

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**PROSPECTS OF EU VISA FACILITATION REGIME FOR CERTAIN CATEGORIES
OF CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

EU	European Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
RA	Republic of Armenia
EC	European Community
SAP	Stabilization and Association Process
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
HLWG	High Level Working Group
NIF	Neighborhood Investment Facility
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
ENPI	European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument
IOM	International Organization for Migration
SCAD	Southern Caucasus Anti-Drug
VIS	Visa Information System
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Communities

ABSTRACT

With the European Neighborhood Policy launch and Eastern Enlargement successfully completed, the EU is searching for a proper balance between internal security and external stabilization that is acceptable to all sides. This paper focuses on an EU foreign policy instrument that can be a solution: EU visa facilitation and readmission agreements. The paper aims to offer analysis of the objectives, substance and political implications of these agreements. The analysis suggest that EU visa facilitation and readmission agreements from one side are means to implement a new EU security approach in the neighborhood and from another side are tools to make Europe more closer and its values more acceptable; offering more relaxed travel conditions in exchange for the signing of an EU readmission agreement and reforming domestic justice and home affairs, the EU has found a new way to push for reforms in neighboring countries while addressing a major source of discontent in these countries. The paper also discusses broader implications of these agreements. The study contains comparison part of the agreements of those countries which have already implemented EU visa facilitation regime. The paper concludes with the recommendations, namely how RA can improve border management and legislation.

The European Union's (EU) role in the outside world has changed in recent years. With the Eastern enlargement, new regions and countries became neighbors of the EU. New frameworks of cooperation, such as the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) were set in motion to closely affiliate neighboring states with the EU. A major challenge in the EU's efforts to stabilize the neighborhood was to find a proper balance with the internal security concerns. In the EU a consensus is emerging that irregular immigration and organized crime cannot be prevented through strict visa regulations.

What is Visa Facilitation?

The aim and the purpose of European Union Visa Facilitation with the contracting States (the states which have signed SAP, ENP Action Plan or the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation) is to facilitate, on the basis of reciprocity, the issuance of visas for an intended short stay (no more than 90 days per period of 180 days) to the citizens of the contracting State.

Implementation of EU Visa Facilitation Regime is the first concrete step towards the visa free travel regime, it aims to further develop friendly relations between the Parties (EU countries and Armenia) and desire to facilitate people-to-people contacts as an important condition for a steady development of economic, humanitarian, cultural, scientific and other ties.

EU Visa Facilitation Agreement will allow certain categories of citizens of the Republic of Armenia (RA) (members of official delegation, business people and representative of business organizations, journalists, persons participating in scientific, cultural and artistic activities, pupils, students, post-graduate students, participants in international sports event and drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services to the territories of Member States) to have easier access to entry visas for the EU through decrease of costs, shortening of the application period and the possibility for longer-period visas.

Armenia must recognize that this facilitation should not lead to illegal migration and Parties should pay special attention to security and readmission agreements, which allow the EU to send back illegally residing persons from Armenia.

The visa facilitation should encourage Armenia to tackle problems which are still imminent in areas such as rule of law, the fight against organized crime and corruption, and the strengthening of the administrative capacity in border control and security of documents.

From 1st January 2008 new rules on facilitation of issuance of visas are applicable.

The general requirement of personal appearance for the submission of the visa application and supporting documents will remain unaffected. For the categories of persons listed above, only the mentioned documents are requested to justify the purpose of the journey:

- Document certifying your trip's legality (invitation, official document, letter from authority of the contracting state for official delegation, certificate of enrolment in certain activity, written request from host organization ...).
- The fee for processing a visa application is 35 €. This fee will benefit all citizens of the contracting state and concern all types of Schengen visas, i.e. both transit and short-stay visas, irrespective of the number of entries. As the fee corresponds to the administrative costs for processing the visa application, it has to be paid when the visa application is submitted and there is no reimbursement in case of refusal to issue the visa (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).
- Certain categories of persons benefit from a waiving of the visa fee:

Members of official delegations who, following an official invitation addressed to the contracting state, members of national Government, Parliament, the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, Judiciary Council and Public Prosecutors Council, persons participating in

scientific, research, cultural and artistic activities, university and other exchange programs, pupils, students, post-graduate students who undertake trips for the purposes of study or educational training, exchange programs, as well as other educational or school-related activities, participants in international sport events, disabled persons, representatives of civil society organizations travelling to attend meetings, seminars, exchange programs or training courses, journalists, drivers conducting international cargo and passenger transportation services, members of the professions participating in international exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars or other similar events held in the territory of the Member States, pensioners, diplomatic missions and consulates can waive or reduce the fee in individual cases (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).

- In certain cases multiple-entry visas will be issued (for staying max 90 days per 180 days) valid for a long period of time (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).
- A decision on visa application shall be taken within 10 calendar days of the date of the receipt of the complete visa application and the supporting documents (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).
- For diplomatic missions and consular posts that have an appointment system, the period of time to get an appointment is not counted as part of the processing time. This period may be extended up to 30 days when further scrutiny is needed. In urgent cases, the period for taking a decision may be reduced to 2 days or less (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).

- Holders of diplomatic passports are exempted from the visa requirement for periods of up to 90 days per period of 180 days (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).
- Special Council Directives were introduced “Facilitation of entry for studies and pupil exchange” and “Admission for purposes of scientific research” (Council Directives 2004/114/EC and 2005/71/EC, 2004 and 2005).

It should be noted that Visa Facilitation and Readmission agreements do not apply for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ireland, The Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).

Visa facilitation is a part of a broader set of measures aiming at increased people-to-people contacts between the EU and its neighbor states. These include awarding more scholarships to students and researchers from the region, further cooperation in the areas of research, education and culture, including through participation into the relevant Community programs and agencies, and simplified rules for researchers and students for admitting them to the EU and granting them resident permits (Mission of the European Union to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006).

