

ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS INDEX IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *Over the last decade until the Covid-19 pandemic, the international tourism market has seen significant growth every year, involving more and more states and regions in the tourism and travel industry. In a number of countries, tourism has become the main sphere of employment for citizens and the most important sector of the economy. Tourism thus became the source of economic, social and economic innovations and transformations. However, the pace of tourism development in each country is different and depends on a number of factors and conditions. There is no homogeneity in tourism development worldwide. The differences are generated by distinctive features and the ability to capitalise on the opportunities these distinct features offer. At the same time, the level of success of a country or region on the international market for tourism services depends directly on its competitiveness. The article focuses on the analysis of the competitiveness of tourism in the Eastern Partnership countries using the index of competitiveness in tourism and travel published in the World Economic Forum report. The analysis is performed by comparing data from 2017 and 2019 using the Promethee model. Through the research, we performed comparative analysis of the tourism situation in Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. The international report lacks data on Belarus. The results showed that most Eastern Partnership countries do not have a high level of competitiveness in tourism and travel. A positive effect is the upward trend of Georgia and Ukraine's performance in the research area. At the same time, although Ukraine, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova increased in the global competitiveness ranking, this growth was not high enough to reach Georgia's level.*

Keywords: *Eastern Partnership countries; tourism competitiveness index; environment empowerment; tourism policies; infrastructure; cultural and natural resources.*

JEL Classification: *L83, Q26, Z32.*

1. Introduction

Globally, the tourism industry is booming as a result of globalization and technological advances and has become a critical driver of social and economic growth in the world economy, as well as one of the main drivers of international trade (Liu, Cheng, OuYang, 2019). Economic growth processes associated with tourist activities generate a number of benefits for the economy (Cárdenas-Garcíaand, Pulido-Fernández, 2019). In this regard, tourism has proved to be a major activity, becoming a cornerstone of its business activity in some countries (Castro, Molina, Pablo, 2013). According to the World Tourism Organisation, in 2018, the number of arrivals of international tourists worldwide reached 1,4 billion. Already the seventh consecutive year, the growth of tourism exports (+4%) exceeded the growth of exports of goods (+3%) (World Economic Forum, 2019). The tourism industry, including the sectors: transport, accommodation, catering, entertainment and retail is of major social, cultural and political significance and makes the following substantial contributions to the development of the economy (APEC, 2000):

- 1) It is a key source of economic demand and growth in demand.
- 2) It is a major employer at all economic levels, generating sustainable employment opportunities.
- 3) It is a significant winner of the currencies.
- 4) It is an important source of business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- 5) Distribution of economic benefits within and between economies, especially at provincial level.
- 6) It contributes significantly to the achievement of the economic and fiscal objectives of governments.
- 7) It is a catalyst for public-private partnership (Hong, 2008).

Despite its contribution to economic growth, the development of the tourism sector can be hampered by a number of economic and legislative obstacles that may affect the sector's competitiveness. In this context, the World Economic Forum proposes, through the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, in addition to a methodology to identify key factors that contribute to increasing the competitiveness of tourism, and tools for analysing and evaluating these factors. The aim of this research is to analyse the tourist competitiveness of Eastern Partnership countries by using the travel and tourism competitiveness index and the Promethee method. The results of this research can detect obstacles and problems, as well as the tourism potential of the Eastern Partnership countries. In order to assess the position of tourism

competitiveness in the Eastern Partnership countries, four strands are analysed, enabling environment, travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources. Data are collected from the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report for 2017 and 2019. The report does not contain data on Belarus's tourist competitiveness. For this reason, the tourism competitiveness of five Eastern Partnership countries without Belarus has been analysed. The data were analysed using the Promethee method and were created rankings for each of the four components of the tourist competitiveness index and the general ranking of competitiveness.

2. Literature review

The popularity of the term “competitiveness” emerged in the 2000s. The significance, scope, measurement and relevance of competitiveness have been widely discussed in various disciplines such as economy, management and political science. Competitiveness is an important factor in creating national prosperity (Durand, Madaschi & Terribile, 1998); because it improves the level of living and real income, offering goods and services with some comparative advantages (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999).

