SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT FERTILITY PATTERNS IN TRANSITIVE COUNTRIES: RUSSIA AND SLOVAKIA CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Paper brings some view, comparisons and comments on the recent and future fertility changes and population policies as factor of these changes, putting together Slovakia and Russia as a comparative case study. The key question solved in the study is debate over the factors and uncertainty of the possible future changes of fertility in Russia and Slovakia, thus try to answer whether divergence or convergence is coming. Potential factors of that including policy measures are under debate too.

Introduction: Can we talk about uniform model of (future) fertility in Central and Eastern Europe?

Demographic changes within post-communist countries seem to be the most dramatic in overall European 20th century ´s population development. Perhaps, the most visible changes struck fertility and union formation, being a hot topic in contemporary population studies across Europe. Abortion has changed substantially in the right way, and finally, mortality has been improving. Many studies have shown intimately how radical the changes have been so far (Kučera et. al. 2000, Bongaarts 2001, Perelli, 2005, Philipov - Spéder and Billari 2006, Thornton and Philipov 2007, Káčerová, 2005[1], and many others). Some main conclusions have been introduced, such as fertility postponement, change in timing of fertility, increase in rate of living out of wedlock. In general, the base trajectory is the same for all transforming population in Central and Eastern Europe. Some differences are noticeable by way of how mortality is developing. The former Soviet Union countries recorded decrease of life expectancy (especially male) in contrast to other countries.

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[1] KUČERA, T., et. al. (2000). New Demographic Faces of Europe, Springer, Berlin, 420 p.
BONGAARTS, J. (2001). Fertility and reproductive preferences in post-transitional societes, Supplement to Population and Development Review, Vol. 27, pp. 260-281
PERELLI, H, B. (2005). The Path to Lowest-Low fertility in Ukraine, population Studies, Vol.59, No 1. , pp. 55-70.
PHILIPOV, D. – SPÉDER, Z., – BILLARI, F. (2006). Soon, later or ever? The Impact of Anomie and Social Capital on Fertility Intensions in Bulgaria (2002) and Hungary (2001). Population Studies, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 289-308.
THORNTON, A. – PHILIPOV, D.(2007). Developmental Idealism and Family and Demographic Change in Central and Eastern Europe. European Demographic Research Papers, Vol. 3., 85 p.
KÁČEROVÁ, M. (2005). Demografické starnutie populácie Slovenska a Európy. In. Naša demografia – súčasnosť a perspektíva. SŠDS. s. 97-102 [Population Ageing in Slovakia and Europe]

Although many changes in the recent development have not yet been explained adequately (the impact of economic transformation, how the policy measures work, etc), the future brings also many prospects to scientists. The general question, we should put, is, whether convergence between Western and Eastern Europe is coming, what is a horizon for such a convergence. EUROSTAT suppose the general convergence scenario according to the latest forecast for countries. Big uncertainty is likely to be identified by that however. First, nor Western, either Eastern Europe appears to be the homogenous groups. Although some general trajectories differ distinctly, some indicators tell about necessity to delimit sub-groups of countries. Several grouping have been introduced recently (see e.g. Monnier – Rychtaříková 1992, Rychtaříková 2006, Gauthier – Philipov 2008[2]). The clear difference also within "non-transitive" European countries (EU 15) shows the study on fertility preferences by Testa – Grilli (2004). Unfortunately, no exact plus detailed cross-national analysis within overall transitional group exists. Tradition of micro-surveys consequently used in such type of analysis is not so strong in Central and Eastern Europe. Exception can also find, for instance Generation and Gender Surveys, which results used Philipov – Jasilioniene (2008)[3]. They put some very interesting findings towards differences between the countries, which belongs to the common "demographic" group according to most studies, among others the stressed a certain time-shift between Russia and Bulgaria. This finding is suitable for further generalisation about how the convergence/divergence within Eastern Europe is developing. Some other papers include all the EU 27, or OECD, but they lack the data on Russia and former post-Soviet countries.

According to some studies mentioned above, at least three main demographic groups exist within Europe. We had a special look at group of post-communist countries. The main purpose is to compare two relatively different following populations – Russian and Slovakian ones. Although both the countries belong to the transitional ones, from to regional point of view they are located in different groups. Slovakia, traditionally, is perceived as a part of Central European region, or as a part of Visegrad group. On other side, Russia is perceived rather than as a biggest country of former Soviet Union countries group. In population studies, sometimes, these two groups are dealing separately with, in rare cases they are seen antagonistically, most of all mainly Western European authors see the transitional countries to be one unit. Despite of that, Sobotka (2003)[4] shows the big differences between fertility models of Central and Eastern Europe. The question is, if it is appropriate to define two or three groups of post-communist countries. Balkan countries are sure to represent the spatial

[2] MONNIER, A. – RYCHTAŘÍKOVA, J. (1992). The Division of Europe into East and West, Population, 4, pp.129-159.
RYCHTAŘÍKOVÁ, J. (2006). Different Paths of Population Ageing: EU old and New Members Apart. Conference: The Impact of Ageing: A Common Challenge for Europe and Asia, Vienna, June 7 – 9, 2006.p.26, Online: http://www.univie.ac.at/impactofageing/pdf/rychtarikova.pdf 16.7.2006.
GAUTHIER, A. H. – PHILIPOV, D. (2008). Can policies enhance fertility in Europe? Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, pp. 1-16.

