Accreditation Expert Group Report on Higher Education Programme

Higher Education Programme Name, Level of Education

HEI's Name

Date(s) of Evaluation: 21 January 2022

Report Submission Date

Tbilisi

HEI's Information Profile[1]

Name of Institution Indicating its Organizational Legal Form	LEPL - Ilia State University (Joint Masters programme with University of Glasgow and University of Tartu)
HEI's Identification Code	204861970
Type of Institution	University

Higher Education Programme Information Profile

Name of the Programme	Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES)
Level of Education	Master
Qualification Granted[2]	Master of Caucasus Studies (Ilia State University) International Master (University of Glasgow; University of Tartu)
Detailed field and Code	0388 Interdisciplinary – includes social sciences, journalism and information management
Indication of relevant secondary education subject/subjects/group of subjects (In case of Integrated teacher Bachelor's and Master's programme and Teacher training programme)	
Language of Instruction	English
Number of ECTS Credits	120
Programme Status (Authorized/ Accredited/Conditionally Accredited/New/Internationally accredited) indicating the relevant decision (Number, Date)	Accredited (26.01.2018, Decision No. 20.)

Expert Panel Members

Chair (Name, Surname, University/organization/Country)	Dibyesh Anand, University of Westminster, UK

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[1] In case of joint programme, please indicate the HEIs that carry out the programme. If the joint programme is carried out in collaboration with the foreign HEI, indicating ID Number and Organizational-legal form is not obligatory

[2] If the programme is carried out in collaboration with the foreign HEI and the formulation of the qualification granted after the completion of the programme is different, the qualification is indicated according to the respective university

Member (Name, Surname, University/organization/Country)	Ivanna Machitidze, New Vision University, Georgia
Member (Name, Surname, University/organization/Country)	Tamta Tskhovrebadze, International Black Sea University, LLC. Georgia
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Member (Name, Surname, University/organization/Country)	Nana Pirtskhelani. Caucasus University LTD. Georgia

Accreditation Report Executive Summary

- **General information on the education programme**

The programme is a two-year Masters in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies with a focus on Georgia/Caucasus in the second year. It is a genuinely international programme where enrolled students will get experience of at least three institutions. The specific programme we investigated involved Universities of Glasgow, Tartu and Ilia State.

- **Brief overview of the accreditation site-visit**

The site visit was online via Zoom on Friday 21 January 2022. The panel met University representatives, programme directors, academics, officials, students and external stakeholders.

- **Summary of education programme's compliance with the standards**

The programme fully meets various Georgian, European and International Standards

- **Summary of Recommendations**

Two small recommendations are made under 2.4 and 3.1

- **Summary of Suggestions**

While we found the programme to be excellent, there are a few suggestions for improvement and they are highlighted under different headings below. The programme will be served by a better and clearer student feedback system where the views of the students can be ascertained at regular intervals and suitable interventions made at different stages of the programme to support students from diverse backgrounds. Currently, the feedback from the employers seems to be taken every three years – this ought to be more frequent to make the programme more responsive.

- **Summary of best practices (If Applicable)**

The cross-institutional collaborative working, the diverse range of teaching methods and topics, the balance between academic, practical, local, regional and global knowledge.

- **In case of accredited programme, summary of significant accomplishments and/or progress (If Applicable)**

Compliance of the Programme with Accreditation Standards

1. **Educational programme objectives, learning outcomes and their compliance with the programme**

   A programme has clearly established objectives and learning outcomes, which are logically connected to each other. Programme objectives are consistent with the mission, objectives and strategic plan of the institution. Programme learning outcomes are assessed on a regular basis in order to improve the programme

1.1 Programme Objectives
Programme objectives are clearly articulated and practiced. Cutting across different institutions and countries, this is a unique programme that brings together research, academic, and practical skills that are cross-cultural and cross-institutional. The programme allows for sufficient flexibility for the students while offering rigorous methodological and knowledge-based training to them in the first year in two different institutions. The Georgia part of the programme (second year, two semesters, involving optional courses, obligatory Internship and the MA thesis) follows a clear structure and fits the overall objectives of the programme. This international programme allows for creation of advanced postgraduate students who are genuinely international as well as well-versed in the politics/geopolitics/culture of the region, including Georgia.   The objectives connected to regional specialism, multi-disciplinarity, language skills, cross-cultural awareness through mobility, and independent research are strongly met by the programme design. It also works in practice.   The programme claims to be responsive to labour market needs and demands. The documents provided refer to evaluations done by the employers through focus group interviews. However, the panel felt more needs to be done to engage with the employers and get their feedback and re-evaluate the programme. There is limited indication of established mechanism of permanent communication with the employers, including formal or informal. On the other hand, as a best practice, some of employers mentioned that their suggestions to improve the programme were considered by the programme administration.   The programme is very clearly linked with the high-level institutional Mission of internationalisation. The information around the programme is public and accessible.
Evidences/indicators   - The mapping of programme Learning Outcomes, Syllabi of the range of courses, the feedback from the interviews, the commitment and clarity of the programme directors, and the Self-evaluation report indicate a well-thought and suitably rigorous MA programme. The high-level institutional commitment to supporting the programme as part its own Mission is a big strength.   - Interviews with the programme administration and quality assurance department.   - Self-evaluation report.
Recommendations:

o NA

Suggestions for programme development:
o The programme director highlighted the greater student interests in culture and diversity of Georgia than in Geopolitics. The programme description indicates that it is more connected to geopolitics and international relations rather than culture. Given the low student number and the varied interests, the panel suggests minor changes be made to how the programme is advertised and presented so that culture is flagged up as important as geopolitics. The panel also suggests more frequent evaluation of the labour market's needs and demands and establishing of a mechanism of permanent communication with the potential employers (International Organizations, NGOS and Public sector) at least once a year.