A key element for defining competitiveness is competition. Without competition, competitiveness is non-existent. The definition of competition requires understanding several other dimensions in addition to competitiveness:

- 1) competitors, i.e. competition with whom. In general, when two or more independent and interested individuals (groups or nations) have interdependent interests, they may decide to cooperate or cooperate rather than compete with each other;
- 2) competing objects, i.e. something (e.g. profits, market shares, material sources, innovation of ideas, service networks, customer satisfaction, etc.) that not all groups can easily obtain. Without competing objects, competition is not possible.
- 3) competitive capacity, i.e. independent interested individuals demonstrate their special characteristics and abilities during the competitive process; the more capable they are, the easier they obtain competing objects;
- 4) competing results, i.e. competing objects are eventually distributed to competitors. If the results are not mutually satisfactory, competition can continue (Eatwell, Milgate & Newman, 1991).

The competition between tourist destinations and, implicitly, between countries, in terms of the ability to attract tourists is extremely harsh, and competition must be looked at at its real dimensions, without having a very optimistic vision, as only in

this way can all the necessary measures be taken to ensure the efficient development of a holiday destination. In order to be able to impose itself on a competitive market, the tourist destination must ensure that the quality of its own products and services is, at least, comparable to that of other destinations (Hapenciuc, 2018). In this context, the tourism industry in different countries has begun to make sustained efforts from a material, financial or informational point of view to develop the competitiveness of tourism activity internationally.

The competitiveness of a tourist destination could be defined as its ability to attract tourists (Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013). However, this definition cannot be applied without further analysis of traditional tourism performance indicators, as this activity is a service where the consumer must be moved to the place of production. Thus, the impact of consumption and production takes place in the same place, so that the impact of tourism on destination also becomes a determining factor for the future (Seyoum, 2007). Therefore, in order to make an appropriate diagnosis of competitiveness in this sector, it is important in the analysis to take into account the period during which interactions occur. In addition, the size of the tourism sector in each destination (country) depends both on the physical size of the country itself and on its attractiveness, which has made the competitive diagnosis based on performance focus on the analysis of the evolution of its flows (growth rates) rather than its levels.

Theoretical and methodological aspects, together with empirical applications that focus on tourism competitiveness analysis, have become important in recent decades, due to the evolution of the size and importance of tourism as a sector for many countries (Hong, 2008). Thus, Hong (2008), reviewing an important part of literature on this subject, indicates that there is still no common accepted and standardised definition of the competitiveness of tourism. In this respect, the vision that has a higher practical acceptance is derived from the analysis of performance in the sector (tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, etc.), as well as its similarity to commodity flows (exports), despite the fact that they are of less theoretical recourse (Bolaky, 2008).

According to the model for measuring and explaining the competitiveness of tourism proposed by Medina-Muñoz (2013), a comprehensive and appropriate way of analysis should adopt indicators from the definitional approach (e.g. indicators relating to the ability to attract visitors) and the approach to explanation (e.g. production and contextual factors) (Medina-Muñoz, 2013). The author therefore suggests a structural model in which the variables related to market share and demand growth are causally correlated with factors that determine competitiveness,

aiming at an explanatory approach with relevant political and managerial implications.

Approaches to defining the competitiveness of a tourist destination are as different as those concerning the definition of the concept of competitiveness as a whole. Thus, below, we will present a selection of eloquent definitions, we believe, for the topic addressed:

Table 1. Definitions of tourism competitiveness

Author	Definition
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2019	The competitiveness of a tourist destination is the ability to use its natural, cultural, human and capital resources efficiently, for the development and delivery of quality, innovative, ethical and attractive tourism products and services, in order to achieve sustainable growth in line with its overall vision and strategic objectives, to increase the added value in the tourism sector, to improve and diversify its market components, to optimise the attractiveness of the destination and the benefits, both for visitors and for the local community, in a sustainable perspective.
World Economic Forum, 2019	...the set of factors and policies enabling the sustainable development of tourism, which in turn contributes to the development and competitiveness of a country.