[3] PHILIPOV, D. – JASILIONIENE, A. (2008). Union formation and fertility in Bulgaria and Russia: A life table description of recent trends. Demographic Research, Vol. 19, Art. 62, pp. 2057-2114.

[4] SOBOTKA, T. (2003). Re-Emerging Diversity: Rapid Fertility Changes in Central and Eastern Europe after the Collapse of the Communist Regimes. Population. Vol. 58, No. 4, 5. pp. 451-485.

group. Some features are closer to Central Europe (at least the EU affiliation), some others more to the post-Soviet union countries (e.g. religion).

With a view to compare the future population change, we used the assumptions of the official UN, EUROSTAT (Slovakia only) and national forecasts. By help of those, we depict the future population change of fertility as follows. Russia and Slovakia share many common features, but a couple of differences have been appearing since 1989. Even though both the countries are transforming economies with many problems connected with the process, some changes have developing distinctly. For instance, both the countries have been recording a sizeable growth of the GDP since late 90s, when the former period of a ruthless drop ended. On the other side, GDP per capita, HDI and other social characteristics differ more or less. Of course, a few demographic indicators also vary substantially (e.g. abortion rate), although many are quite similar (non-marital births a. o.). This is one of the several reasons why discussion was established, to what extent can be these two countries classify within one group. We analyse especially recent and future features (since about 2006 up to 2060). It is clear, that only detailed analysis can lead to clear answers. Our view is broader by help of using general indicators, some existing theories, classifications and results of the previous studies. We put some assumptions concerning uncertainty of the future demographical changes. Discussion was set up about some sources, which might do the trajectories closer and vice versa. Finally, paper tries to define the limits beyond which the changes should not exceed.

Fertility assumptions and their uncertainty

Fertility at national level is supposed to be the key factor of the future population trajectory. European countries suffer from very low fertility in general. Except three European countries (including Turkey), all the countries are below-replacement level. Moreover, according to European Demographic Datasheet (EDD, 2008)[5] many countries were below the critical level of 1.5 in 2006, some eastern European countries below lowest-low level of 1.3. McDonald (2006) supposes that once the TFR falls below 1.5, it is very difficult then to move up it above this limit. Both the countries by EDD belong to the countries with very low fertility, although the adjusted TFR of Russia represents of 1.52, even 1.66 in Slovakia. The adjusted TFR (ATFR) takes note on the timing of fertility and its postponement (see e.g. Bongaarts and Feeney 1998). Thus, Slovakia belongs to the countries with the highest difference between the TFR and ATFR (0.42), whereas Russian difference is slightly lower, but still noticeable (0.23). But, the otherness between cohort fertilities seems to be quite fair-sized. The Slovakian women of cohort born in 1965, ergo near the end of their reproduction rate, finished its reproduction at level of 2.09 children per woman, whereas their Russian opposites at 1.67. V4 countries demonstrate the higher level of fertility of the cohort 1965 as compared to former Soviet Union countries (especially Russia, Belarus and Ukraine). In contrary, the

[5] LUTZ, W. et. al. (2008). European demographic datasheet 2008, issued by VID, IIASA and PRB.

TFR and ATFR seem to be closer one another, generally being lower than in Central European countries.

All these facts could cause several factors. First, the extent of postponement following by recuperation, might vary. Looking at the above numbers, the actual intensity of current fertility in Slovakia is supposed to be little higher than in the Russian federation is. The mean age at first childbirth in Russia and Slovakia could be considered the evidence too. The clear difference in mean age (24.2 and 25.9 respectively) combined by above depicted numbers can indicate the higher share of postponed births in Slovakia than in Russian federation.

As depicted at figure 1, the current timing of fertility inhere different features. The maximum of fertility in Russia is seen in ages about 5 years lower than in Slovakia. The maximum of fertility is situated in category of 25-29 females in Slovakia, whereas in Russia is still the maximum in the category of 20-24. Slovakian females aged 20-24 outbalanced the 25-29 ones in terms of intensity last in 2000. The changes since 1990 are depicted at figure 1. The drop is broadest in the age category of 20-24 in Slovakia especially, and vice-versa in category of 30-34 old Slovakian, thus confirm broader postponement than in Russia was.

Let us have a look at future fertility changes in Russia and Slovakia. We used all the variants of the 2006 revision of UN population forecast and available national forecasts. The latest Slovak national forecast (medium scenario) was issued in 2007. We also used the EUROSTAT 2150 convergence scenario for Slovakia. Figure 2 depicts the future TFR assumptions of the UN forecast.