Best Practices (if applicable):
o The partnership across the institutions as well as working culture where all organisations are seen as equal partners. The balance between research methods, language training, academic scholarship, Internship, and research comes across as excellent.
In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress
o NA

Evaluation
o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard ☐ **Complies with requirements X** ☐ Substantially complies with requirements ☐ Partially complies with requirements ☐ Does not comply with requirements

1.2 Programme Learning Outcomes
➢ Programme learning outcomes describe knowledge, skills, and/or the sense of responsibility and autonomy, students gain upon completion of the programme; ➢ Programme learning outcomes assessment cycle consists of defining, collecting and analysing data; ➢ Programme learning outcomes assessment results are utilized for the improvement of the programme.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

- o The programme learning outcomes are clear, coherent, ambitious, and fit for purpose. They tie in closely with the programme objectives and are suitably realistic and ambitious. They would pass muster in Georgian, European as well as international standards. Based on the documents, the panel is comfortable to accept the claim that each partner institution has clear mechanisms for setting appropriate learning outcomes as well as coordinating with each other. The Programme clearly identifies various ingredients (scholarly knowledge, skills, behaviour, and responsibilities) required to succeed. There is an inbuilt mechanism to offer flexibility and coordination through regular consortium meetings. At the same time, there are differences across the institutions in terms of working and academic culture and this is not a weakness but a strength of the programme. In general, students are offered clarity from the very beginning and there is a clear division of labour across the institutions. Various stakeholders seem to be familiar with the learning outcomes. However, a coordination across institutions must not be taken for granted and stronger mechanisms developed to share developments outside the twice a year consortium meeting.

Evidences/indicators

- o The self-evaluation report, the various documents submitted as evidence, and our interviews with the various stakeholders offered us confidence about the rigour and suitability of the programme.

Recommendations:

- o NA

Suggestions for programme development:

- o As the Self-Evaluation report identifies, the institution needs to invest time and energy in better systems of evaluating learning outcomes at a more regular basis rather than wait for long term accreditation exercises. In various parts of the world, diversifying and decolonising academic knowledge is seen as crucial by the students and academics. Given the specificities of the region – with asymmetry of power between a larger country and its neighbours, it will suit the long-term interest of the programme to engage more with issues of diversity and decolonisation.
- o The coordination through twice a year Consortium meeting is commendable but even better mechanisms need to be developed for in-between meeting coordination.

Best Practices (if applicable):
o   Coherence of the learning outcomes that base themselves upon teaching offered in three different institutions.

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress
o   There has been greater focus on range of topics offered around Georgian culture and politics.

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard
 	
    ☐ **Complies with requirements X**
 	
    ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
 	
    ☐ Partially complies with requirements
 	
    ☐ Does not comply with requirements

Programme's Compliance with Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
Educational programme objectives, learning outcomes and their compliance with the programme	X			

2. Teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of programme mastering

Programme admission preconditions, programme structure, content, teaching and learning methods, and student assessment ensure the achievement of programme objectives and intended learning outcomes.

2.1 Programme Admission Preconditions
Higher education institution has relevant, transparent, fair, public and accessible programme admission preconditions

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

The admission criteria for the Erasmus Mundus International Master in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IMCEERES) is fair, transparent and easily accessible to all potential applicants.

Panel found that full information about the admission criteria is provided at the CEERES – ERASMUS Mundus web page (http://ceeres-erasmusmundus.eu/postgraduate/erasmusmundus/ceeres/howtoapply/) as well as at the Ilia State University web page. As clarified during the interviews with the representatives of the Consortium Universities, University of Glasgow coordinates the applications' submission process as well as fulfils the key coordinating role in the process together with the University of Tartu.

Apart from the selection criteria, "Frequently Asked Questions "offer a detailed overview of all additional questions that could be relevant for potential applicants.

As for the admission package, the required documents are the following:

- A copy (or copies) of official degree certificate(s) (if an applicant has already completed the degree);
- A copy (or copies) of official academic transcript(s), showing full details of subjects studied and grades/marks obtained;
- Official English translations of the certificate(s) and transcript(s) (additional details are available about all possible options to prove knowledge of English);
- Two supporting reference letters on headed paper. Academic references are preferred. References should be dated within the last 12 months;
- Evidence of the English Language ability (if the first language is not English);
- CV – Europass CV Format;
- A copy of the photo page of your passport;
- Scholarship Application Form.

In order to be considered for scholarship, all applicants should submit their application packages in January for entry in September. The Accreditation Experts' Group interviews with programme students and graduates confirmed that every stage of the application process as well as deadlines were well known to applicants.

The English language certificate can be uploaded after the scholarship outcomes are available. The programme outline also offers information on the admission criteria. In case Georgian nationals apply to the joint master programme at Ilia State University, they have to pass National Unified Entry Exams. The detailed information is available at naec.ge web page.

The panel is fully satisfied with these.

Evidences/indicators

- IMCEREES Programme Outline;
- Interviews with Programme representatives, students and graduates;
- CEREES official web page - ceeres-erasmusmundus.eu/postgraduate/erasmusmundus/ceeres/howtoapply/
- Self-assessment Report.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions for programme development:

N/A

Best Practices (if applicable):

- Admission criteria for the programme allows for competitive selection and thus lead to entry of highly-qualified students with interests in the area of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Eurasia Studies.