People-to-people Contacts

Interaction between EU and partner countries’ citizens, in particular young people, needs to be recognized as a promoter and monitor of change and should be encouraged. The EU has specifically recognized the value of cultural cooperation and inter-cultural dialogue as an integral part of all external policies and has underlined the importance of cultural cooperation in addressing political processes and challenges. Cooperation can also build on a number of popular

Community and external assistance programs, notably in the area of education, including language learning, youth and research. The development of the Information Society and the role of media in facilitating contacts between people must also be supported (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

The Commission should launch a visa dialogue with RA and expressed its readiness to further discuss this issue with a view to define detailed roadmaps setting clear benchmarks to be met by Armenia in order to gradually advance towards visa liberalization. This would enable the Council and the Commission to closely monitor progress in necessary reforms (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

For the thematic platform on Contacts between people, the Commission proposes to improve several aspects:

- *Culture* - to launch a specific program that will strengthen the capacity of cultural operators in the whole ENP region and enhance the role of culture as a force for reform, promotion of inter-communal tolerance and social cohesion. It would also support the role of youth NGOs and other actors to strengthen civil society in the partner countries.
- *Education and Research* - To significantly increase funding for the Erasmus Mundus and TEMPUS programs, thus increasing student and academic exchanges and promoting higher education reforms. To support partners working towards reforms in line with the Bologna Process and integration into the emerging European Research and Higher Education Area. To encourage partners to take advantage of the opportunities for teaching, research and conference grants in the field of European integration studies available through the Jean Monnet Program.

- *Information Society and media* - To foster cooperation among the partners' regulatory authorities for electronic communications as well as between them and the regulators of the EU Member States. To promote cooperation between the partners' and the EU Member States' authorities in charge of the development of the Information Society, including the widespread use of ICT by citizens, business and the public sector. To explore the possibilities for creating joint media projects and promoting contacts among media stakeholders of different partner countries (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

Freedom of movement is one of the basic human rights, and European Union as a leader and promoter of human rights and democracy must do everything to ease the process of enjoying it. The challenge of the Amsterdam Treaty is now to ensure that freedom, which includes the right to move freely throughout the Union, can be enjoyed in conditions of security and justice accessible to all. This freedom should not, however, be regarded as the exclusive preserve of the Union's own citizens. It would be in contradiction with Europe's traditions to deny such freedom to those whose circumstances lead them justifiably to seek access to EU's territory. This in turn requires the Union to develop common policies on asylum and immigration, while taking into account the need for a consistent control of external borders to stop illegal immigration and to combat those who organize it and commit related international crimes (Communication from the Commission, 2003).

A visa system is intended to function as both a control to protect one's own citizens from the potential threats posed by non-EU member countries' nationals and a mechanism by which to separate the "welcomed" guests from the "unwelcomed" ones. Issuing visas occupies an important place in the EU's understanding of effective and comprehensive border management.

Common Approach on Visa Facilitation

On 20 December 2006 the Regulation on a local border traffic regime was adopted, which creates a framework for conclusion of bilateral agreements between bordering Member States and contracting states. Political declarations to that effect were annexed to the relevant visa facilitation agreements (Dall, 2008).

The High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum (HLWG) drew up guidelines on a consistent framework approach on the issue of visa facilitation, which covers migration, security and external relations by request of the Permanent Representatives Committee, 20 July 2005. The Permanent Representatives Committee is examining the outstanding issues, with a view to agreeing on a Common approach on visa facilitation. The common approach deals only with visa facilitation; simplification of visa issuing procedures for nationals of contracting states who are currently under visa obligation. As regards the decision to open visa facilitation negotiations with contracting states, the common approach is based on a case by case assessment of the given country, while bearing in mind the EU's overall relationship with candidate countries, countries with a European perspective and countries covered by the European Neighborhood Policy as well as strategic partners. The merits of the case of each country must be assessed individually (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

Readmission is a priority for the EU, regarding both external relations and the area of freedom, security and justice; explicitly, a visa facilitation agreement would not be concluded if no readmission agreement were in place, without prejudice to the pace of negotiations. Nevertheless, the existence of a readmission agreement, or the willingness of a contracting state to negotiate one, does not automatically lead to the opening of negotiations on a visa facilitation

agreement. The EU shall consider other factors such as political, economic, and commercial which are exploited to achieve the conclusion of a readmission agreement (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

The EC should take account of the implementation record of existing bilateral agreements and progress on related issues in the area of justice, freedom and security (e.g. border management, document security, migration and asylum, fight against terrorism, organized crime and corruption); and security concerns, migratory movements and the impact of the visa facilitation agreement. So the substance of a visa facilitation agreement is likely to vary from one country to another, depending on the visa policy of the country concerned, the introduction of biometric passports and the existing practical problems. Differentiation in substance ensures that each agreement is modified to the specific situation and requirements of a contracting state (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

A visa facilitation agreement takes precedence over any bilateral agreement between one or more Member State and the contracting state in question, insofar as the provisions of the latter cover provisions dealt with by the Community agreement (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

The Common approach on visa facilitation presupposes that there should be inclusion of a monitoring mechanism and a suspension clause to allow the EU to suspend, at any time, the application of the agreement in case of difficulties in respect of implementation or unexpected political developments (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

The Commission carries out exploratory talks with the candidate country. These exploratory talks enable the Commission to gather the necessary technical information about a third country's visa system in order to elaborate the negotiating directives (High Level Working Group on Migration and Asylum, 2005).

Current Situation

Current EU visa policies have negatively affected the image of the European Union in Armenia and in all ENP countries. Obtaining a visa is a complicated and costly procedure for ENP citizens. Studies of Boratynski et al., 2006 revealed that the current EU visa practices are perceived as nontransparent, too expensive and troublesome in neighboring countries (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

Applicants were frequently required to wait for hours in queues, did not receive reliable information on which documents were needed, and, in case a document was lacking, needed to return personally with the missing one. Usually consulates do not accept documents sent by post or e-mail, implying that the applicant has to come again. As the relevant consulate is usually a long distance from the applicant's place, according to the EU visa policy monitoring survey (2006, p. 18), the numerous visits may turn out to be costly and burdensome. Getting a Schengen visa could therefore be a "bureaucratic and costly nightmare", as once even Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn (2006) admitted (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

Because several European countries do not have Embassies in Armenian, citizens of RA have to send their applications to other countries.