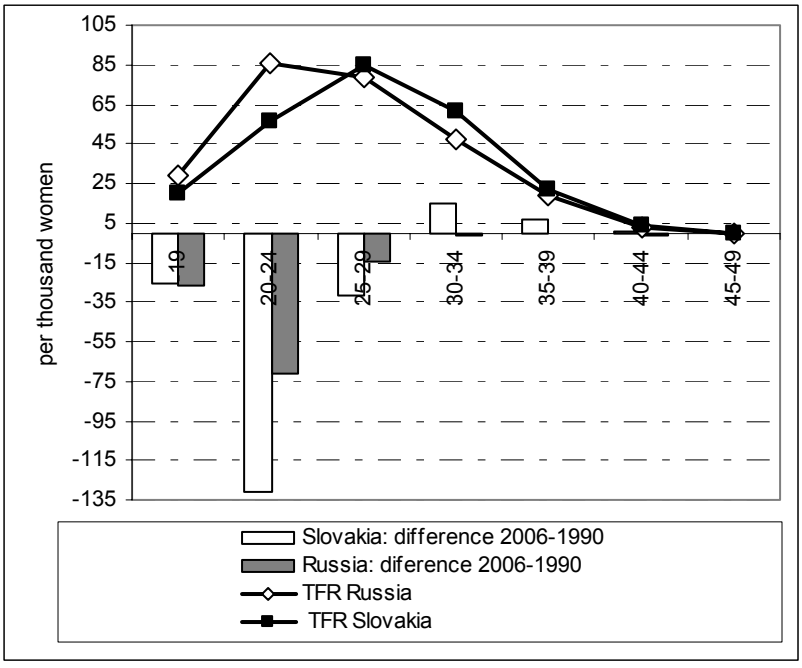

Figure 1: RECENT AGE-SPECIFIC FERTILITY

Source: www.gks.ru, www.infostat.sk/vdc

All variants are quite optimistic for both the countries, though low variant predicts too pessimistic and unrealistic decrease up to 2020. On other side, high variant predicting 2.1 – 2.2 is likely to be overestimated a little. Thus, the confidence interval is wide considerably.

The medium variant seems to be very probable, or the TFR perhaps will rise to slightly higher level. Medkov (2006)[6] also predicts the 2050 level of 1.85 for Russian population. Slovakian official forecast ´ s assumption represents the level of 1.6 in 2025 already. On the other side, the EUROSTAT is quite pessimistic as far as the Slovak fertility presenting 1.4 in 2050.

What is the main reason of uncertainty in fertility assumptions in countries such as Russia and Slovakia? Firstly, the rate of recuperation is very uncertain. The postponed births have risen up in Slovakia recently, especially in regions, which were initial ones by changing the fertility behaviour, that means the big cities particularly. We assume, that if certain sub-population changed the timing indicated by postponement sooner than others, the recuperation will come sooner, too. Hence, Slovak TFR may increase more distinctly and sooner than Russian one, and vice versa.

Why can demographer be optimistic about future increase? Looking at Slovak cohort fertility, the cohorts of 1960s record above- replacement level, whereas the generations of 1970s are not likely fall below 1.6 according to estimation of Potančoková (2008)[7]. Of course, several factors mentioned by Lutz – Skirbekk (2005)[8] can influence antagonistically, the factor of recuperation in transitional countries is likely to overbalanced the derogating factors. Of course, if there is no scope for recuperation, TFR may going to be lower in future. This is indicated by low difference between TFR and ATFR (tempo distortion, for such comparison see also Gauhtier – Philipov, 2008 p. 5, cited above) connected with lower cohort fertility according EDD (cited above). From this point of view, Russia is close to European average. Among first 15 countries with the highest difference ATFR minus TFR belong Central, Eastern and Southern European ones exclusively, except for Ireland. Russia reached 21st place, therefore to be close Austria and Germany with which they represent the special group characterised by TFR, ATFR and cohort fertility to be below the European average, and difference ATFR minus TFR to be above the average. Having a short look at difference cohort fertility (1965) minus ATFR, it is clear to say that only seven countries record the value of 0.4 and more (Poland and Slovakia from the V4 group included), whereas Russia is located below average. Our theoretical ground is as follows. The higher is the difference between TFR (ATFR) and cohort fertility of females at the end of reproduction age, respectively, the bigger is the chance to rise current TFR (or remain at the same level at least) because of two following reasons. First, existing potential to recuperation exists, second, the difference is a clear indicator that something broad happens within female reproductive generations, luckily just something temporal one, that can only time-series

[6] MEDKOV, V. (2006). Depopulacionnije prognozy cislennosti naselenia Rossii v 2005-2050 gg. Online: www.demographia.ru/articles_N/index.html?idR=22&idArt=254 [Depopulation forecasts of population Size of Russia in 2005-2050]

[7] POTANČOKOVÁ, M. (2008). Plodnosť žien na Slovensku v období rokov 1950-2007 v generačnom pohľade, Infostat, Bratislava, 59 p. [Female Fertility in Slovakia from the Cohort Perspective in Period 1950-2007]

[8] LUTZ, W. – SKIRBEKK, V. (2005). Policies Addressing the Tempo Effect in Low-fertility Countries. Population and Development Review, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp.699-720