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

Evaluation

☐ X **Complies with requirements**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

2.2 Educational Programme Structure and Content

Programme is designed according to HEI's methodology for planning, designing and developing of educational programmes. Programme content takes programme admission preconditions and programme learning outcomes into account. Programme structure is consistent and logical.

Programme content and structure ensure the achievement of programme learning outcomes. Qualification to be granted is consistent with programme content and learning outcomes

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

Based on the information obtained from the CEERES self-evaluation report and documentation package submitted by Ilia State University as well as interviews with the Programme Coordinators from three Universities (University of Glasgow, Tartu University and Ilia Uni) and Administration, the expert panel concluded that it is in full compliance with the University Regulations for development and approval of educational programs as well as rules and procedures for introduction, revision and cancellation of programme changes. CEREES is a double degree programme with the first degree offered - International Masters (IntM) in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (coordinated by University of Glasgow, UK and University of Tartu, Estonia) and in case of Ilia State University, the degree the Programme offers is Master of Caucasus Studies (MCS) in Political Science (Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies).

Hence, through their first year of studies, first semester students spend at University of Tartu and take the core courses "Introduction to Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies", one of the languages offered and "Social Sciences Methodology" (24 ECTS of core courses), optional courses are offered as well (6 ECTS). During the second semester which students spend at the University of Glasgow, they select one of the pathways, Central and Eastern European Studies, Russian Studies, Eurasian Studies, Western Balkans (20 ECTS of core courses and 10 ECTS of elective courses). During the second year, students spend their time at Ilia State University. Internship is the only core study component (6 ECTS), while elective courses constitute 24 ECTS; this is in addition to the thesis.

The programme is subject to continuous and regular evaluation. As the interviews with the Programme Coordinators from the University of Glasgow and Tartu University demonstrated, the Consortium meeting gathers two times a year to discuss all quality-related issues and introduce any revisions throughout the process. Additional meetings are scheduled, in case there is a need for it. For instance, programme's content and learning outcomes that underwent rigorous revision since 2018 were also confirmed by the Consortium meeting. According to the programme structure, students with an interest in the Caucasus track continue their third semester at Ilia State University and write MA thesis throughout the fourth semester. A more detailed overview of the courses offered and their compatibility with the accreditation standards is revealed in the component 2.3. As the interviews revealed, initially no expectation was there for the programme to attract a high number of applicants, however, taking into account its specific regional focus, programme representatives are satisfied with the number of annual applications and the number of applications to the Caucasus track in particular.

At Ilia State University, the Academic Head of the programme is supported by administration of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and other administrators from the Quality Assurance Department, International Relations Office, Teaching Department are involved. For those students, who choose the Caucasus track.

The content of the programme takes into account the prerequisites for admission to the programme and is in full compliance with learning outcomes. The structure of the programme is consistent and logical. The Master's Programme is structured in the manner that allows its students to develop an in-depth knowledge in the region of their particular interest, namely, Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Russia.

Evidences/indicators:

- o IMCEREES Programme Outline;
- o Interviews with Programme representatives, students and graduates;
- o CEREES official web page - ceeres-erasmusmundus.eu/postgraduate/erasmusmundus/ceeres/howtoapply/
- o Self-evaluation Report;
- o Decisions on the CEREES Programme renewal and update.

Recommendations:

- o N/A

Suggestions for programme development:

  N/A

Best Practices (if applicable):

- - CEREES MA Programme is one of a kind in Georgia where Ilia State University stands out as the key partner in the Consortium for the Caucasus Studies track. Hence, the programme potentially serves as the role model for other HEIs in Georgia to follow.

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)

Evaluation

  o

  ☐X **Complies with requirements**

  ☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

2.3. Course
- Student learning outcomes of each compulsory course/subject/module/concentration are in line with programme learning outcomes; Moreover, each course content and number of credits correspond to course learning outcomes; - Teaching materials listed in syllabi are based on the core achievements in the field and ensure the achievement of intended programme learning outcomes.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

Based on a rigorous analysis of the syllabi and programme outline provided by the CEREES Master's programme, the expert panel concluded that the learning outcomes of the core courses (divided into field-specific and transferrable learning outcomes) are in line with the programme learning outcomes. The course content and credit load correspond to the programme objectives and learning outcomes. As mentioned in the assessment of the 2.2. accreditation component, the programme offers a large variety of optional courses along with the key core courses (administered by the University of Glasgow and University of Tartu) that equip students with knowledge and skills to create innovative approaches for the study of the region, and combine the variety of approaches characteristic for scientific discipline with the view to conduct own independent research.

The course syllabus, submitted for evaluation by each of the three Universities, offers a detailed information about the prerequisites (if any), distribution of independent and contact hours, list of compulsory and additional literature to be used through the course. As the interviews with the programme student and graduate of the Caucasus track demonstrated, they could choose courses of their interest from among the optional courses offered at Ilia State University. As the language of instruction is English, the programme offers access to an impressive variety of sources in the field at both University of Glasgow and University of Tartu as well as Ilia State University, which was emphasized by both the of two respondents.

At the same time, for Ilia State University optional courses, all of them would benefit from updating the core literature used, although in most cases a considerable part of the readings offered are the classical readings for the issue in focus, without which studying democratization process, energy issues, memory politics or ethnic conflicts would not be possible. Still, such

influential readings should be enriched with newer readings, preferably, scholarly papers, analytical assessments etc.

The interviews with the academic and invited staff, Head of the CERRES MA Programme as well as students and graduates confirmed a continuous, non-interrupted and systematic evaluation of the courses' content and the ability to assess acquired skills and knowledge in the framework of the course through suggested evaluation components.