Even the European Commission noticed that existing visa policies and practices often impose real difficulties and obstacles to legitimate travel. "Long queues in front of EU

consulates are a highly visible sign of the barriers to entry into the Union” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, p. 5 in Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

The International Crisis Groups assessed that the current visa regime was seen as “fostering resentment, inhibiting progress on trade, business, education and more open civil societies, and as a result contributing negatively to regional stability” (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

In the EU a consensus is emerging that irregular immigration and organized crime cannot be prevented through strict visa regulations. One of the European Commission officials in his interview critically assessed the current visa practices saying that there is a big misunderstanding in the EU. Visa policy has nothing to do with illegal migration or trafficking in human beings. It is like the link between prohibition and drinking beer. Once you forbid alcohol at all levels, all beer drinkers become criminals. If you are limiting or suppressing the possibilities for something that is basic, like beer drinking or going to Paris for a weekend, then people invent things to be nonetheless able to do it. And they will find a way. So the EU’s visa policy is not helping a bit to reduce the number of criminals or economic illegal immigrants, because they are already there (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

EC visa facilitation and readmission agreements may also become an important element in the EU’s efforts to develop a new “global approach on migration”. During the Summit at Hampton Court October 2005 a whole set of new measures on irregular and legal migration were proposed; “mobility packages.” Mobility packages would provide the overall framework for managing such movements and would bring together the possibilities offered by the Member States and the European Community (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, p. 7 in Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

The development of Mobility packages would further bring to cooperation on readmission, irregular migration and border management. These packages go beyond facilitated travel opportunities and also incorporate ideas on promoting circular migration (temporary or seasonal migration) and legal migration based on the labor needs of interested EU member states. In the framework of this privileged form of cooperation visa facilitation and readmission policies will also be components in a comprehensive cooperation on migration issues (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

So it is understandable why the present visa barriers are a source of deep resentment to “good faith” travelers. The present system restricts mainly those who should be allowed to benefit from the EU’s proximity, with the majority being made to pay for an ill-intended minority. It is time to make some steps and tangible changes. Unless the EU simplifies and facilitates visa regime, it will further isolate the people of non-EU member countries, increasing economic and political frustrations.

A pattern of rejection and suspicion is repeated in consulates across the region as citizens attempt to gain legal access to the member states of the EU. It is a problem, as usually young people are rejected, and it is difficult for them to perceive EU in a right way without experience. The generation that has to take the region out of narrow-minded nationalism and conflict towards a democratic future is not being given the capacity to do so.

Therefore, the basic aim of this research is to discover whether EU Visa Facilitation Regime for Armenia is a tangible future or will remain a topic for ENP communications in upcoming years. For the above mentioned purposes the following research questions and policy problems are the focus of this study:

1. Can the membership in ENP be regarded enough basis for launching EU Visa Facilitation Regime for certain categories of citizens of RA?
2. What steps should be taken for EU Visa Facilitation Regime to be fully implemented in Armenia and how long is it supposed to take?
3. Which model should Armenia follow to launch EU Visa Facilitation Regime?

Methodology

For the purpose of this study in-depth interviews have been conducted with the representatives of AEPLAC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consular Department, UNHCR and Delegation of the European Commission to Armenia.

Primary data analysis was applied for this study, namely analysis of official documents from EU and RA, also analysis and comparison of Agreements between the European Community and number of republics on the facilitation of the issuance of visas and Agreements between the European Community and number of republics on the readmission of persons residing without authorization.

For this study secondary data analysis was also applied, namely analysis of Internet resources; interviews and speeches of recognised authors, publications in acknowledged periodicals.

ENP and Visa Facilitation Prospects

“The ENP offers every neighbor country the chance to choose its own path. Those who want to advance relations through the ENP are already seeing their commitment matched with new opportunities.”

Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner
(EurActiv, 2004).

Strengthening ENP

The ENP is neither a foreign policy, nor an enlargement policy. It is in fact a mix of domestic and foreign policy instruments with enlargement practices. By the help of ENP EU seeks to answer the question of how to support the transformation of its neighbors in line with EU standards, while not offering membership.

The ENP stands for an extension of the EU governance regime – norms, standards and values beyond the political borders of the Union. Its objectives range from the promotion of human rights, democratization and prosperity to the support for good governance in the neighborhood. In exchange for reforms, the EU offers the prospects of deeper economic integration and increased political dialogue (Sasse, 2007).

The ENP policy instruments include support for institution building, trade liberalization, economic reform, legislative harmonization and contribution to conflict resolution in the neighborhood (Sasse, 2007).

ENP Action Plans were agreed with Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Ukraine in 2005, with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2006, and with Egypt and Lebanon in 2007. The Action Plans are not legally binding agreements, but political documents outlining a joint set of objectives and measures to undertake for the EU and its neighbors. They aim at providing a framework for the harmonization of norms and standards of the countries in the neighborhood to the EU. The Action Plans’ stated aims are to enhance the

strategic partnership with neighboring countries “beyond cooperation and towards significant integration” (Sasse, 2007).

Lastly, relations with the EU play a key role in the potential reform of Armenian migration management. The framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, among other issues, foresees the development of a Migration Action Plan, which needs to be based on a coherent migration management strategy (EU / Armenia Action Plan, 2004).

