) —▲— Remittances from the EU (in USD million)
■ Migrants in the Russian Federation (thousand people) —×— Remittances from the Russian Federation (in USD million)

¹¹ World Bank **data on remittances** are updated up to 2014: the most recent development is shown in figure 5, which is based on data from the Central bank of Russia. Data are

It must be noted that the World Bank’s figures on remittances do not go beyond 2014. Following the peak in 2014, stagnation can be observed in the volume of remittances received by all countries except Ukraine, which experienced a strong decline.

The subsequent evolution seems to illustrate a clear downward trend, probably caused by the worsening economic and monetary situation in Russia and the depreciation of the rouble against the dollar. This trend is highlighted in the following graph which is based on another data source (the Central Bank of Russia).

Figure 5:
Personal remittances from
Russia



Source: Central Bank of Russia

As many observers expected, the economic contraction in Russia has resulted in migrant job losses, while the depreciation of the rouble has reduced the real income of migrant workers in Russia and reduced the value of remittances, which are measured by the World Bank and the Central Bank of Russia in US dollars. In any case, the number of migrant workers does not seem to have declined, as the mobility of the workforce is structurally limited and concrete alternatives are scarce for migrants in Russia.

Although it offers more job opportunities, the EU is also dealing with the worst migrant crisis in its history and does not appear to provide a credible alternative to EaP jobseekers, except for specific and temporary or limited privileges granted to associated countries.

available for 2005 (estimates), 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014. United Nations **data on migration** are updated to 2015 and are available only for 2005, 2010, 2013, 2015.

5 Legal and illegal migration in the EU

In addition to legal conditions, cultural, linguistic and economic considerations also determine the destination of migrants.

The conditions for legal migration from the EaP countries are regulated by legislation in EU Member States, but cultural and linguistic considerations also have a big influence on where migrants from the EaP settle (e.g. the Moldovan community in Italy). Moreover, in cases where a community of co-nationals already exists in a particular country, its appeal to prospective migrants will be boosted (e.g. the Armenian community in France). Finally, the role of economic opportunities cannot be overlooked (e.g. the Ukrainian community in Germany).

Table 2:

International migrant stock, top 5 destinations in the EU (2015)

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Republic of Moldova	Ukraine
France	Germany	Poland	Greece	Italy	Germany
Greece	France	Latvia	Germany	Romania	Italy
Germany	UK	Lithuania	Cyprus	Germany	Poland
Belgium	Sweden	Italy	Italy	Portugal	Czech Republic
Spain	Latvia	Germany	France	Spain	Spain

Source: United Nations, *Trends in International Migrant Stock, 2015*

Visa statistics show that a large number of Schengen visas are issued in Ukraine (1.18 million in 2015). In Belarus, almost 754 000 Schengen visas were issued in 2015, which is proportionally higher than in Ukraine when population size is taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to mention that Ukraine and Belarus have the highest share of multiple entry visas (56.8 % and 66.3 %, respectively). At 2 207, the number of Schengen visas issued in Moldova is the lowest. The rate of visa non-issuance is highest in Armenia (12.3 %) and Georgia (12.9 %), and lowest in Belarus (0.3 %) and Ukraine (3.4 %). One important limitation must be highlighted with regard to these visa statistics. In the table below, only Schengen visas issued by EU consulates in EaP countries are mentioned. However, EaP citizens residing legally in any other country can also apply for a Schengen visa there. Other citizens residing legally in one of the EaP countries are also entitled to apply for a Schengen visa in an EU consulate in one of the EaP countries.

Table 3:

Visa applications by and issued to EaP citizens in 2015

	Uniform visas applied for	Total uniform visas issued (including MEV)	Multiple entry uniform visas (MEVs) issued	Total LTVs issued	Uniform visas not issued	Not issued rate for uniform visas (in %)	Share of MEVs (in %)
Armenia	57 787	50 590	10 226	7	7 105	12.3	20.2
Azerbaijan	68 941	65 190	19 365	29	3 464	5.0	29.7
Belarus	752 782	753 937	499 999	209	2 359	0.3	66.3
Georgia	100 549	87 043	22 500	16	12 974	12.9	25.8
Moldova	2 314	2 207	1 022	1	101	4.4	46.3
Ukraine	1 233 530	1 188 357	674 682	1 410	41 855	3.4	56.8

Source: [European Commission, DG Migration and Home Affairs](#)

The Commission assessed the possible migratory and security impacts of visa liberalisation on the EU.

In Moldova, illegal border crossings are a marginal issue.

The EU and the Russian Federation are attractive destinations for Moldovan labour migrants.

Before Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine moved into the second phase of the VLAP, the Commission assessed the possible migratory and security impacts of visa liberalisation. The assessments were updated for Georgia and Ukraine when the last progress report for each country was published.¹²

Regarding the Republic of Moldova, the 2012 Commission assessment and the fifth progress report of November 2013 found that illegal border crossings were a marginal issue.¹³ Asylum applications were low and had even decreased. Given that emigration is perceived as a way to earn money, migration not only to the EU but also to the Russian Federation is an attractive prospect to Moldovan migrant workers. The Commission did not expect a change in the volume of illegal migration.