Source: elaborated by authors

In economic practice, the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, a methodology developed by the World Economic Forum (WEF), together with partners from each country under review, including international organisations such as IATA, OMT, WTTC, as well as private organisations (air airlines, hotel chains, etc.) is used in economic practice. The report is published by the World Economic Forum every two years. From a methodological point of view, the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index aims to assess the elements that ensure the development of the tourism sector in different countries through three categories of variables that affect the competitiveness of tourism globally. These categories are assessed through four subindices subordinated to Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index:

- 1) the legislative and regulatory framework affecting the tourism sector. The elements assessed in this subindex relate to those aspects which depend directly or indirectly on the country-specific political climate and institutional environment;
- 2) business environment;
- 3) infrastructure;

4) natural, cultural and human resources involved in tourism activities.

Table 2. Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index	
Enabling environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business environment - Safety and security - Health and hygiene - Human resources and labour market - ICT readiness
T&T policy and enabling conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritization of Travel & Tourism - International Openness - Price competitiveness - Environmental sustainability
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Air transport infrastructure - Ground and port infrastructure - Tourist service infrastructure
Natural and cultural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural resources - Cultural resources and business travel

Source: developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019

Each of these subindices is composed of a number of pillars defining the essential elements in the analysis of the competitiveness of tourism. These elements are: specific laws and rules; environmental sustainability; safety and security; health and hygiene; priority given to tourism; air transport infrastructure; land transport infrastructure; tourist infrastructure; IT infrastructure; price competitiveness; the human resource; affinity for tourism and travel; natural resources, cultural resources, climate change. Each of these pillars is in turn made up of a number of individual variables. The data set used to estimate these pillars includes both data from annual statistical surveys carried out by the World Economic Forum, quantitative data obtained from publicly accessible sources, as well as data from international organisations and tourism institutions and experts. The statistical study is also carried out among executive directors and business leaders who make decisions in this field. In addition, the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index methodology is not limited to awarding scores and scores to the tourism sector in various countries, but aims to create a common evaluation framework to compare performance in this area. Given the elements that make up Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, it is noted that at least a large proportion of them cannot be directly assessed by means of standardised statistical indicators being determined on the basis of opinion polls conducted either among specialists or customers.

3. Eastern Partnership Countries

In this article we aim to carry out the analysis of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index registered in Eastern Partnership Countries. That is why we believe that it is necessary to give the definition of this group of countries.

The Eastern Partnership is an initiative to strengthen and deepen European Union cooperation with the Eastern Dimension States. The countries that are part of this initiative are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine.

Officially launched on 7 May 2009, at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, the initiative is governed by the principles of common involvement, differentiation and conditionality, and common values such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance underpin this partnership.

The Eastern Partnership falls within the broader framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, designed in the context of the 2004 enlargement to avoid the creation of new demarcation lines and to bring Europe's new neighbours to the east and south closer to political, economic and values levels. (European Commission, 2020)

The Eastern Partnership is an European Union political instrument structuring cooperation with partner states on two dimensions: bilateral (signation and implementation of association agreements, creation of the free and in-depth trade area, visa liberalisation) and multilateral, which is carried out through thematic platforms and flagship initiatives. Cooperation on the parliamentary dimension of the EaP is carried out in the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly.

4. Methodology

Data used in the research were collected from the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report for the years 2017 and 2019. The report contains data on the tourist competitiveness of 140 countries, accounting for about 98 % of the world's GDP of tourism and travel. The report does not contain data on Belarus's tourist competitiveness. For this reason, the tourism competitiveness of five Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova) has been analysed. The data were analysed in the Visual Promethee software. The Promethee method is the central part of multicriteria decision analysis (Boujelben, 2017), and allows the pair comparison of alternatives. The Promethee method has a considerable place among ultra-classification methods (Ballis & Mavrotas, 2007),

because the mathematical model of Promethee is relatively easy to make decisions (Gilliams, et al., 2005). Simplicity, clarity, reliability of result and rapid and simple sensitivity analysis are important advantages of this method. The ranking is made from the highest to the lowest number.