The ENP already offers a privileged reform relationship. Now the offer became more attractive, effective and credible. On December 4, 2006 the European Commission proposes new ways to strengthen the European Neighbourhood Policy. The first 18 months of implementation of the ENP have shown good results. The new Communication sets out to increase the impact of the policy, by proposing ways that the EU can help partners who are willing to reform to do this faster and better, and provide incentives to convince those who still hesitate. The new proposals are accompanied by progress reports on the Neighbourhood partners whose ENP Action Plans began to be implemented in 2005. The Communication fed into work during the German Presidency in the first half of 2007 (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

Communication among other aspects also proposes substantially improved visa procedures for certain types of visitors. The ability of people to move and interact with each other is of the utmost importance not only within the EU but also within the neighbourhood (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

The EU cannot fully deliver on many aspects of the European Neighbourhood Policy if the ability to undertake legitimate short-term travel remains constrained. Mobility is also the most visible and immediate way in which the citizens of ENP countries could benefit from the

deeper and closer relationships. There is room for improvement regarding the issuance of visas by the EU Member States in order to be consistent with the expressed intention of the ENP to avoid the creation of separating lines and to form close relationships with our neighbours. This situation has a negative impact on the perception of the EU in neighbourhood (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

The Commission has already recommended, in the above mentioned Communication of December 4, 2006, that negotiations on readmission and visa facilitation should be initiated with ENP countries to make visa procedures less of an obstacle to legitimate travel from neighbouring countries to the EU (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

In addition, in its May 2007 Communication, the Commission considers it absolutely essential that dialogue and agreements on mobility issues be enhanced in the EU's relations with ENP partner countries. In this regard, the Commission stresses that visa facilitation for particular categories of persons should be promoted as a matter of priority, particularly for business, official and educational purposes, and suggested that mobility partnerships for ENP countries be considered, including in particular possibilities for visa facilitation, work permits and information related to seasonal labour market needs within the EU (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

Assistance to Armenia over 2007-2013 period will principally be provided under the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) which is being established to provide assistance for the development of an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness involving the European Union and the partner countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Funding levels for Armenia under the national ENPI allocation

are currently estimated at € 98, 4 million for the period 2007-2013. In addition, Armenia will benefit from allocations under the ENPI regional program and from allocations under CBC (Black Sea Program), thematic and nuclear programs. One of priorities financed during this period is People-to-people contacts. The Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) has been established with the first € 50 million contribution from the Community budget, and started to support lending to ENP partners in 2008. Overall, the Commission will allocate to the Facility an indicative amount of € 250 million over the next four years and plans to devote a further € 450 million over the period 2011-13 (in total € 700 million over 7 years) (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

In January 2007 the Commission has presented a Commission Staff Working document on the Implementation of these Council Conclusions 2003 on flexibility in issuing visas to participants in Euro-Mediterranean meetings. In this document the Commission has identified the points for discussion in relation to the improvement of the implementation of these Conclusions. One of them is to extend the scope of these Conclusions to countries participating in the ENP. The extension would mainly concern three countries covered by the ENP: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

Furthermore, with regard to internal information and procedures, the following suggestions were presented that could also be extended to ENP countries:

- to set up a list of Institutions and Organizations having their headquarters in Member States and organizing events in the framework of ENP dialogue and cooperation;
- to establish a periodic exchange of information on meetings, conferences and other events in which ENP partner participation is expected or required;

- to issue guidelines on procedures and modalities to be followed by Member States consular posts when assessing and issuing visas to persons participating in ENP events.
- to invite ENP-partners to cooperate more actively e.g. designating participants in events in sufficient time in order to improve the mobility of senior officials and experts in the future (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

In addition, the following could be considered to facilitate the process of visa applications:

- for the Commission to systematically provide a letter of support for those known to be travelling on "EU business". The relevant Commission Delegation could then monitor the progress of such applications and intervene with Member State consulates/embassies where necessary to facilitate the process;
- for Member States to fast-track such applications and, where the applicant has previously respected visa requirements, to more systematically grant multi-entry visas (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

During German Presidency the term ‘ENP plus’ was used along with Strengthening ENP, without this yet being defined in a public document in operational detail. According to scholars Emerson, Noutcheva and Popescu ‘ENP plus’ could mean: that the basic provisions of the European Neighborhood Policy plus several priority aspects (Emerson et al., 2007).

The strengthening of the standard ENP package would include:

- Deepening free trade,
- Improved ENPI,
- Visa facilitation, and
- Bigger education/scholarship programs (Emerson et al., 2007).

The resolution of European Parliament 2008 stresses that the internal political and institutional reforms undertaken by Armenia following the constitutional reform and in the context of implementation of the ENP Action Plan; encourages the Armenian authorities to continue on this path and to make further progress in strengthening democratic structures, the rule of law and protection of human rights; calls, in particular, for further efforts to be made in establishing an independent judiciary, in promoting reforms in the police, the civil service and local government, in fighting corruption and in creating a vibrant civil society (European Parliament Resolution, 2008).

It is underlined that the facilitation of movement of persons is linked to secure borders, and welcomes the Commission's initiative to promote regional cooperation in the South Caucasus in the field of integrated border management; stresses the need to facilitate efficiently the visa requirements for local border traffic; realizes that goodwill on both sides is a prerequisite for cooperation (European Parliament Resolution, 2008).

Eastern Partnership: New Prospects for Visa Facilitation

Except ENP another EU implication can be the instrument through which Visa Facilitation for Armenia can become a reality. This instrument is Eastern partnership (EP).

Currently it is an ambitious and solid framework allowing for concrete and visible steps towards a safer European living space for citizens of both – the EU and ENP states. In case the Eastern Partnership starts with a strong push of designed, motivated and successful policies, it may bring about a true change in the life of citizens of ENP states and change the perception of the EU concept in these countries.

The core of Eastern Partnership is the development of a safer regional living space, which is important both for Europe, and for the region. It must not suggest same things which can be achieved through ENP, but look from another angle. However, Eastern Partnership has to prove its conceptual difference from the existing ENP instruments. Eastern Partnership shall be inclusive and shall take full advantage of efforts of other players applied in this region (Sargsyan, 2008).

Eastern Partnership represents a step change in the EU's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It foresees far-reaching integration into the EU economy, easier travel to the EU for citizens providing that security requirements are met among other factors such as a considerable upgrading of the level of political engagement, including the prospect of a new generation of Association Agreements, enhanced energy security arrangements benefitting all concerned, and increased financial assistance. The EU intends much more intensive day to day support for partners' reform efforts through a new Comprehensive Institution Building program, and a new multilateral aspect which will bring partners together to address common challenges. The new Partnership includes new measures to support the social and economic development of six countries, and five flagship initiatives that will give very concrete evidence of the EU's support (European Commission's Delegation 2008).