According to Europol, however, Moldovan criminal organisations were particularly active in human trafficking, facilitating illegal immigration,

¹² [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Possible migratory and security impacts of future visa liberalisation for the Republic of Moldova on the European Union](#), European Commission, 3 August 2012; [Commission staff working document accompanying the document Fourth progress report on Georgia's implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015; [Commission staff working document accompanying the document Sixth progress report on Ukraine's implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

¹³ [Possible migratory and security impacts of future visa liberalisation for the Republic of Moldova on the European Union](#), European Commission, 3 August 2012.

organised property crime, credit card fraud, cigarette smuggling and cybercrime.¹⁴ The report stated that women and girls are often sexually exploited and men, women and children are often exploited on the labour market as nurses, baby-sitters and carers for family or the elderly. The Republic of Moldova was depicted as a transit route and a location for the storage and further processing of cocaine, despite a decrease in the number of prosecutions for crimes of this nature¹⁵

The risk level for illegal migration from Georgia is assessed differently within the EU.

The Republic of Moldova is the only country whose statistics show a decrease in the number of nationals found to be living and working in the EU without complying with legal conditions. Between 2012 and 2014 the number decreased by 1285, from 3490 to 2205 Moldovan citizens.¹⁶

A political crisis or a conflict has the potential to increase the number of asylum applications by Georgians.

In a more recent assessment (2015), the Commission remarked that the risk posed by illegal migration from Georgia is evaluated in different ways within the EU. Poland refused only 4.5 % of visa applications in 2014, whereas the Netherlands refused 20.7 %.¹⁷ Georgians are reported to have falsely declared the purpose of their visit and to have provided falsified supporting documents on a frequent basis.¹⁸ The Member States with the largest number of Georgian nationals staying legally are also the main destinations for illegal migration. The Commission's report forecasted more regular temporary and circular migration rather than a dramatic increase in migration from Georgia to the EU.¹⁹ Asylum applications are also expected to decrease once a visa-free regime is in place, as this will offer migrants an easy way to enter the EU. However, history has shown that political crises and conflicts increase the number of asylum seekers. We therefore cannot overlook the fact that, in the case of a new crisis, asylum applications would increase again.²⁰ In the context of illegal activities, it is predicted that organised crime groups may exploit the visa-free regime for the purposes of smuggling (precious metals and stones, for example). Moreover, the South Caucasus route may be exploited as an alternative route to smuggle heroin from Iran and Afghanistan.²¹

Ukrainians tend to use legal channels to enter the EU.

The rate of visa refusal was quite low for Ukrainian citizens (ranging from 0.6 % in Lithuania to 4.6 % in Sweden in 2014). In 2015, however, the number of entry refusals increased, particularly at the Polish border.²² The Commission concluded that Ukrainians tend to use legal channels to enter the EU.²³ A visa free-regime is expected to lead to an increased circularity in migration flows between Ukraine and the EU. It is unlikely, however, that Ukrainian citizens will

The number of asylum applications grew as a result of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

¹⁴ [Possible migratory and security impacts of future visa liberalisation for the Republic of Moldova on the European Union](#), European Commission, 3 August 2012.

¹⁵ [Possible migratory and security impacts of future visa liberalisation for the Republic of Moldova on the European Union](#), European Commission, 3 August 2012.

¹⁶ [Third country nationals found to be illegally present](#), Eurostat, 20 November 2015.

¹⁷ [Commission staff working document Georgia](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

¹⁸ [Commission staff working document Georgia](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

¹⁹ [Commission staff working document Georgia](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

²⁰ [Commission staff working document Georgia](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

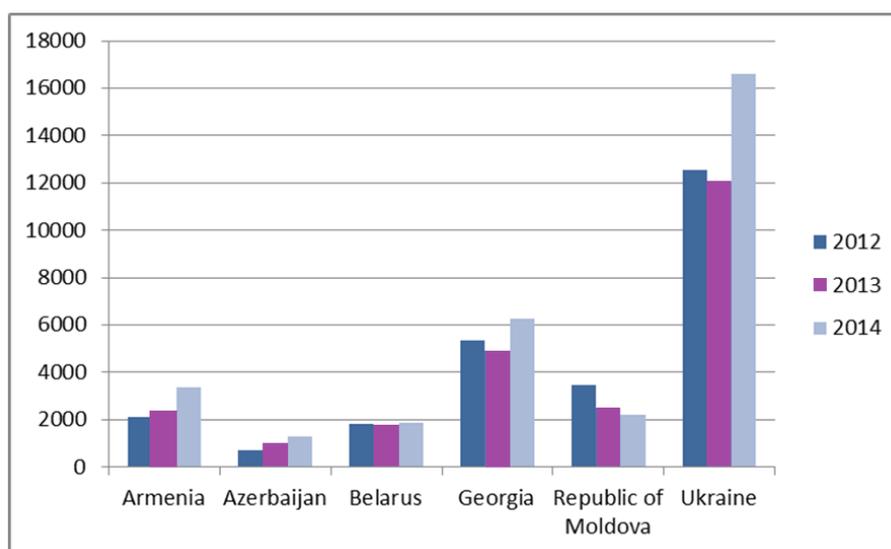
²¹ [Commission staff working document Georgia](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