5. Results and Discussions

According to the data published in The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, the situation of countries analysed in terms of international tourist arrivals (ITA), international tourism inbound receipts (ITIR), average receipts per arrival (ARPA), tourism and travel industry GDP and tourism and travel industry employment, Ukraine has the highest number of arrivals in international tourism between Eastern Partnership countries. Ukraine has 63.5 % of arrivals in international tourism out of total tourist arrivals in the Eastern Partnership countries. Ukraine also generates the largest employment opportunities in the tourism industry. While Azerbaijan has the largest international tourism inbound receipts (ITIR) among the Eastern Partnership countries, 35.8 % of the total ITIR for Eastern Partnership countries.

Table 3. The situation of tourism in Eastern Partnership countries in terms of environment empowerment

	ITA	ITIR (million)	ARPA	T&T GDP (million)	T&TIE (job)
Georgia	4 069 400	\$2 704,3	\$664,6	\$1 703,5	151 300
Azerbaijan	2 454 000	\$3 011,8	\$1 227,3	\$1 662,5	160 700
Armenia	1 494 800	\$1 120,2	\$749,4	\$502,8	36 900
Moldova	145 200	\$319,4	\$2 199,9	\$103,2	10 300
Ukraine	14 229 600	\$1 261,0	\$88,6	\$1 794,5	206 200

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019

5.1. Environment of tourist activity

The environment, as the first component affecting the competitiveness of tourism, contains 5 pillars (business environment, safety and safety, health and hygiene, human resources and labour market, ICT readiness). Following the analysis of 40 indicators referring to the tourism environment using the Promethee model, out of the 5 Eastern Partnership countries in 2017 and 2019, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine scored negative scores. Moldova and Ukraine have a relatively upward trend, but Armenia has had a downward trend. The reason for the decrease in Armenia's score is the safety and security subindex. The Security and Safety pillar fell from 5,9 in 2017, to 5,8 in 2019, which resulted in the 6-place fall in the 140

countries for which the Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Index was calculated, i.e. the 34th place fell to 40th on this pillar.

Table 4. The position of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of environment empowerment

	2017				2019			
	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score
Georgia	0,1391	0,1878	0,0487	100	0,1517	0,1778	0,0261	100
Azerbaijan	0,0840	0,1378	0,0538	89,43	0,0119	0,0892	0,0773	75,43
Armenia	-0,0115	0,0865	0,0981	73,85	-0,0131	0,0705	0,0835	71,76
Moldova	-0,0910	0,0635	0,1545	62,97	-0,0619	0,0597	0,1216	65,06
Ukraine	-0,1205	0,0821	0,2026	59,32	-0,0886	0,0625	0,1511	61,66

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 and 2019

The upward trend of Moldova and Ukraine is explained by improving the business environment, safety and security, human resources and labour market, promptness in the tourism industry.

In the Republic of Moldova the pillar of the business environment improved (from 3,8 to 4), safety and security (from 5,4 to 5,5), human resources and the labour market (from 4,3 to 4,4), ICT readiness (from 4,3 to 4,6), and in Ukraine the pillar of the business environment improved (from 3,7 to 4,1), safety and security (from 3,5 to 4,8), ICT readiness (from 4,2 to 4,5).

Two countries (Georgia and Azerbaijan) scored positive scores. Georgia has a positive trend, and Azerbaijan has recorded a descent. The reason for Georgia's rise is the ICT readiness pillar, which has increased from 4,5 to 4,9.

5.2. Travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions

Travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions involve indicators of performance and prioritisation of tourism and travel, international openness, competitiveness costs, environmental sustainability. The most important indicators used in assessing the prioritisation of tourism and travel are the development of the tourism industry by the government, the state budget allocations for tourism: museums, parks, etc., marketing and advertising to attract tourism and the country's promotion strategy as a tourist destination.

The need for visas, the opening of new air routes, the number of regional trade agreements are important indicators of international openness. Competitiveness involves ticket prices, airport costs, hotel costs, purchasing power and fuel prices. Finally, the most important indicators used in environmental sustainability are the restrictions imposed by environmental regulations, the enforcement of environmental regulations and the sustainability of the development of the tourism

and travel industry, the ratification of environmental treaties, the grubbing-up rate of forests.