Figure 2

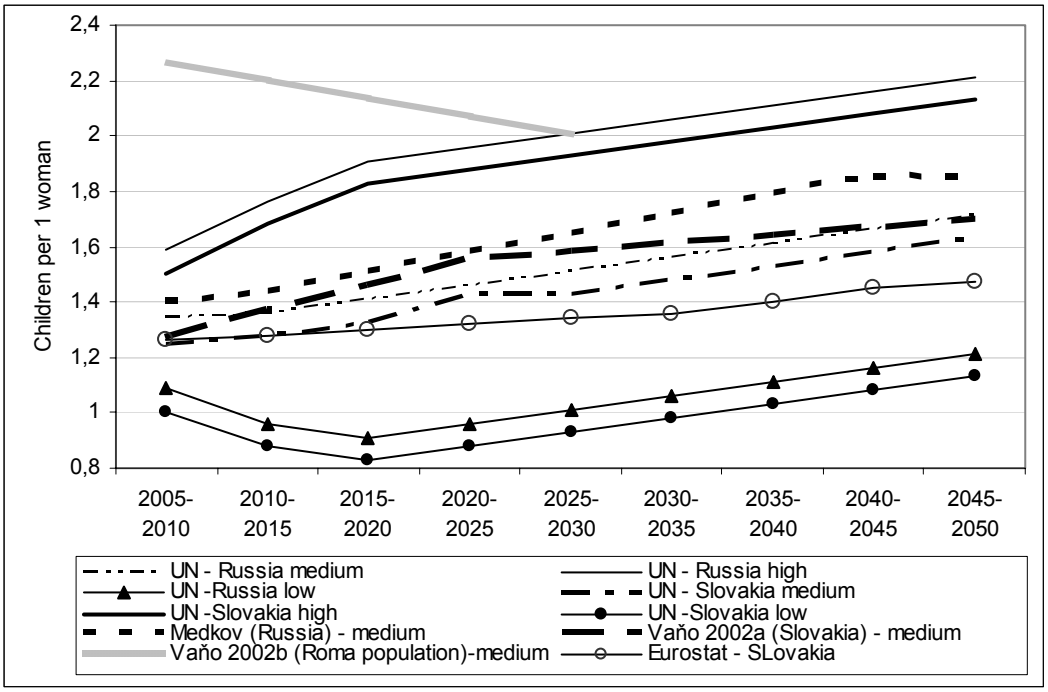

Figure 2: FUTURE FERTILITY ACCORDING TO EXISTING FORECASTS
Source: http://esa.un.org/unpp and related publications

Although religion structure is different, several similarities are identified. Both countries have been developing in the same political conditions, both suffered from economic transformation in 1990s. Moreover, both are Slavic countries with many twin customs, standards and norms. If economic transformation becomes successful in both Slovakia and Russia, no sharp fertility divergence will like to arise. Although Thornton – Philipov (2007, see above) argue for religion being the factor of various behaviours, talking about fertility, Slovakian Roma Catholics and Orthodox does not behave in quite different way. By their theory, diffusion will spread from West to East progressively. Thus, some displays may appear sooner in Slovakia. The transition should be within the framework of second demographic transition (SDT) discussed. We also argue for the concept of SDT in general, moreover, its features are sure to appear clearly in transitional populations. Some authors tell about Eastern model of the SDT, or Central – Eastern model of SDT (Pastor 2001)[9]. The causes and sources of the SDT in transitional populations are different however. First of all the SDT in Western Countries did not influence any rapid political or economical changes, whereas the SDT in former communist countries did. With analogy to the (First) Demographic Revolution, the later start of the SDT in the country, the quicker progress of spread comes.

The uncertainty of forecast can be expressed by help of prediction interval, that means by using of the stochastic (probabilistic) approach instead of traditional (deterministic) one.

[9] PASTOR, K. (2001). Zmeny demografického správania na Slovensku po roku 1990 podľa okresov. In: Súčasný populačný vývoj na Slovensku v európskom kontexte. 8. demografická konferencia, Rajecké Teplice 10.-12. 9. 2001. Zborník príspevkov, SŠDS Bratislava 2001, pp. 151-155. [Changes in demographic behaviour in Slovakia by districts after 1990]

Several methods were within last 15-20 years introduced (see e.g. Lee – Tuljapurkar 1994, Keilman - Pham 2001[10]). Safarova – Scherbov and Pirozkhov (2008)[11] applied the method mentioned above to Russia and Ukraine forecast until 2050. They assume the 60% confidence interval to be between 1.33-1.78 for both countries, median being at 1.53, little pessimistic in comparison to other forecasts.

The future assumptions of fertility timing by existing forecasts portrays figure 3. The top of fertility in both countries will remain in category 25-29, in Slovakia the shift to higher ages (e.g. change in timing) will be broader. Although the UN uses many simplifications and generalisations, it seems to be quite accurate prediction from the comparative point of view. Uncertainty inheres in the question, what rate of recuperation, and what timing change within some specific sub-populations (especially Roma population in Slovakia).

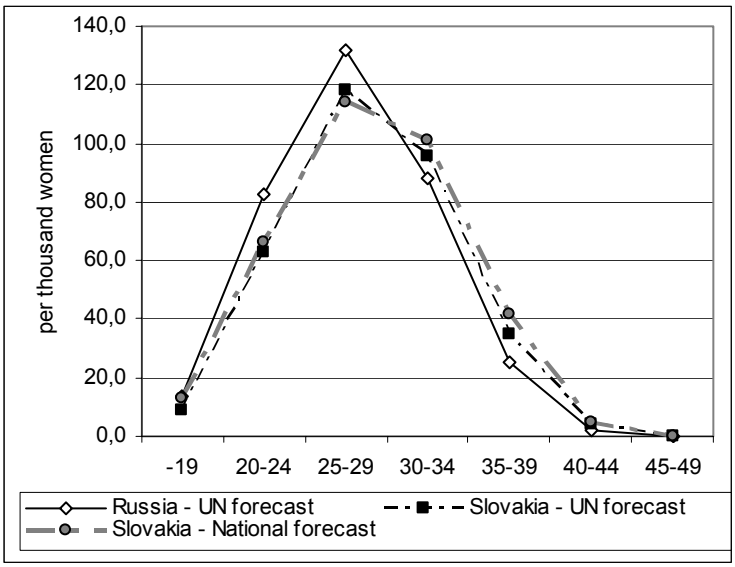

Figure 3: AGE SPECIFIC FERTILITY IN 2045-2050

Source: http://esa.un.org, Vaňo 2002a[12]