President José Manuel Barroso stated: "Only with strong political will and commitment on both sides will the Eastern Partnership achieve its objective of political association and economic integration. We need to make an even greater investment in mutual stability and prosperity. This will be quickly compensated by important political and economic benefits and

will lead to more stability and security both for the EU and for our Eastern partners" (European Commission's Delegation 2008).

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner stated, "The time is ripe to open a new chapter in relations with our Eastern neighbors. The EU will continue with the successful approach of tailor-made programs on a new scale and add a strong multilateral dimension. It remains our principle though that progress must go hand in hand with reform efforts by our partners, but this new package also offers more intensive assistance to help them meet their goals" (European Commission's Delegation 2008).

Following consultations with the Eastern Partners the Commission proposes to engage more deeply bilateral relations with the Eastern Partners and to launch a new multilateral framework for cooperation. The main new points of the initiative are:

The conclusion of "mobility and security pacts", allowing for easier legitimate travel to the EU while at the same time stepping up efforts to combat corruption, organized crime and illegal migration. These pacts would also cover the upgrading asylum systems to EU standards and the establishment of integrated border management structures, etc. the ultimate goal being visa-free travel with all cooperating partners (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

The Commission will study possibilities for labor mobility with the aim of opening the EU labor market further.

Eastern Partnership presupposes more people-to-people contacts and greater involvement of civil society and other stakeholders, including the European Parliament. It will also bring additional Financial Assistance – a substantial increase from € 450 million in 2008 to € 785

million in 2013. This means a supplementary envelope of € 350 million in addition to the planned resources for 2010-2013. Moreover we will redeploy €250 million already allocated to the ENP regional programs (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

Eastern Partnership Flagship initiatives are follows: Integrated Border Management Program; SME facility; promotion of Regional electricity markets, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources; development of the Southern energy corridor; and co operation on Prevention, preparedness for and response to natural and man-made disasters (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

The Commission proposes to launch this initiative in spring 2009 at a special "Eastern Partnership Summit".

The mobility side of the pacts would reflect the recent Commission Communication on Strengthening the Global Approach to Migration and the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, endorsed by the European Council in October 2008. The main tool would be the Mobility Partnership, as identified in the framework of the Global Approach to Migration and currently tested with a number of countries. Developments in the area of visa policy will be an integral part of this wider concept. Visa policy would follow a phased approach, leading to visa liberalization under specific conditions and with accompanying measures, including financial assistance for ENP countries (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

What is done and what should be done for Visa Facilitation become a reality for RA?

The entry into force of visa facilitation agreements is to be seen as an important step along the path set out by the ENP. In order to move forward in this area, RA will have to implement relevant reforms and reinforce their cooperation with the EU and at regional level in areas such as strengthening the rule of law, fighting organized crime and corruption, and increasing their administrative capacity in border control and security of documents by introducing biometric data.

EU stated about its intention and will to include RA in the list of countries which have facilitated visa regime with EU. It can be observed in many documents and Communications about ENP.

On November 25, 2008 the first technical meeting on «Visa Facilitation» took place in Brussels and Armenia was present there with a large delegation. After this meeting it became clear that it will be appropriate to speak about Visa Facilitation agreement after EU analyzes its agreements with already signed states; evaluate progress, find out strong and weak aspects of this agreement. Thus one thing is clear that non-official dialogue has begun between Armenia and EU on EU Visa Facilitation.

The Armenian side is ready to start official dialogue and make all necessary administrative and legislative changes to launch Visa Facilitation Regime with EU countries.

The conclusion of readmission agreements is the most important requirement of EU for the countries wishing to have facilitated visa regime. Some scholars even argue that visa

facilitation agreements were introduced as incentives for countries to have readmission agreements with EU (Trauner and Kruse, 2008).

The government of Armenia is entering into agreements to prepare the legal framework for curbing the illegal migration; we have signed a number of readmission agreements since 2003 (Denmark, Lithuania, Switzerland, Germany 2006, Bulgaria 2007). Readmission agreements are initialed with Benelux countries, Czech Republic, Norway and Sweden and negotiated with other countries (Poland, Ukraine, and Russia).

Visa facilitation presupposes that RA will improve its border management and strengthen domestic and international tools. In 2008 IOM and the Swedish Migration Board carried out an assessment of the country's migration management system at the request of the Government of Armenia. The main objective of this assessment was to identify the main gaps and key areas requiring attention in the field of migration management and its legal basis in Armenia. The prioritized point was immigration of foreigners into Armenia; however emigration of Armenian nationals was also considered (Assessment Mission Report, 2008).

The Government of Armenia faces several challenges in the management of the flows of foreigners across its international borders and their ensuing stay in the country for a short or long period. The important thing that must be considered is geopolitical and geographical situation of Armenia and also rising living standards of the country. However, legal migration into Armenia is accessible to very high extent some other factors also contribute to this. These factors are the followings:

- Armenia has rather liberal and open policy on entry following its free market policies to promote tourism and investment and consolidating its role as an “education service provider”;
- A very liberal visa regime both in terms of visa categories as well as in relation to visa issuance at the borders;
- No proper inter-agency administrative structure nor a clear-cut inter-agency cooperation in place between the various ministries and agencies;
- Except for entry and exit no further tracking mechanism for foreigners is in place inside the country to verify “change in status”;
- The definition of “irregular/illegal migrant” with disproportionately high (criminal) penalties for illegal border crossing, as opposed to limited administrative penalties for other immigration offences, such as over-stay;
- The current migration realities and tendencies are at times not adequately covered by the existing legislation of Armenia. The legal provisions need to be defined in a clearer manner, with an enhanced point of reference towards EU requirements;
- A lack of a consistent system for migration data collection and analysis and not sufficiently elaborated data exchange mechanism between institutions dealing with migration (Assessment Mission Report, 2008).

Republic of Armenia is also a migrant exporting country, since 1988. Consequently, the issue of combating irregular migration flows is mainly associated with a series of problems faced by RA and other receiving states and their residents as a consequence of the illegal stay of Armenian citizens in Europe and other countries worldwide (Gevorgyan, 2006).