Table 5. The position of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions

	2017				2019			
	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score
Georgia	0,0728	0,2804	0,2076	100	0,0565	0,2402	0,1837	100
Azerbaijan	0,0380	0,2326	0,1946	76,67	0,0263	0,2533	0,2270	94,12
Armenia	0,0598	0,1435	0,2033	93,26	-	0,1857	0,2109	84,91
					0,0252			
Moldova	0,1207	0,1522	0,2728	67,81	-	0,2120	0,2272	86,62
					0,0152			
Ukraine	0,0696	0,2370	0,1674	99,35	-	0,2011	0,2435	82,04
					0,0424			

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 and 2019

23 indicators have been analysed. The results showed that the Republic of Moldova had the biggest increase in this chapter, from 67,81 in 2017 to 86,62 in 2019. The Republic of Moldova recorded growth in all pillars of tourism policy. The highest increase and effect, respectively, had the international opening pillar, which increased from 2,1 in 2017 to 3,1 in 2019. This made the Republic of Moldova not last among the Eastern Partnership countries in terms of tourism policy, but in the penultimate place, last place being occupied by Ukraine.

5.3. Infrastructure

The infrastructure component involves air and land infrastructure and tourism services infrastructure. The most important indicators in increasing the competitiveness of tourism according to infrastructure are the quality of aviation infrastructure, road quality, rail infrastructure quality, port infrastructure quality, land transport efficiency (bus, metro, etc.) and the quality of tourism infrastructure. In this respect, the Republic of Moldova is at the end of the ranking among the Eastern Partnership countries and registered a decrease in the score from 39,52 to 36,11. The Republic of Moldova has a bad position both in the air transport infrastructure pillar (2,1 out of maximum 7), placing it 104th in the world, as well as in ground and port infrastructure (place 106) and tourist service infrastructure (104th place).

Table 6. The position of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of infrastructure

	2017	2019
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	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score
Ukraine	0,2088	0,2544	0,0456	100	0,2529	0,2971	0,0441	100
Georgia	0,0132	0,1176	0,1044	67,21	0,0853	0,1868	0,1015	70,74
					-			
Azerbaijan	0,0721	0,1838	0,1118	75,62	0,0015	0,1971	0,1985	59,45
					-			
Armenia	-0,0471	0,1044	0,1515	59,57	0,0912	0,1118	0,2029	49,66
					-			
Moldova	-0,2471	0,0353	0,2824	39,52	0,2456	0,0750	0,3206	36,11

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 and 2019

Increases in this area have been recorded by Georgia. Georgia's growth is due to improvements in airport infrastructure and tourism infrastructure. The air transport infrastructure pillar for Georgia records 2,5, thus ranking it 81st and the tourist service infrastructure pillar is 4,9, placing it 41st in the world. Georgia's tourist service infrastructure pillar is markedly detached from the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries, followed by the rankings of the Eastern Partnership countries of Armenia, which ranks 62nd worldwide and the tourism service infrastructure pillar is 4,3.

5.4. Natural and cultural resources

Natural and cultural resources have indicators such as the number of tourist attractions that are part of the world's heritage, natural attractions (parks, beaches, mountains, etc.), large sports venues, the number of cultural attractions.

Table 7. The position of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of cultural and natural resource components

	2017				2019			
	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score
Georgia	0,1518	0,3665	0,2147	69,78	0,2825	0,4325	0,1500	100
Ukraine	0,4081	0,5450	0,1369	100	0,2675	0,4750	0,2075	96,81
Azerbaijan	0,1250	0,3500	0,2250	67,64	0,0700	0,2950	0,2250	64,37
Armenia	-	0,2997	0,3250	57,73	-	0,2925	0,3000	55,11
	0,0253				0,0075			
Moldova	-	0	0,6596	35,66	-	0	0,6125	13,44
	0,6596				0,6125			

