

Impact of visa liberalisation for Western Balkan countries and Eastern partnership countries on Belgium

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Introduction

- Assessment of the impact of visa liberalisation agreements with **Serbia, FYROM and Montenegro (visa liberalisation in Dec. 2009), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dec. 2010), Moldova (April 2014), Georgia and Ukraine (March and June 2017).**
- Data driven analysis
- Identify and analyse challenges and positive effects of the visa liberalisation over a longer period

Direct impact of the visa liberalisation

- Drop in the number of **short stay visa applications**
 - E.g. Albania 2,691 short stay visa applications lodged in 2010, and only 38 applications in 2011)
- Impact on the number of **border crossings?** No view on the number of people from visa exempted countries who enter the Belgian territory over land.
- At the airport: increase in the number of **refusals of entry** (unclear travel purpose)
 - E.g. Albania 462 cases in 2011 compared to 17 cases in 2010, 3 cases in 2009).

Challenges related to the visa liberalisation

- Sharp increase of (mostly unfounded) **applications for international protection**:

WB-countries:

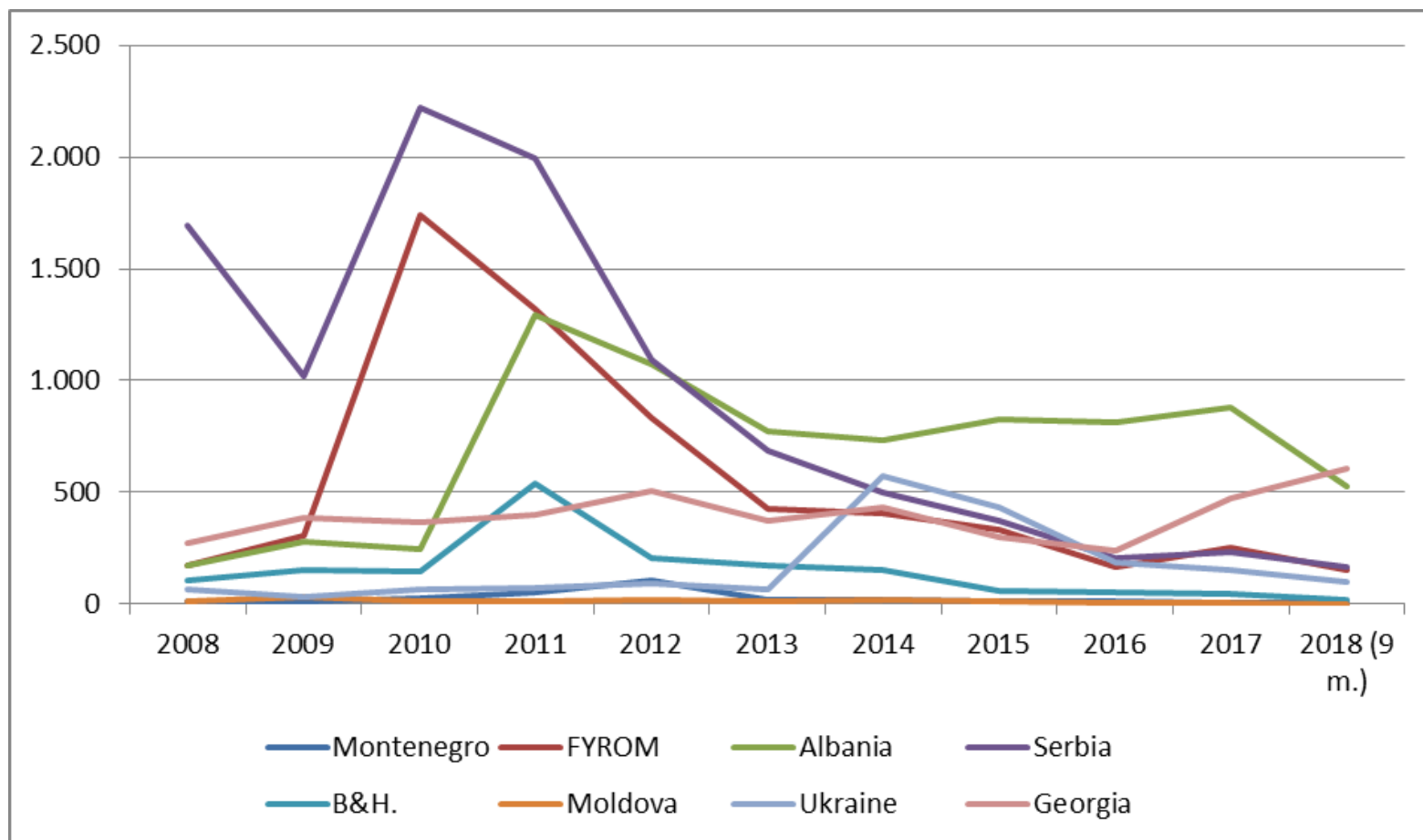
- FYROM (from 305 in 2009 → 1,740 in 2010)
- Serbia (1,020 in 2009 → 2,220 in 2010)
- Albania (from 245 in 2010 → 1,290 in 2011)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (from 145 in 2010 → 540 in 2011)