The new Southern Caucasus Integrated Border Management program consists of one common training component, two bilateral cooperation Armenia-Georgia and Georgia-Azerbaijan components, and three national components, enhancing strategic border management capacities across the region with the goal of introducing coherent integrated border management systems (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

RA government activities focus on preventive measures, including public awareness-raising in the regions about labor trafficking, public information about legal and illegal situations (e.g. government hotlines) and on provision of information on reliability of employers (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

Electronic migration database systems operate at some border crossing points and similar database systems are under construction for other border crossing points. However, these systems only seem to register the number of people entering and exiting Armenia but not any other specifics. Measures were undertaken to improve the visa-stickers to the required security levels. Current passports comply with minimum security standards as established by the ICAO and ISO, however, the government is examining possibilities to issue new passports in conformity with the standards established by the latest ICAO on machine readable travel documents. The Armenian Police has centralized handling and issuing of passports with digital photos in Yerevan and it is intended that this becomes common procedure country wide. The first step toward the introduction of Electronic Passports with biometric identifiers in Armenia is already done. This process is set up by presidential decree. For the beginning, it will be for diplomats, then by 2010 for the whole population (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

Together with UNHCR, the government is increasing shelter capacity and providing integration support (e.g. micro credits) to the limited number of asylum seekers (currently a few Iraqi Armenians). Law on “Refugees and asylum” is currently updating to bring Armenian legislation and practice in line with international standards in this field. Furthermore, Armenia is taking steps against labor trafficking and is cooperating with several EU countries on protection of migrant rights and on readmission (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

Armenia ratified the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1993, but further work is needed on the development of a comprehensive national anti-drugs strategy, balancing preventive and punitive measures as well as to secure adequate civil society and international input. In addition, Armenia is fully engaged in the SCAD program (Southern Caucasus Anti-Drug) at regional level (Communication from the Commission, 2008).

For successful implementation of Visa Facilitation Regime in ENP countries EU must also introduce some changes and adjustments. And some steps are already made.

On 28 December 2004 the Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation concerning the Visa Information System (VIS) and the exchange of data between Member States on short-stay visas. The purposes of the VIS are, among others, to improve the implementation of the common visa policy by facilitating the visa issuing procedure, to prevent "visa shopping", to facilitate the fight against fraud and to facilitate the checks at external borders and within the territory of the Member State. At the same time, the VIS also serves the bona fide travelers. When the VIS is launched, consular authorities of Member States will have access to previous

applications of this bona fide travelers as well, which should ease the issuing of the visa to him/her (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

In May 2006 the Commission has presented its proposal for amending the Common Consular Instructions in relation to the introduction of biometrics including provisions on the organization of the reception and processing of visa applications. With the introduction of the VIS fingerprints and photographs as biometric identifiers will be taken from the visa applicant. This proposal creates the legal basis for taking the biometric identifiers. The Commission has proposed that at the moment of submission of his first visa application the visa applicant should provide these biometric identifiers and therefore should appear in person to the consular authority. However, for any subsequent application the biometric identifiers will be copied provided that the last entry is not older than 48 months. In these cases, it would not be necessary, in general, to appear in person when applying for a visa (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

In order to avoid Member States having to install the necessary equipment for collecting biometric identifiers in every consular office, the proposal provides for the possibility to create "Common Application Centers" (CAC); several Member States work together in one building, and "outsourcing"; cooperation with external service providers. In addition the proposal introduces the possibility of "limited representation"; representation of one or more Member States solely for the reception of applications and enrolment of biometric identifiers. This proposal also aims to provide better consular representation of Member States and a better geographical coverage. The advantages of these new forms of organizing the reception and processing of visa applications are strengthening local consular cooperation, streamlining and

cost-saving for Member States and this also benefit visa applicants (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

To conclude this part it must be said that one thing is obvious; after Armenia makes all the necessary legislative and structural changes the real process of launching «Visa Facilitation Regime» will not take long. For instance, the EU-Moldovan negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission started in February 2007 and lasted until November 2007 with both agreements entered into force on 1 January 2008.

What model should Armenia follow?

Visa Facilitation Agreements are so far concluded with Serbia (2007), Montenegro (2007), Macedonia (2007), Albania (2007), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2007), Moldova (2007), Ukraine (2007) and Russia (2007).

The main purpose of these agreements is to facilitate, on the basis of reciprocity, the issuance of short-stay visas (90 days per period of 180 days). Long-stay visas remain within the authority of the member states (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

A visa-free travel regime is recognized in all agreements as the long-term objective. Though the wording of this objective somewhat varies. In the visa facilitation agreement with Ukraine and Moldova the EU recognizes the “introduction of a visa free travel regime as a long-term objective”. A similar clause is included in the agreement with Russia, where the parties reaffirmed “the intention to establish the visa-free travel”. In the agreements with the Western Balkans this statement is made more clearly; in all agreements with the Western Balkan states, it was seen as the “first concrete step towards the visa free travel regime” (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The mainly EC visa facilitation agreements concern which categories of citizens may benefit from facilitated visa procedures and what documentary evidence regarding the purpose of the journey each category must attach. All agreements include the following categories of citizens: a) members of official delegations participating in meetings, consultations, negotiations,... b) business people and representatives of business organizations c) drivers of international cargo and passenger transportation services d) members of train, refrigerator and locomotive crews in international trains e) journalists (with certificate) f) scientists and persons

active in cultural and artistic activities g) pupils, students, post-graduate students and accompanying teachers h) participants in international sports events and persons accompanying them i) participants in official exchange with twin towns j) close relatives (spouse, children, parents, grandparents, grandchildren) visiting their family legally residing in the EU k) relatives visiting for military or civil burial grounds. The agreement with Russia stops at this point. Agreements with other countries include also the category of l) persons visiting for medical reasons. The agreement with Ukraine stops at this point. The EC visa facilitation agreements with Moldova and the Western Balkans also contain: m) civil society organizations when undertaking trips for the purposes of educational training, seminars, and conferences n) professionals who participate in international exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars or similar events. The agreements with the Western Balkan states are the farthest-reaching. They also include o) tourists (with certificate or voucher from a travel agency or a tour operator) p) religious communities and only the one with Albania contains q) persons politically persecuted during the communist regime (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The agreements are almost identical in their wording. In term of categories of persons eligible for multiple-entry visas, the visa facilitation agreements with the Western Balkan states are again the more comprehensive ones.