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 and 2019

The results of the research showed that during the analysed period Georgia increased, while the rest of the countries decreased tourist competitiveness in terms of natural and cultural resources. The Republic of Moldova is very bad at the natural

resources pillar, which is 1,7 (out of 7) in 2019, placing the country in the world's 139th place in 140 countries, i.e. the second-last place in the world in the natural resources index. It should be noted that all five Eastern Partnership countries are low on this indicator. Armenia alone ranked 100th in the world rankings, ranking 95th in the world, with Georgia ranked 105th, Ukraine 116th and Azerbaijan 123rd. Eastern Partnership countries also have low values in the index of cultural resources. In 2019, the lowest value of cultural resources index among Eastern Partnership countries is the Republic of Moldova, with a value of 1,2 (out of 7), placing the country 117th out of 140 in the world ranking. Ukraine ranks 55th, Azerbaijan 57th, Georgia 79th and Armenia 91st in the world.

5.5. General position of tourism competitiveness in the Eastern Partnership countries

In this part of the research, the general position was investigated, i.e. enabling environment, travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources.

Table 8. General situation of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of tourism competitiveness

	2017				2019			
	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score	Phi	Phi+	Phi-	Score
Georgia	0,0941	0,2068	0,1127	100	0,1303	0,2218	0,0915	100
Ukraine	0,0482	0,1960	0,1478	91,19	0,0223	0,1827	0,1604	80,46
Azerbaijan	0,0705	0,1846	0,1141	95,36	0,0192	0,1707	0,1515	79,95
Armenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0,0306	0,1218	0,1524	77,88	0,0296	0,1297	0,1593	72,52
Moldova	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0,1821	0,0699	0,2521	57,29	0,1423	0,0934	0,2356	57,77

Source: Developed by authors based on The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 and 2019

The results of the analysis of 90 indicators of tourism competitiveness among the Eastern Partnership countries have shown that Georgia has maintained its leading position in the group and Ukraine has managed to increase its tourist competitiveness between 2017 and 2019 and ranks second among the Eastern Partnership countries, surpassing Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan moves from 2nd to third place. Armenia and the Republic of Moldova retained their positions in the Eastern Partnership since 2017.

6. Conclusions

The results showed that although Moldova and Armenia improved their own position in the world rankings (Moldova climbed from 117th to 103rd and Armenia from 84 to 79), they did not change their positions in the overall ranking of the tourist competitiveness of the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia and Ukraine also rose in the world rankings (Georgia 70th rose to 68th, and Ukraine from 88 rose to 78). Azerbaijan retained its 2017 position in 2019 (the 71st place in the world), but lost a position in the Eastern Partnership countries, yielding to Ukraine.

Most countries try to use the advantages of the tourism industry by providing adequate opportunities and infrastructure. The region of partnership countries is an attractive place for tourism because it is not yet widely explored by tourists. The tourism industry has not developed in some countries; as a result, it is not successful to attract tourists. The tourism industry in today's world is the world's leading tourist industry after its positive economic, cultural and social effects. In many countries tourism is considered an important resource for business activities, revenue generation, employment and international exchanges. As the results show, most Eastern Partnership countries do not have a good competitiveness power in tourism and travel. A positive effect is the upward trend of Georgia and Ukraine's performance in the research area.

Analysing the overall situation of the tourism and travel competitiveness index in the Eastern Partnership countries and the evolution of 2017 and 2019, it could be concluded that although Ukraine, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova increased in the global competitiveness ranking, this growth was not so high that it could reach Georgia's competitiveness level.

Based on the results of this research, several recommendations can be proposed to improve tourism hospitality in the Eastern Partnership countries.

National tourism authorities should invest in capacity building of staff directly involved in tourism activities, such as language learning, business techniques and e-tourism, the environmental and socio-cultural impact of tourism, history, national flora and fauna, etc.

The Eastern Partnership countries should recover the insufficient infrastructure needed to develop a viable tourism industry. Action programmes for the development of tourism infrastructure should focus on promoting economic, cultural and social incentives.

The quality of tourism infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities, access routes, transport and communications, should be improved and adjusted to European Union standards. This would mean creating a safe environment for tourists during their journey by promoting safety and health measures. It is important to train the

local population to involve them in tourist activities and promote existing attractions and tourist resources available.

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