Eastern partnership countries:

- Georgia (from 240 in 2016 → 470 in 2017 and 659 in 2018 (12 nov))
- Limited impact for Moldova and Ukraine



Applications for international protection (data Eurostat)



Challenges related to the visa liberalisation

- increase in the **number of persons found on the Belgian territory in irregular residence** (most obvious 2 years after the visa lib.)

WB-countries:

- FYROM (70 in 2009 → 125 in 2011)
- Serbia (225 in 2009 → 460 in 2011)
- Albania (145 in 2010 → 600 in 2012)
- Bosnia & Herz. (70 in 2010 → 125 in 2012)

Eastern partnership countries:

- Moldova: no clear impact of the visa lib. on persons in irregular stay
- Georgia and Ukraine: too early to assess



Challenges related to the visa liberalisation

■ Public order issues and criminal offenses:

Federal Police:

- Increase in criminal offenses with suspects of Albanian nationality since 2011
- For the other countries in scope of this report, no striking evolution that can be linked with the visa liberalisation (recent increase for Georgia, but manifested itself already preceding the visa liberalisation date)



Challenges related to the visa liberalisation

■ Public order issues and criminal offenses:

Immigration Office:

- Percentage of persons involved in public order issues on the total number of persons apprehended in irregular stay is notably high for Albania and Georgia (for 2017, 36% for Albania and 66% for Georgia)

FPS Justice:

- About 10% of the total number of convicted facilitators of human trafficking in recent years have Albanian nationality
- Albania is among the main nationalities of foreign prison population in Belgium

Measures taken to address the misuse of visa lib.

- Series of **information and prevention campaigns** in FYROM, Serbia, Bosnia & H., Albania and Georgia
- Intensified **border controls** at the airport
- Increase in the **number of voluntary and forced returns**
- Introduction of the **concept of safe countries of origin** in national legislation (WB in 2011 and Georgia in 2016)
- Importance on **coordinated approach** (prevention + enforcement)
- Measures appear to be successful to counter the negative consequences of visa liberalisation (except for Albania)

Positive consequences of visa liberalisation

■ Impact on tourism:

- Ukraine (19,246 visitors in 2017) and Albania (11,449 visitors in 2017) are the 2 most important countries (staying in hotels and other acc.)
- Except for Ukraine, no significant increase immediately after visa lib.
- However: anno 2017, significant more visitors for Albania, FYROM, Montenegro and Moldova compared to the years preceding visa lib. (gradual increase)
- No effect for Serbia, Bosnia & Herz. and Georgia



Positive consequences of visa liberalisation

- **Impact on foreign trade:**
 - Increase of the total value of incoming and/or outgoing trade over the past ten years for FYROM, Bosnia & Herz. and for Serbia.
 - Ukraine most important trading partner of the countries in scope
 - Difficult to establish causal links ! Many other factors have an impact: trade agreements, trade missions, macro-economic trends, economic developments in the partner country, indexation, etc.

	Export # client of Belgium (2017)	Import # supplier for Belgium (2017)
Ukraine	48 th	56 th
Serbia	65 th	79 th
FYROM	89 th	72 th
Bosnia and Herzegovina	103 th	119 th
Georgia	108 th	113 th
Moldova	128 th	132 th
Albania	132 th	157 th
Montenegro	160 th	123 th



Positive consequences of visa liberalisation

- **Impact on residence permits issued for employment related reasons and educational reasons:**
- Number of **employment related permits** is limited for all the countries in scope of this report (only for Ukraine more than 100 in 2015 and 2017).
- Limited number of **permits for educational reasons** (about 80 per year for Ukraine, about 50 per year for Albania and Serbia, very low numbers for the other nationalities in scope).

Positive consequences of visa liberalisation

- Improved **diplomatic relations**
- **Fruitful cooperation on readmission** (high return rates)
- **Political importance** > economic benefits
- **Importance for the population** of the visa exempted countries
- **People to people contacts** may stimulate democratisation, development and mutual understanding

	Agreement on readmission	Visa liberalisation agreement
Albania	2006	2010
Bosnia & Herz.	2008	2010
FYROM	2008	2009
Montenegro	2008	2009
Serbia	2008	2009
Moldova	2008	2014
Ukraine	2008	2017
Georgia	2011	2017

Thank you for your attention

Questions ?

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