What regards the assessment methods, while the Quality Assurance Department at Ilia State University is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the institutional evaluation and monitoring of the CEREES programme, the Consortium Management Board is entrusted with responsibility for ensuring the common standards for the examination of students. The individual course handbooks contain all the necessary information on the calculations of final grade as well as evaluation components.

According to the programme requirement, a student is allowed to proceed to the Dissertation stage in case of an average score of 12 with minimum 75% of the credits at a score of 9 or higher, all credits at a score of 3 or higher. It is worth noting that Ilia State University is free to use its own assessment system with the view to award the degree of Master in Caucasus Studies, although the assessment should be submitted to the Consortium's Board of Examiners together with the detailed outline. Ilia State University undertakes to provide a clear and complete information regarding the correspondence between own grading system and the one at the University of Glasgow. Final examination is also overseen by the Board of Examiners.

According to the documentation provided by Ilia State University, Master's thesis and Internship (in case of the Caucasus track) stand out as benchmarks for measuring the attainment of the learning outcomes, while the optional courses offering an opportunity for systematic and critical assessment of the complex and multifaceted processes in the region, namely, democratization, energy-related issues, cultures of the Caucasus, Soviet Past, contemporary foreign policies of the South Caucasus, Russian language and others can be taken by students throughout the third semester of studies and do not constitute benchmarks due to their elective status.

Evidence/indicators:

- Mapping of programme learning outcomes;
- Programme and syllabi;
- Interviews with the Head of the Programme (Ilia State University), University of Glasgow and University of Tartu representatives;
- IMCEREES web page;

- Ili University web page.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions for programme development:

- Ilia State University optional courses would benefit from updating of their syllabi. While most of the classical readings are used for issues including democratization process, energy issues, memory politics or ethnic conflicts, there is room for incorporation of new and critical literature.

Best Practices (if applicable):

- The Programme offers a rich variety of optional courses which allow students to obtain an in-depth knowledge in the issue of interest.

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)

Evaluation

□ **X Complies with requirements**

□ Substantially complies with requirements

□ Partially complies with requirements

□ Does not comply with requirements

2.4 The Development of practical, scientific/research/creative/performance and transferable skills
Programme ensures the development of students' practical, scientific/research/creative/performance and transferable skills and/or their involvement in research projects, in accordance with the programme learning outcomes
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements   While employers are fairly satisfied with the programme– as was evident from the documentation and our interviews – a concern was raised about the some skills gap amongst the

students. While the employers emphasised their satisfaction with the academic writing or verbal skills, they felt some of the students had insufficient knowledge of the South Caucasus region; thus, for them, a deeper understanding of the local context remains a challenge. Moreover, applying the theoretical knowledge into the current local or regional political analyses is the least developed skill among the programme students, according to them. The necessity to improve practical and analytical skills as well as collection of data was highlighted. As for the transferable skills, the strengthening of communication skills was identified. While the gap around regional knowledge is understandable because the Internship takes place in the third semester (first out of two semesters that the students spend at Ilia State University), more effort can be put into introducing the students to the regional context before they are sent for internship.

Based on the students' and alumni's evaluation reports as well as interviews, more discussion opportunities and integration of modern teaching methodologies were stated as the key aspects of the programme. However, the expert panel acknowledges that some of its observation may be affected by the very small sample size. We'd expect the University to listen to both the students and employers more frequently and address concerns.

Internship is an obligatory component and has 6 ECTS. The process as well has a well established evaluation component by the internship organization supervisor and faculty internship supervisor. Students have possibility to choose internship organizations out the organizations list the university provides (currently listed seven organizations though the expert panel had access to only two memorandum) in agreement with the University/Faculty/Programme. Although expanding the internship organizations would give students possibility to choose out of variety of internships, expanded working areas and gain practical experience more effectively.

In order to meet potential labour market needs and demands, the self-evaluation report mentions evaluation of the programme by the employers; the document folder includes focus group interviews with seven employers and describes challenges and opportunities for the programme. Although those employers are main stakeholders as well as the key providers of the internships for the students enrolled in the programme, the limited amount of the focus group participants and topics limits the opportunity to provide deep and comprehensive picture of the demands and needs of labour market. The panel would suggest the programme expands its pool of employers stakeholders.

During the meeting with employers group, the panel understood that the University consults them once every three years. We did not come across an established mechanism of permanent communication with the employers, including formal or informal. While some of the employers mentioned that their suggestions to improve the programme were considered by the programme administration, it will be better for the programme to have more regular feedback mechanism.

Evidences/indicators

- o Interviews with the employers, as well as with students and alumni;
- o Interview with the faculty administration, head of the programme, quality assurance department;
- o Self-evaluation report;
- o Students' Evaluation Report;
- o Employers' Evaluation Report;
- o Practice/ Internship Guidelines;
- o Employers Focus group and interviews

Recommendations:

The programme should conduct more regular, deep and comprehensive evaluation of the labour market's needs and demands, with a more extensive qualitative component and engage with the employers.

Suggestions for programme development:

- o The programme should offer greater opportunities for the students to deepen their perspectives on local and regional development.
- o To expand cooperation and memoranda with relevant non-governmental organizations, research centres, and, if necessary, relevant private structures operating in Georgia, in order to provide more internship opportunities;
- o To establish a mechanism of permanent communication with the potential employers (International Organizations, NGOS and Public sector) at least once a year;
- o Better mechanism to listen to the feedback from the students and other stakeholders

Best Practices (if applicable):

- - Small classes allow students and lecturers to lead free, open, and effective discussions.
- - Mandatory internship with 6 ECTS and a strong evaluation component provides a student with additional motivation to use their abilities to a greater extent at work.