On other side, the higher intensity above 30 years inheres in higher intensity of parity 3, 4, 5 and more by Roma population, which is supposed to will go down (Vaňo 2002b)[13]. Russian mean age at childbirth will sure remain lower than Slovakian ones due to religion attitudes, but the influence of those will decrease probably.

[10] KEILMAN, N. – PHAM, D.Q. (2000). Predictive intervals for age-specific fertility. European Journal of Population, Vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 41-66.
LEE, R. – TULJAPURKAR, S. (1994). Stochastic population forecasts for the United States: Beyond High, Medium, and Low. Journal of the American Statistical Association, Vol. 89, pp. 1175-1189.

[11] SAFAROVA, G. – SCHERBOV, S. – PIROZKHOV, S. (2008). Future trends of population ageing in Russia and Ukraine: a probabilistic view. Paper prepared for the European Population Conference 2008, Barcelona, July 9-12, 2008.
For the topic see also:
NIKITINA, S. – SCHERBOV, S. (2007). Verojatnostnij prognoz cislennosti naselenia Rossii. Voprosi statistiky, No. 7, pp. 6-9. [Probabilistic Forecast of Population Size of Russia]

[12] VAŇO, B. (2002a). Prognóza vývoja obyvateľstva SR do roku 2050, Infostat, Bratislava. 121 p. [Population Forecast of Slovak Republic until 2025]

[13] VAŇO, B. (2002b). Prognóza vývoja rómskeho obyvateľstva do roku 2025. Infostat, Bratislava. 38 p. [Forecast of Roma Population in Slovakia until 2025]

Policy implications: Is there any chance to affect the Slovak and Russian fertility?

Plenty of research studies on population policies have been issued[14] recently, especially in Europe most suffering from low fertility. According to Demeny (2003, p.3)[15] population policies are "deliberately constructed or modified institutional arrangements and/or programs through which governments influence…demographic change". It should be said, that nowadays not only central governments, but also the local and regional ones try to affect fertility and migratory intensions especially. Besides many studies investigating fertility determinants more general (e.g. Watkins 1992, Van de Kaa 1994, U.S. CB[16], and many others), several comprehensive studies on how the policy regimes cause (may cause) fertility have been occurred. The VID in Vienna dedicated a special conference to the topic in 2007, thus providing together several interesting studies as a result. There is no place to put here a wide review of opinions about usefulness and efficiency of such policies here. Some authors argue for, some did not, the most bring positive as well as negative results and opinions. For instance, Boccuzzo et. al. (2008)[17] showed, that in Italy region of Friuli – Venezia – Guilia the impact of bonus at birth influences especially birth of higher orders combined by low education. However, the effect is just temporal causing the change in timing of fertility. This is what we can see during the communist period in Czechoslovakia when just short-term effect of some aids was visible. As for timing of fertility, Goldstein – Lutz – Scherbov (2003), Lutz – Skirbekk (2004)[18] argue for the "tempo policies" which may potentially have impact on lowering the mean age at childbirth. The increase of mean age occurring distinctly in post-socialistic countries has been operating in a natural way however. It is just spontaneous human reaction to the sharp societal changes, so it is very difficult to launch such measure in Eastern Europe these days.

There is no doubt that no clear evidence exists for both the policy effectiveness and inefficiency in general. McDonald (2008, p. 23)[19] expressed the fact aptly: "Policy reforms are likely to be confronting to existing social norms and values and to have potentially major implications for economic relations…" Other main obstacles highlighted Gauhtier – Philipov

[14] In paper, we discuss the pronatalist policies only although population policies represent wider set of measures.

[15] DEMENY, P. (2003). Population Policy. A concise Summary. Working Papers, No. 173, Population Council, 27 p.

[16] WATKINS, S. C. (1992). Fertility Determinants. In: Borgatta, E. F., Borgatta, M. L. (eds.). Encyclopedia of Sociology, New York, pp. 704-711.

VAN, DE KAA., D. (1996). Anchored Narratives: the Story and Findings of Half a Century of Research into Determinants of Fertility. Population Studies, Vol. 50, No. 3, s. 389-432.

[17] BOCCUZZO, et. al. (2008). The impact of the bonus at birth on reproductive behaviour in a lowest-low fertility context: Friuli_venezia Giulia (Italy) from 1989 to 2005. Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, pp. 125-148.

[18] GOLDSTEIN, J. - LUTZ, W. – SCHERBOV, S. (2003). Long-term population decline in Europe: The relative importance of tempo effects and generational length. Population and Development Review, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 699-707.