²² [Commission staff working document Ukraine](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

²³ [Commission staff working document Ukraine](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

enter the EU if there is no specific need for workers. As a result of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the number of asylum applications grew significantly, despite the fact that most refugees are seeking asylum in the Russian Federation and Belarus. Although visa liberalisation may create new opportunities for organised crime activities, it is considered unlikely that visa liberalisation will result in a drastic increase in criminal activity in the EU.²⁴ The Ukrainian Black Sea port Odessa is already known as a hub for heroin trafficking to the EU. Drug flows may increase once a visa free-regime is in place. The smuggling of counterfeit alcohol, cigarettes, medicines and pesticides may also increase.²⁵

Figure 6:
EaP country nationals found to be present in the EU illegally, 2012-2014



Source: Eurostat, *Third country nationals found to be illegally present - annual data*, 2015, accessed 22 February 2016.

6 Conclusion

Considerable change to the general migration situation is not expected.

The case of the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated that visa liberalisation does not significantly alter general migration to the EU. On the contrary, positive developments were identified in terms of the number of irregular Moldovan migrants found in Member States. However, the fact that Romanian passports are issued widely to Moldovan nationals must be taken into account, as must the very poor economic conditions in the country, which limit travel possibilities²⁶.

For Georgia and Ukraine, the expectations may be somewhat similar. The Commission expects more regular temporary migration rather than a sudden and significant increase in migration. However, the political situation in both countries influences migratory flows. The current conflict in Ukraine has

²⁴ [Commission staff working document Ukraine](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

²⁵ [Commission staff working document Ukraine](#), European Commission, 18 December 2015.

²⁶ See [How to buy EU citizenship](#), EU observer, September 2012.

increased the number of Ukrainian citizens seeking asylum in the EU. If the situation in Ukraine deteriorates, the number of asylum seekers will increase further. A similar scenario is likely for Georgian citizens, should the conflict in Abkhazia or South Ossetia escalate. In any case, the size of Ukraine's population may result in higher migration in absolute figures, even if the immigrant ratio remains low.

The separate treatment of the visa-free proposal for Georgia and Ukraine was due to technical reasons.

The symbolic importance of granting visa-free travel to Georgia and Ukraine should not be underestimated. However, the separate treatment of the Georgian and Ukrainian Visa liberalisation processes, with the presentation of the Ukrainian proposal one month after the Georgian, should be considered purely technical, aside from the need for further advancement in Ukraine. Linking Georgia's and Ukraine's proposals for political reasons would have sent the wrong message to both countries.

Migrant stocks in Russia and the EU are not expected to vary unless EaP migrants are offered stable labour opportunities, which the EU does not seem likely to offer in the short term.

In any case, visa liberalisation in these countries and the temporary presence of natural persons granted by the Association Agreements is not likely to reverse the asymmetric stock of migrants in Russia and the EU. Such an outcome would only be brought about by opening the Union to the free movement of natural persons, which is a possibility only for nationals of the countries with EU membership that are party to the European Economic Area agreement (Norwegians, Icelandics and nationals of Liechtenstein) or that have signed bilateral agreements, such as Switzerland.

Politically, this option does not seem workable in the medium term. On the one hand, the European Parliament has left the door open to the possibility of the three associated countries becoming Member States in the future, as it recognises them as having a long-term 'accession perspective', i.e. a chance to apply for candidacy to the EU under the Treaties' provisions²⁷.

On the other hand, the reluctance among some Member States in the Council to grant them prospect of accession is likely to act as a brake on negotiations, and therefore postpone the prospect of the free movement of Georgian and Ukrainian citizens. On 3 March 2016, President Juncker stated that 'Ukraine will certainly not join the EU in the next 20 to 25 years'²⁸.

In this context, with the strict migration limits set by Member States, the appeal of the EAEU and particularly the Russian Federation will remain strong despite the economic decline of the bloc.

²⁷ The EP stated that these countries 'may apply to become a member of the European Union' in its resolutions of 13 November 2014 on the AA with the Republic of Moldova, of 18 December 2014 on the AA with Georgia and of 14 January 2015 on the AA with Ukraine.

²⁸ [14th Norbert Schmelzer lecture – Lecture by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, 'The European Union – a source of stability in a time of crisis'](#), The Hague, 3 March 2016.