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o N/A

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ Complies with requirements

☐ **Substantially complies with requirements X**

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

2.5 Teaching and learning methods
Programme is implemented using student centred teaching and learning (SCL) methods. Teaching and learning methods correspond to the level of education, course content, student learning outcomes and ensure their achievement

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

The teaching methods the CEREES MA Programme offers, allow students to obtain the knowledge and skills that meet the learning outcomes envisaged by each course as well as the programme overall. The documentation provided as well as interviews with the key stakeholders confirmed the variety of teaching and learning methods in the framework of the courses. The majority of the courses offer lectures and seminars, writing method, discussion and debates. Apart from the methods mentioned above, some courses as "Energy and Economics of Transition in the South Caucasus" emphasize inquiry-based learning and individual project-based learning; "Forms and Consequences of Europeanization" employs case study method; "Foreign Policy of the States of South Caucasus" and "Political History of the Caucasus" – group work as well as combined lecture/seminars session with a practical component.

Expert panel welcomes the strong emphasis on research papers as the final evaluation assignments for the overwhelming majority of the courses. Another strong feature of the CEREES Programme is the argumentative and analytical essays as part of the midterm evaluation along with the focus on discussions and debates. Some courses such as "Comparative Ethnopolitics" offer a synopsis (book review) as part of the midterm evaluation. Other courses as "History of the Baltic Sea Region" emphasize individual critical analysis and reflection papers which is an overall feature of the core and optional courses in the programme. Although in the conditions when in some optional courses the number of students could be rather small, interviews with the programme's student and graduate showed that there were cases when they were the only student in the class, hence, course instructors may introduce slight changes into the initial teaching methods envisaged by the course.

Evidences/indicators:

- Programme and syllabi;
- Interviews with the Head of the Programme (Ilia State University), University of Glasgow and University of Tartu representatives;
- Self-assessment report;

- IMCEREES web page; - Ili University web page; - Self-assessment report.
Recommendations:
Suggestions for programme development:
Best Practices (if applicable):
In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress
Evaluation   ☐ **X Complies with requirements** ☐ Substantially complies with requirements ☐ Partially complies with requirements ☐ Does not comply with requirements

2.6. Student Evaluation
Student evaluation is conducted in accordance with established procedures. It is transparent and complies with existing legislation
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements   o   The range of assessment methods as well as the clarity around evaluations is a strength of the programme. A student can be expected to develop a range of skills through the diversity of evaluation and assessment methods. However, extra effort is necessary for all the students negotiating three different institutions to be comfortable with different methods and study culture and great acknowledgement of this from the programme team would help make the experience more seamless. Overall, while acknowledging the difference between partner institutions, the student should be able to map out what mark

indicates which level of competence. Thesis supervisory process as well as thesis evaluation criteria are clear.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report and paperwork submitted. No student concern was raised around evaluation.

Recommendations:

- NA

Suggestions for programme development:

- Given the special needs and European requirements for adjustment for students with disability, alternative assessment methods should be available in each module to cater to different needs of the students. For instance, a student with specific mental health problems may find class presentations very challenging; an alternative assessment in the form of one to one presentation or even a longer essay might not disadvantage the student.
- To integrate more of the modern teaching methodologies (discussions, round-tables, case-studies, etc) into courses in order to strengthen communication, data collection, and analytic skills;
-

Best Practices (if applicable):

- NA

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- NA

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements	

Programme's Compliance with Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
Teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of programme mastering	X			

3. Student achievements and individual work with them

HEI creates student-centred environment by providing students with relevant services; programme staff ensures students' familiarity with the named services, organizes various events and fosters students' involvement in local and/or international projects

3.1 Student support services
Students receive appropriate consultations and support regarding the planning of learning process, improvement of academic achievement, employment and professional development
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements   The expert panel on the basis of the information collected through programme, the Self-evaluation Report, relevant enclosed documents, and the site visit discovered that all necessary students support services are in place. Student support services represent one of the strongest parts of the Programme. Quality Assurance Office of the Faculty and programme staff provide students with relevant information regarding consultations and supporting services available at the University during the permanent meetings. The flexible approach of the academic staff to the syllabus elaboration process gives students the unique possibility to receive the specific scientific information according to their interest and to achieve the learning outcomes envisaged by the programme. Meanwhile, regular meetings with focus groups are conducted as part of the programme to research student satisfaction. We note the effective mechanism of feedback that exists among the programme's administrative and academic staff and students on paper though based on some student comments, we are not fully confident that what is on paper is actually working in practice. However the very small sample size of students we interacted with means

our views cannot be expressed with full certainty and so we give the institution a benefit of doubt in this.

Another important point for students is the possibility to be included into the university's internal electronic system "ARGUS" to manage and support the educational process. The online system "Argus", which supports interaction between students and lecturers, enables students to receive an online consultation with regard to the issue or the course of his/her/their interest. It is noteworthy that official e-mail, telephone communication, official groups created on social networks, and the official website of the university are extensively used to inform students about the learning process activities. However, the student group interviewed during the session did mention confusion around information. In addition, through this communication system, students regularly receive information about the curriculum, the learning process, study materials, and various activities, as well as information about the ongoing and planned conferences, research projects and grants.

Moreover, panel cannot be certain that the students have a high awareness of Career services which is led by Students Affair Department. Based on interviews most of the students or alumni of the programme have never used their support or have never got emails about the upcoming events, conferences or vacancies. There is clearly a communication gap that can and must be rectified by the University.