LUTZ, W. – SKIRBEKK, V. (2004). How would "Tempo Policies" Work? Exploring the Effect of School Reforms on Period Fertility in Europe. European Demographic Research Papers, No. 2, VID Vienna, 32 p.

[19] MCDONALD, P. (2008). Very Low Fertility – Consequences, Causes and Policy Approaches. Japanese Journal of Population, Vol. 6, No. 1. pp. 19-23

(cited again) who consider the non-existence of pronatalist objectives of such policies[20], the impact of non-financial factors and finally, the strong diversity of fertility intensions among individuals thus make the policy impact more uncertain. We supplement also the fact that the clear measurement of policies ´ impact is difficult to do and verify. Hence dichotomy between two opposite attitudes towards policies is not meaningful.

Introducing some measures became a current topic within the transitional countries too. Public discussion, even the scholarly debates is not wide as in Western countries. In the Czech republic several papers have appeared. In this country, especially academic debate is quite intensive dividing the scholars into the two main groups of proponents (e.g. Kučera 2002)[21] and opponents (Loužek 2002, Rabušic 2007)[22]. There is significantly lesser public and academic debate towards population policy in Slovakia. It is mainly on the grounds of a small number of demographers dealing with the topic. The latest concise study introduced Bleha – Vaňo (2007)[23]. They argue for selected measures in spite of restricted efficacy of them stressing chiefly the housing support (rental housing), equity and work-related measures. On other side, they do not prefer one-off tools, such as financial bonus at birth. As mentioned above, this aid can preserve higher fertility of higher parity ratio incited by economical reasons (child like income source).

As to economical motivations, we prefer indirect measures such as fiscal bonus. This is in harmony with the assumptions that share of the adaptive and career – oriented women[24] increased and will increase in transitional societies also thanks to changing educational structure of woman, which is sure to affect the fertility. Higher education level is connected with a lower realised fertility and later transition to motherhood (see e.g. Gustafsson 2001)[25] in general. Slovak government has dealt with the topic recently resulting in issued document (Material towards Harmonisation of family and working life until 2010[26]).

Talking about fertility intensions, it is worth mentioning the concept of ideal, intended, expected or wanted fertility. The problem seems to be very comprehensive. Unfortunately,

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[20] Slovakia is typical case. Central government usually does not declare the certain aid as pronatalist, just as "social" one.

[21] KUČERA, M. (2002). Propopulační politika je krok správním směrem. Seminary "Propopulační politika – ano či ne". pp. 29-36 [Pro-population policy is the right way] Online: http://www.cepin.cz/cze/kniha.php?ID=21

[22] LOUŽEK, M. (2002). Odolejme svádení socialistické propopulační politiky. Seminary "Propopulační politika – ano či ne". [Let us resist the tempting the socialistic population policy] Online: http://www.cepin.cz/cze/kniha.php?ID=21, pp. 37-46

RABUŠIC, L. (2007). Několik poznámek k české rodinné politice. Demografie, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 262-272. [Some comments on the Czech population policy]

[23] BLEHA, B. – VAŇO, B. (2007). Niektoré teoretické a metodologické aspekty populačnej politiky a náčrt jej koncepcie pre SR. Sociológia, No. 1, 2007, pp. 62-80. [Some theoretical and methodological aspects of population policy and its concept for the Slovak republic]

[24] Classification see in:

HAKIM, C. (2003). A New Approach to Explaining Fertility Patterns: Preference Theory". Population and Development Review, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 349-374.

VITALI, A., et. Al. (2004). Preference Theory and Low Fertility: A Comparative Perspective. European Demographic Research Papers, No. 2, 36 p.

[25] GUSTAFFSON, S. (2001). Optimal Age of Motherhood. Theoretical and Empirical Considerations on Postponement of Fertility in Europe. Journal of Population Economics, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 225-247.

[26] „Návrh opatrení na zosúladenie rodinného a pracovného života na rok 2006 s výhľadom do roku 2010" (authorized by Slovak goverment on June 21th 2006)

there has been no research into the fertility intensions so far, which would have covered each European country (at least EU 27 plus post-Soviet Union countries) to make the intensions jointly comparable. Testa - Grilli (2004)[27] introduced their research concerning EU 15, some other studies compare either two, or more countries, the most of them concerning Western Europe. We emphasize, that the only way to compare fertility intensions (intended, not ideal fertility) correctly, is take into consideration the same sample in each country from the social-economic state point of view. Thus, we are allowed compare the same relative incomes only. Intended fertility of Slovak female living would differ from her own fertility, living in better (worse) conditions. We think the ideal as well as intended fertility is at variance mainly due to social-economic conditions, parental measures a. o., so except some countries (Germany, Austria), the cultural (ideational) influence on the cross-country variety is moderate.