All categories of travelers mentioned in the agreements may apply for a multiple entry-visa with the exception of tourists. However, only members of official delegations, national or regional governments and parliaments, close family members visiting their relatives in the EU, business people and journalists may apply for a multiple-entry visa with a term of validity up to

five years. The multiple-entry visa for all other categories may be valid for one year only (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The agreements fix the fee for processing visa applications for all citizens of the target country at € 35. In Russia and Ukraine agreements there is a clause that the fees increase to € 70, if the request is urgent (3 days before departure). The EC visa facilitation agreements provide certain categories of citizens with the waiving of the visa fees. The least comprehensive agreement in terms of persons benefiting from the waiving of the visa fee is the EC-Russian visa facilitation agreement, followed by the ones with Ukraine and Moldova (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The agreements with Macedonia and Serbia contain the additional clause that Bulgaria and Romania, both of which are not yet bound by the Schengen acquis, may also waive the fees for processing national short stay visas for citizens of those two countries. The decision on the visa application shall be taken within ten calendar days, though this period may be extended up to 30 calendar days, particularly when further examination of the person applying is needed (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The agreements are supervised and monitored by a joint committee composed of Commission officials, assisted by experts from the member states, and also the officials of partner countries. The committee suggests amendments or other additions to the present agreement and resolves disputes arising from it. The Commission must meet at least once a year or more often, if necessary (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The EC Visa Facilitation agreements have annexed Protocol which clarifies the implications of the agreement for the states that do not fully apply the Schengen acquis; the UK

and Ireland, not included in the territorial validity of the agreement, were invited to conclude bilateral agreements. The EC visa facilitation agreements do not apply to Denmark, Iceland and Norway either, which were asked to conclude bilateral agreements, in similar terms, with target partner country (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

In some agreements, a special reference was made to EC Regulation No 1931/2006 concerning the establishment of a system of local border traffic. Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania declared their willingness to negotiate a local border traffic regime with Ukraine. In the Western Balkans, Macedonia will negotiate one with Bulgaria, Serbia another with Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. Moldova and Romania also declared their willingness to establish a local border traffic regime (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The intention of EC visa facilitation agreements is to make the procedures for issuing short stay visas more transparent, acquire better information on the validity, the documents necessary and minimum requirements.

The visa facilitation agreement with Moldova is the only one that declares the intention to improve the EU presence in the country and set up a common application centre in Chisinau (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

The visa facilitation agreements with the Western Balkans end by admittance their intention to “give a wider definition to the notion of family members that should benefit from visa facilitation”. This mainly concerns siblings and their children. The European Community motivates Member States’ consular offices to make full use of the existing possibilities in the *acquis communautaire* for facilitating the issuance of visas to this category of persons, including in particular, the simplification of documentary evidence requested for the applicants,

exemptions from handling fees and where appropriate the issuance of multiple entry visas (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

To sum up, in terms of substance, the EC visa facilitation agreements with the Western Balkans are the more comprehensive ones, as they contain the clearest statement for visa-free travel and more categories of citizens that benefit from facilitated travel, including tourists in particular. The EC-Russian visa facilitation agreement is at the other end of the scale. “The present – not very ambitious – agreement on the facilitation of visas is an example of the essentially pragmatic way in which (the EU-Russian) relations are unfolding”, according to the assessment of the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2006, p. 6). It considered the agreement lacking a “human rights and democracy clause” and demands that “conditionality must also be a cornerstone of EU external policy on visas”, particularly with regard to the “rules of democracy and the rule of law” (European Parliament, 2006, p. 9).

The countries which already signed the EC visa facilitation agreement are not affected by the Council Decision of 1 June 2006 which “readjusted” the visa application processing costs at € 60 to cover the additional costs, which result from the introduction of biometrics and the VIS (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

Still, viewed from the perspective of the target countries, the fixing of the prize at € 35 does not imply a positive change but rather the prolongation or, in some cases, a deterioration of the status quo. In terms of applying for a short-stay visa to the long-term participating Schengen states, the situation remains unchanged (Trauner and Kruse 2008).

Other countries also have aspiration to launch Visa Facilitation Regimes. Some countries cannot go further than negotiations on a readmission agreement, like Morocco. Negotiations

have been ongoing for a number of years but have not yet borne fruit. Preliminary discussions on the opportunity of engaging in such negotiations have been also held with Algeria. The Algerian authorities have indicated that negotiating a readmission agreement for third country nationals is intrinsically linked to visa facilitation for Algerian citizens (Communication from the Commission, 2006).

Though EC visa facilitation agreements in general bring stability and security to both sides, disadvantages also must be mentioned. The agreement divides society into two groups, namely the privileged few who can get a multiple-entry visa, benefit from a simplified procedure or profit from the waiving of the application fee for the visa, and as to the remainder: the vast majority of ordinary citizens who cannot enjoy such advantages (Boratinski et al. 2006).

This can create a feeling of discrimination and lead to the conclusion that the European Union is interested only in the given country's elite. This in turn can lead to the EU being seen in a negative light. In addition, the privileged categories are to include journalists, business people and drivers, and that favoritism might easily lead to corruption (tempting some to submit counterfeit confirmation of their journalist or driver status). Should such practice become widespread, the mutual trust between the EU and partner country will suffer (Boratinski et al. 2006).

Lately the Commission made the first step towards the conclusion of short stay visa waiver agreements between the European Community and six third countries: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Mauritius, Saint Kitts and Nevis and the Seychelles. The recommendations to authorize the Commission to open negotiations are to be submitted to the Council (European Law Monitor, 2007).