The University library delivers permanent training to students on how to use the University's electronic resources and databases. At the same time, the Academic Writing center provides students with additional support regarding the uses of Moodle and Turnitin resources. However, as was identified during the interview with a relevant focus group, the various tools of the electronic communication system related to the learning process are a little bit confusing for students. In this regard, it is highly recommended to deliver detailed instructions and comprehensive information on the use of existing electronic platforms and communication tools to every student at the very start of their time at Ilia State University.

It is significant to note that during their studying students have the possibilities to be involved in different kinds of international or local events. In addition, the International Relations Department provides students with the accessibility to information on international opportunities (summer schools, international conferences, other training, etc. www.elearning.iliauni.edu.ge). Via the active cooperation with relevant research organizations such as Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Georgian Foundation for Strategic and

International Studies (Rondeli Foundation) and Media Development Foundation (MDF), programme students gain the possibility to take the internship in the above-mentioned organization and to conduct research activities.

Evidences/indicators

- o Interviews during site visit with different stakeholders**;**
- o Self-evaluation report;
- o Syllabi of the courses in the programme;
- o Electronic platform for organizing study process "ARGUS" – www.argus.iliauni.edu.ge;
- o Rules of Academic Programme Supervisors and Working Groups activities;
- o Information on consultation hours http://argus.iliauni.edu.ge;
- o Ilia State University Library http://library.iliauni.edu.ge;
- o Academic Writing Center webpage: http://writingcentre.iliauni.edu.ge
- o Memorandum Agreement among partner universities.

Recommendations:

- o It is highly recommended to deliver detailed instructions and comprehensive information on the use of existing electronic platforms and communication tools to every student at the very start of their time at Ilia State University.
- o

Suggestions for programme development:

- To increase awareness of career services and student affairs departments among international and local students in order to provide more opportunities for them to adapt to local environments and gain knowledge of local development through job opportunities, conferences, events, and so on. Moreover, the communication mechanism by the student affairs department ought to be strengthened

Best Practices (if applicable):

- o

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o

Evaluation

  o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements X

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

3.2 Master's and Doctoral Student supervision
Master's and Doctoral students have qualified thesis supervisors

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

The expert panel, on the basis of information collected through programme Self-evaluation Report, relevant enclosed documents, and Interviews with Master thesis Supervisors, students, and graduates along with a review of relevant documents (CVs and University regulations) are convinced that the Programme meets the accreditation standards in this regard. Every Master student benefits from a person-to-person approach, has a qualified supervisor and if necessary, depending on the topic, an external co-supervisor who has scientific-research experience relevant to the topic of the thesis. Within the framework of this programme, during the third semester of study, the student gets a master thesis supervisor from the university where he/she/they are located during the second year (in this programme, that institution is Ilia State University). The University has an elaborated document, which defines the rights and obligations of the supervisor and the supervision process. Supervisors conduct consultations with students on a regular basis. Supervisors are affiliated academic staff members, have a strong academic background as well as professional experience in Eurasian studies.

Evidences/indicators

- Interviews during site visit with different stakeholders**;**
- Self-evaluation report;
- Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES)
- Programme Curriculum
- Academic and invited staff involved in the programme implementation and their CVs
- and documents;
- Master's papers;
- Rules of Academic Programme Supervisors and Working Groups activities;
- Information on consultation hours http://argus.iliauni.edu.ge*;*

Recommendations: ○	
Suggestions for programme development: ○ Better and obligatory documentation of record of a few student-supervisor meetings	
Best Practices (if applicable): ○	
In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress ○	
Evaluation o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard ☐ **Complies with requirements** ☐ Substantially complies with requirements ☐ Partially complies with requirements ☐ Does not comply with requirements	

Programme's Compliance with Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
Student achievements and individual work with them	X			

4. Providing teaching resources

Programme human, material, information and financial resources ensure programme sustainability, its effective and efficient functioning, and achievement of intended objectives

4.1 Human Resources

- ➢ Programme staff consists of qualified people who have necessary competences in order to help students achieve programme learning outcomes;
- ➢ The number and workload of programme academic/scientific and invited staff ensures the sustainable running of the educational process and also, proper execution of their research/creative/performance activities and other assigned duties. Balance between academic and invited staff ensures programme sustainability;
- ➢ The Head of the programme possesses necessary knowledge and experience required for programme elaboration. He/she is personally involved in programme implementation;
- ➢ Programme students are provided with an adequate number of administrative and support staff of appropriate competence

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

- o The programme is led and managed by very committed academics and there is a strong research-based teaching culture across the institutions. The range of academic expertise offered on the Programme is impressive from politics and international relations to cultural studies to geopolitics and regional studies. The teachers and instructors range from established to new scholars. The programme is mostly based on academic staff with some reliance on invited staff for expertise. Workload does not seem to be an issue for the programme. The Programme had sufficient administrative and quality related support. The collective programme director structure works well; their role in coordinating across institutions is most vital. The participation in the ERASMUS Mundus Project is of clear benefit. The support for research and teaching of the academic staff within Ilia State University is clearly evidenced. The panel did not find much evidence of cross-institutional working beyond the programme. While this is not essential, it would be healthy or academics from Ilia State University to explore and develop greater research and professional cooperation with other members of the Consortium beyond this specific programme.

Evidences/indicators

- o Self-Evaluation report, CVs of the teachers and the interview results.

Recommendations:

- o NA

Suggestions for programme development:

- o The panel did not have the opportunity or remit to do a gender-analysis of the programme. Panel did note that most academics who were available for the interviews were men. Expert panel does hope that male-dominance is not the norm in the

programme and we'd strongly encourage the programme to be aware of fundamental academic principle of making education more diverse and equitable.