As mentioned above, the population policy isn't a hot issue in Slovakia although the population ageing is considered a serious problem among scientist, politicians as well as in public. Some political parties, conservative ones particularly, propose some measures to enhance fertility sometimes, but it seems to be just a marginal activity. Russian population change should worry the representatives much more. The drop of fertility, life expectancy and net migration resulting in depopulation seem to be unprecedented. There are several web sites and links dedicated to population and demography[28], several declarations and speeches of top politicians about Russian demographical crisis and future goals, including former president Putin[29]. Russian government also confirmed Conception of population policy until 2025[30] with strong emphasis on improvement of mortality conditions as well as enhance of fertility. Nifantova, R.V. et. al. (2008)[31] introduced the survey of expert opinions concerning population policy in Sverdlovsk region. Among other results of survey, the most preferred solution among experts was providing the mortgage for young families, which indicates the similar problem of the financial accessibility of housing as in Slovakia (see debate below). We can conclude finally, that the demographic crisis is quite hot issue in Russia in contrast to Slovakia.

We have executed a general comparison between features relating to maternity and parental leave, parental allowances, and other in Slovakia and Russian federation[32]. Russian woman gets one-off 9 thousand Russian roubles (about 200 EUR) at childbirth. According to current law so-called “Maternity Capital” also 250 thousand roubles (about 6000 EUR) at 2nd, 3rd an above childbirth since 2007 (child has to reach 3 years). This amount is designated strictly for selected purposes, such as enhance of housing, child education. Maternity leave is of 18

[27] TESTA, M.R. – GRILLI, L. (2004). The effects of childbearing regional contexts on ideal family size: A multilevel analysis. European Demographic Research Papers, Vienna, No. 4, 46 p.

[28] http://www.demographia.ru;http://rus-demografia.ru; http://dmo.econ.msu.ru/demografia; http://www.demostudy.ru/
http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2007-213-1.cfm;
http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/02/08/1137_type82912type82913_159643.shtml

[30] Концепция демографической политики Российской Федерации на период до 2025 года

[31] NIFANTOVA, R. V. et. al. (2008). Osovennosti covremmennoj demografickeskoj politiki Rossii, Yekaterinburg,. 28 p. [Specific features of contemporary population policy in Russia]

[32] Exchange rate used here 43 Roubles/1 Euro

months' duration during which female gets 1 600 roubles (about 38 EUR) for 1st child, and 3 300 roubles for higher parities.

Current situation in Slovakia is as follows. Woman gets one-off allowance of 830 EUR at 1st, 2nd and 3rd childbirth. She also gets about 55% of former salary amount (265 EUR at most) within six months after birth, if she was employee at least 6 months before childbearing. The following allowance represents about 159 EUR until the child becomes 3 years old (6 years if handicapped). Up to 18 years (or finishing the master degree) the month allowance represents about 21 EUR. The parents also can take advantage of fiscal bonus for working people (19 EUR a month). The conclusion is that both the countries set up the policy measures influencing the fertility both directly or indirectly. The main difference represents the fact, that in Slovakia the direct financial support endures until adulthood of the children, while in Russia only the poorest get another support 18 months after childbirth. Both countries try to support higher parity ratios birth, although in Slovakia the aim seems to be more social than pronatalist.

Our hypothesis with correspondence to some studies is, that in transforming countries the worse social-economical situation counts for the higher potential impact on their fertility level. Therefore, the pronatalist measures may be considered as useful ones for transitional countries in general. Although the clear improvement concerns the social-economical both in Slovakia and Russia, there are still the social groups for which the maternity represents the significant drop of income, because they would be able to nurture the child (or children) by help of actual double income, but the lose of mother´ s income is too vulnerable for family social security. On other side, as mentioned above, they are some ethnic groups especially in Slovakia, for which the child allowances represent the sizeable, often the only source of income. This is way we prefer non-direct measures such as tax bonus (introduced in Slovakia) and housing support to be by our opinions the main fertility obstacle in transitional countries[33] (see also Lauster 2006, Mulder 2006[34] a. o.). Looking at result of Gauthier – Philipov study (above), the Slovakia has satisfied (medium or above average) support as for some indicators in comparative view, especially as concern child care provision, maternity and parental leave. Unluckily the data are not for Russia available.

As to work-related policies, the situation in Slovakia is slowly going to be better. For instance, there is a right to stay with a sick child 7 days a year. There is also duty to retain the job for mother leaving position due to maternity leave a certain time. Most of enterprises arrange their own maternity-related advantages for employee. The possibility of father parental leave has been introduced recently. We suppose Slovakia became at least close the average across Europe on that account.

[33] E. g. in Slovakia, the estimated month mortgage instalment is worth of 300 - 400 EUR (for 30 years, 2-room flat) combined by per worker average income about 700 EUR

[34] LAUSTER, N. T. (2006). A Room of One´s Own or Room Enough for Two. Access to Housing and New Household Formation in Sweden, 1968-1992. Population research and Policy Review. Vol. 25, pp. 329-351.

MULDER, C. H. (2006). Population and Housing. A Two – Sided Relationship. Demographic Research, Vol. 15, Art. 13, pp. 401-412.

Conclusions: The convergence is likely to come

As we showed above, discussion about future fertility patterns insist on several factors taking into consideration. Among them, being very uncertain to predict, the factor of population measures occupies a special place. Population policies seem to be the necessary and meaningful aim despite their questioning effectiveness. As Lutz (2008)[35] discussed, it is not worth of effort to try to preserve the current population size. He talks about human capital taking into consideration also work productivity, educational level, and other. This concept seems to be very useful although being beyond the sphere of demography with interdisciplinary relations. In Slovakia for instance, the number of workers "contributing" to one pensioner´ s income was about ten in 1950s. According to current forecast, the number will decrease to two in 2050. It looks like a huge and insurmountable problem. Taking into consideration the increase of productivity and educational structure last and future decades, situation does not appear so frighteningly. On other side, the higher life expectancy, the longer time for paying retirement pension. This is a key point why the pension reform is the imperative for (not only) European governments. Thus, what should be the goal of population policy in terms of fertility, abstracting away of wider aims discussed by Lutz?