"The Commission intends to open the negotiations on the visa waiver with the six countries as soon as the negotiating directives will be approved by the Council, thus providing for the full implementation of the existing legal framework", stated Vice-President Franco Frattini, Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security (European Law Monitor, 2007).

After these agreements are concluded the nationals of those countries would be transferred from negative to the positive list. Regulation (EC) 1932/2006 (adopted on 21 December 2006) amended Regulation (EC) 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the European Union (negative list), and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (positive list) (European Law Monitor, 2007).

However, the new Regulation makes the implementation of the exemptions from the visa requirement for nationals of these countries depending on the entry into force of bilateral visa waiver agreements to be concluded between the European Community and each of the countries in question (European Law Monitor, 2007).

For this purpose, the Commission prepared the recommendations to be submitted to the Council in order to authorize the Commission to negotiate – on behalf of the European Community – such bilateral visa waiver agreements with each of the six countries concerned. However, the finalization of these recommendations has been delayed due to the decision of some of the six countries to introduce a special visa regime for the nationals of several Member States on a temporary basis for the period of the Cricket World Cup 2007 taking place in the Caribbean Community (European Law Monitor, 2007).

On 25 September, 2008 the European Commission recommended on that the European Council open negotiations on agreements to facilitate the procedures for issuing short-stay visas and on readmission between the European Community and Georgia (Europolitics, 2008).

The EC drafted a mandate in view of negotiation of a community visa facilitation agreement with Georgia, providing facilitations for Georgian citizens equivalent to those granted to Russian citizens. It also drafted a mandate for the negotiation of a community readmission agreement with the former Soviet countries (Europolitics, 2008).

The negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement with Georgia, scheduled to commence in early 2009, will be completed "rather quickly," said EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner at a joint press conference with Georgia's Prime Minister Grigol Mgaloblishvili, on 1 December. She stressed, however, that the agreement has to be then submitted to a lengthy ratification process as it has to be approved by Georgia itself and also by the 27 EU member states (Europolitics, 2008).

Ferrero-Waldner confirmed that the first round of technical talks on visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Tbilisi will take place in January following the Council's approval (Europolitics, 2008).

Recommendations

Recommendations aim to reveal what measures can be undertaken to make launching of EU visa facilitation regime in Armenia a reality. Overall recommendations suggest strengthening the Armenian Government's capacity; to develop a realistic and effective migration management system that takes into account the Armenian reality and at the same time is consistent with international standards.

The Government of Armenia needs to take control of migration management and to articulate a clear vision supported by suitable policies and legislation to create clear regulations and measures:

- In terms of structures, RA government, should empower one ministry or agency which commands sufficient respect in the inter-agency environment to be an effective coordinator of migration issues across the spectrum of migration management requirements, even if other agencies remain involved in immigration management.

International practice suggests that good migration management consists of several essential interdependent tiers:

- Policy: adapt the new policy to the internal and external migration realities of Armenia aimed to control and manage migratory flows.
- Legislation: elaborate more detailed visa categories with a spectrum of aliens who can apply for an “ordinary” visa including the fact that an invitation should not automatically lead to a granted visa; establish new categorization for short and long term visas and transit visas; establish procedures for issuance of visas abroad to citizens of countries that

are not entitled to receive a visa at the border; clarify the entry requirements particularly when entry aims at long term stay (Assessment Mission Report, 2008).

The lack of appropriate information can become an impediment for the government of RA to make necessary legislative and structural changes and see things can be seen in a wrong light. So the creation of database of migration flows and outflows is very important. This can become a reality with the establishment of passports with biometric identifiers:

Priority areas:

- Creating the legal basis for gathering of “aggregated data” and migration data exchange between agencies taking into account issues of data protection;
- Empowering the National Statistics Service (ArmStat) to prepare timely statistics on migration flows as requested yearly by EUROSTAT;
- Creating legislation to establish a unified databank (ideally based on the BMIS) defining also the encoding process, the access process and the data protection.
- Create a unified migration data management system streamlining data collection, analysis and exchange between agencies involved in migration management based on a common set of migration indicators which have to be agreed and used by all institutions involved.

The coordinating role in this process would likewise be assumed by the strengthened “key” migration institution (Assessment Mission Report, 2008).

Government of Armenia cooperates on border management issues with IOM, there are several projects which have been completed and some are ongoing. In recent years IOM has undertaken migration management assessments in many countries including Armenia. Through the delivery of technical assistance IOM is becoming increasingly aware of the widening gap

between the objectives of Armenia to keep pace with the advocated procedural and technological reforms and its capacity to actually implement such reforms. Thus, Armenia is expected to participate in strategic reforms that seek to:

- Safeguard national interests through the control of who may enter or exit the country.
- Facilitate the movement of permanent and temporary entrants.
- Promote business and tourism.
- Contributing to national and regional security.
- Provide certainty about the immigration status of persons.
- Facilitate the detection of persons who may pose some threat or harm to the community (IOM, 2004).

For reaching more effective and valuable results in short period, clear guidelines and instructions for EU visa facilitation should be established in the framework of ENP or EP. The ENP Action Plan can be an example; the document with guidelines should be signed by both sides and Armenia after fulfillment of all the mentioned points would acquire facilitated visa regime with EU countries.

- A joint Euro-Armenian working group should be established to elaborate clear guidelines for RA government and other structures. This group should also monitor the implementation of the guidelines and later make the assessment.
- After visa facilitation agreement is signed a joint committee to monitor implementation should be established. The committee will bring together the Commission and representatives of the authorities of RA. For the whole process, the countries' capacity to ensure correct and effective implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission

agreements will also be taken into consideration. The Commission will provide financial and technical assistance to support implementation of the road-maps. The Commission and the Council will closely monitor progress in the relevant reforms. Once the conditions for Armenia have been fulfilled, the Commission will propose to the Council the lifting of the respective visa obligation (Dall, 2008).

The EC visa facilitation agreements explicitly aim at making all the bureaucratic routines and injustices less burdensome and more transparent, notably through various existing tools and levers, as well as through the newly installed instruments. Therefore Armenia's commitment in upcoming years may assume an important role in ensuring fair and transparent visa application procedures.

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