Best Practices (if applicable): o World class researchers contribute to the programme in various areas including international relations, democratisation and other aspects of Caucasian Studies.
In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress o Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)
Evaluation o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard ☐ **Complies with requirements X** ☐ Substantially complies with requirements ☐ Partially complies with requirements ☐ Does not comply with requirements

4.2 Professional development of academic, scientific and invited staff
➤ HEI conducts the evaluation of programme academic, scientific and invited staff and analysis evaluation results on a regular basis; ➤ HEI fosters professional development of the academic, scientific and invited staff. Moreover, it fosters their scientific and research work
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements o Based on the various documents and our interviews, panel concluded that the institution provides sufficient opportunities to the teaching and research staff to enhance their skills and knowledge. Training and staff development is provided for pedagogical matters. However, we did not come across specifics of how academics are evaluated and supported beyond the existence of institutional level institutes/centres to support this.
Evidences/indicators o Various documents and the interview

Recommendations:
○
Suggestions for programme development:
○
Best Practices (if applicable):
○
In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress
○
Evaluation o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard ☐ **Complies with requirements** ☐ Substantially complies with requirements ☐ Partially complies with requirements ☐ Does not comply with requirements

4.3 Material Resources
Programme is provided by necessary infrastructure and technical equipment required for achieving programme learning outcomes
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements Based on the self-assessment, as well as the submitted documents and interviews with students, alumni and library stuff, it is clear that adequate University infrastructure and material-technical resources are available to the students of the programme without any restrictions to achieve the learning outcomes. Mandatory literature defined by syllabi and other resources electronic or hard copies are available; E-learning platform and Moodle are used for that purpose extensively. Using either of them is optional for the lecturers, but MA thesis, must be submitted on e-learning platform.

Though on both electronic platforms syllabuses and spreadsheets are posted, including assessments, etc, it can lead to some confusion for the students. While. through the e-learning portal, communication between the lecturer and the student is carried out (alongside emails and personal communication via phone), we'd encourage the institution to seek some consistency.

The library offers individual and group training session to equip students with necessary skills in order to navigate in an electronic scientific database; Electronic databases can be accessed from the library of the University: EBSCO; JSTOR; Scopus; ScienceDirect; Clarivate Analytics; Pivot TM; ProQuest Dissertations; SAGE; LexisNexis Academic; Political Science Complete; Humanities Source; Project MUSE; Cambridge Journals; etc. Currently established "one window" principal is used for searching the necessary literature in all databases. During the visit, inspection of books and materials took place based on random sampling and all the requested literature was acquired.

Ilia State University has close cooperation with the Glasgow and Tartu University libraries in order to share experience and advance library services and this should be useful for the students

Evidences/indicators

- ○ Interviews during site visit with different stakeholders including library stuff**;**
- ○ Self-evaluation report;

Recommendations:

- ○ N/A

Suggestions for programme development:

- ○ N/A

Best Practices (if applicable):

- ○ Training opportunities by the University library for students to navigate into scientific data bases

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- ○ Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

4.4 Programme/faculty/school budget and programme financial sustainability

The allocation of financial resources stipulated in programme/faculty/school budget is economically feasible and corresponds to programme needs.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

o The programme is a flagship one for the Ilia State University and we were reassured of full and high level backing to it by the Senior Management. The low student number, on the surface, can be disappointing but the fact that this specific Caucasus related Programme is part of a much larger consortium run programme means that the numbers will have a natural limit. The balance between scholarships and self-funded place seem to be satisfactory. The University also seems committed to not only supporting the students on the programme but the teachers too.

Evidences/indicators

o Interview with the Senior Management

Recommendations:

o NA

Suggestions for programme development:

o NA

Best Practices (if applicable):

o NA

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

o NA

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

Programme's Compliance with Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirement	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
Providing teaching resources	X			

5. **Teaching quality enhancement opportunities**

   In order to enhance teaching quality, programme utilizes internal and external quality assurance services and also periodically conducts programme monitoring and programme review. Relevant data is collected, analysed and utilized for informed decision making and programme development on a regular basis.

5.1 Internal quality
Programme staff collaborates with internal quality assurance service(s) available at the higher education institution when planning the process of programme quality assurance, creating assessment instruments, and analysing assessment results. Programme staff utilizes quality assurance results for programme improvement.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

Internal Quality Assurance mechanisms at Ilia State University are defined by the regulation of Quality Assurance Office. Internal quality assurance services include the systemic surveys and evaluations of curricula, services and resources. QA Office focuses on longitudinal surveys and analyzing assessment results to maintain the effective monitoring and identify development tendencies. In accordance with the evaluation of the submitted documents and online accreditation visit findings, programme evaluation is consistent and assessment results are utilized for programme improvement. Furthermore, the broader consortium evaluation includes annual programme evaluation process overall, heads from all the three universities share the

principles and mechanisms among partners to ensure proper internal quality evaluation of the programme. Programme quality assurance is based on the PDCA - "plan –do – check - act" principle.

Students, graduates, employers, academic and invited staff are involved in the internal quality assessment process. QA office cooperates and encourages involvement of the programme staff to ensure constructive evaluation process, therefore, self-evaluation report of the programme is prepared with active involvement of academic and administrative staff. However, the report leaves an impression that it is not consistently filled.

Quality Assurance Office coordinates identifying the weaknesses and challenges while working on self-evaluation report with the staff involved in the programme. Necessity-based and need assessment surveys are used by internal quality evaluation process for purposively identifying the problems and ensuring quality improvement interventions. These surveys are targeted to identify the necessities, needs and wants of the students with low academic performance, those whose who are transferred through mobility, international students, students with suspended status and etc. As it was revealed from interviews during remote accreditation visit, students and graduates have certain expectations to contribute to the development of services and teaching process by providing their recommendations. Thus, facilitating more active participation of all interested sides in these necessity-based and need assessment surveys would help programme to develop further.

The documentation as well as interviews with programme directors from the partner institutions also gave us confidence that quality assurance is taken in every institution. In fact, quality assurance seems to be a key driving factor in keeping the programme together. The panel was reassured that through the twice a year consortium meetings as well as frequent contacts between programme directors and quality staff, a coordinated approach is adopted.

Evidences/indicators

- o Self-evaluation Report;
- o Quality Assurance Department Statute;
- o Concept of Internal Quality Assurance of Ilia State University;
- o Survey reports (focus groups of students, alumni, lecturers, employers);
- o Remote interviews.

Recommendations:

- o Proposal(s), which should be considered by the institution to comply with requirements of the standards

Suggestions for programme development:

- o Facilitate more active participation of all interested sides in necessity-based and need assessment surveys.

Best Practices (if applicable):

- o Practices, which prove to be exceptionally effective and which may become a benchmark or a model for other higher education programmes

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

5.2 External quality

Programme utilizes the results of external quality assurance on a regular basis

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

External quality assurance at Ilia State university is mainly carried out through Accreditation and Authorization Processes. As the programme is unique and international, it has an advantage to actively cooperate with other consortium partners. External evaluation of the programme is done by each partner university every year, in accordance with the rules and regulations in the respective country. Within 3 years, programme goes through the overall consortium evaluation process at Tartu University based on the action plans and results negotiated by the partners. Consortium aims to ensure a consistent follow-up process for considering the actions taken by the institutions.

The programme got its first accreditation in 2018. Accreditation experts did not have recommendations and identified only one suggestion. Institution expresses receptibility and openness external quality assurance results.

Evidences/indicators

- o Self-evaluation Report;
- o Quality Assurance Department Statute;
- o Accreditation Expert Group Report (2018);
- o Remote interviews.

Recommendations:

- o

Suggestions for programme development:

- o

Best Practices (if applicable):

- o

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

- o

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

5.3. Programme monitoring and periodic review

Programme monitoring and periodic review is conducted with the involvement of academic, scientific, invited, administrative staff, students, graduates, employers and other stakeholders

through systematically collecting and analysing information. Assessment results are utilized for programme improvement

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with standard requirements

For programme development and service improvement QA Office at Ilia State University ensures constant monitoring and periodical assessment. Assessment and evaluation process involve internal and external actors. Surveys with academic and administrative staff, students, graduates and employers are central tools for implementing strategic visions of the university. Monitoring process is based on the principles of transparency and sharing, participation, continuity, academic integrity and freedom, accountability. At the end of every compulsory course students evaluate the course by completing course evaluation form, if the students number is too low in order to get representative results, focus groups are used for validity. Necessity-based and need assessment surveys are used in order to identify improvements and priorities, to ensure effective monitoring process. Results of the evaluation process are distributed among the stakeholders and are used for programme improvements.

Submitted Students and Graduates Survey Results, as well as the interviews showed that there is an expectation from the students to have more interactive, discussion-based lectures and student-centered study process. For this purpose, it can be useful to make classroom observation and peer assessment more active. Programme has a vital possibility to conduct the peer assessment by colleagues from the same programme and from the partner universities as well. This would result in increasing the teaching quality, especially in relation to the students concerns and improving modern teaching methods and skills.

Programme ensures benchmarking for the best available practices. Since the programme is unique with its scope and interdisciplinary nature, analog programmes have not been analyzed, however, consortium partners have shared their experiences and practices to comply with the modern tendencies and requirements. The best international and domestic practices of the partner universities had have been used to collectively develop an international and competitive programme.

Evidences/indicators

- o Self-evaluation Report;
- o Quality Assurance Department Statute;
- o Concept of Internal Quality Assurance of Ilia State University;
- o Survey reports (focus groups of students, alumni, lecturers, employers);
- o Regulation for Academic and Invited Staff Performance Assessment;
- o Remote interviews.

Recommendations:

o Proposal(s), which should be considered by the institution to comply with requirements of the standards	

Suggestions for programme development:

o To make classroom observation and peer assessment more active for the purpose of maintaining teaching quality.

Best Practices (if applicable):

o Practices, which prove to be exceptionally effective and which may become a benchmark or a model for other higher education programmes

In case of accredited programme, significant accomplishments and/or progress

o Significant accomplishment and/or progress made by the programme after previous accreditation (If Applicable)

Evaluation

o Please mark the checkbox which mostly describes your position related to the programmes compliance with this specific component of the standard

☐ **Complies with requirements X**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

Programme's Compliance with Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
Teaching quality enhancement opportunities	**X**			

Enclosed Documentation (If Applicable)

HEI's Name: LEPL Ilia State University Joint Masters programme with University of Glasgow and University of Tartu

Higher Education Programme Name, Level of Education: Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (CEERES), Masters

Number of Pages of the Report: 36

Programme's Compliance with the Standard

Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
1. Educational programme objectives, learning outcomes and their compliance with the programme	X			
2. Teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of programme mastering	X			
3. Student achievements and individual work with them	X			
4. Providing teaching resources	X			
5. Teaching quality enhancement opportunities	X			

Expert Panel Chair's

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