First, the governments should aim at long-term balanced age structure. Contemporary unbalanced age structure is the key factor generating the future problems concerning economical and pension sustainability. Unluckily we are not able to "improve" today age structure. What we can do, is to try keeping the TFR at the same level, to be the closest the two children as much as possible, by help of which the long-term depopulation will not have been so strong. This is prevention from future volatile ageing and discrepancy arisen from time-shift of the imbalanced age structure. On the other side, as Botev (2008)[36] noted, recent Russian policies may have an "interference effect" causing imbalanced age structure in future. Hence, he argues for mixture of measures. Indeed, the various measures for any social groups and ages may enhance their impact in terms of the TFR, on other side their influence on future stability of cohort fertility is questioning. The short-term increase of intensity in several ages thanks to policy measures can cause the increase of the TFR, not resulting in stable increase of cohort fertility however.

Moreover, we do not believe in broader long-term policy influence in terms of radical increase/drop the realised fertility to be more than 0,2-0,3 children per woman, thus agreeing with conclusion of Gauthier (2007)[37] who reviewed literature on policy effectiveness in detail. Although several obstacles may be removed in perfect case, the gap between ideal and finally

[35] LUTZ, W. (2008). What Should be the Goal of Population Policies? Focused on Balanced Human Capital Development. Vienna Yearbook of Population Research. pp. 17-24.

[36] BOTEV, N. (2008). "Can Policies Enhance Fertility in Europe?" and Questions Beyond. Vienna Yaerbook of Population Research. Pp. 29-34.

[37] GAUTHIER, A. H. (2007). The impact of Family Policies on Fertility in Industrialized Countries: A Review of Literature. Population Research and Policy Review. Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 323-346.

realised fertility is likely to remain significant. This is observable on individuals who realised fertility still differing from ideal/intended despite the non-existence of the actual (especially economical) obstacles. Notwithstanding that, there is a bigger scope for introducing various measures in transitional countries, especially work-related and equity measures, potentially resulting in higher-than-average efficacy. Cross national variations and often unclear linking between policies and fertility level does not give any chance to find the universal prescription for all the countries however.

Looking at results of recent studies (including those cited above), we suppose that three types of factors, which cause the convergence/divergence should be classified within post-communist countries. First, geopolitical affiliation is the initial factor. We expect that the proximity of Western countries influence the overall societal development as depicted by Thornton – Philipov (cited above). Some exceptions exist. Baltic countries despite of geographical closeness represent Western values open societies. Balkan countries ´position is quite specific, to be relatively on the frontier between the above mentioned countries. It is to said, that the geographical and geopolitical position/proximity represent distinct entities. For instance, although Ukraine belongs to the former Soviet Union group, recent political development in the country may separate the Russian and Ukrainian demographic ways through the economical, social and societal changes. The conclusion is, that geographical and geopolitical proximity affect the cultural proximity as initial but not only factor.

The economic factors are the second ones, which cause the differentiation. There is still not enough explained, to what extent social-economical situation influence fertility decision. Comparing Slovak Roma population to majority population, the poorer Roma have about twice more children than majority has. They are strongly dependent upon social allowance and benefits as well as suffering from high unemployment rate, low educational level and other. There is nearly 100 percent unemployment rate in some villages. Although some experts predict the decrease of their TFR, the uncertainty of that seems to be very high. These bad conditions result in higher fertility, which makes the problems being bigger. This could be called as "enchanted circle", or by analogy with above mentioned study of Lutz – Skirbekk (2005), the situation may be labelled as "high-fertility trap" (see also[38]), because lately introduced one-off benefits (nearly thousand EUR at birth the 2nd and 3rd child) should worsen the situation, actually making the people just more dependent.

The impact of the economic factors is expected to be less efficient in long-term view, since the economical progress is sure to be come resulting in nearing the post-communist countries to the Western ones, as well as the lowering the differences within the post-communist group.

Finally, the third factor which weight may carry weight for a long time, lies in cultural differences. In spite of additional secularization and "westernization" is sure to come to the Central and Eastern Europe, so influencing the lower and lower impact of religion and their traditions and norms on fertility, the different reaction of religion confessions to cultural progress is anticipated as we can see comparing Slovak regions. We can follow Bratislava

[38] HEMMI, N. (2003). The poverty trap with high fertility rates. Economic bulletin, Vol. 9, No. 6. , pp.1-4. Author tried to expressed the problem.in mathematical way.

example, which as the capital to be a secular society first “responded” to the cultural changes by postponement of fertility, on the other side, the most intense recuperation run there, thus be in contrast to Northern and Eastern regions with dominant Roma Catholics and Eastern Confession.

We conclude that although both the Slovak Republic and Russian federation often are included into one demographical group, many differences are visible influenced by several above mentioned factors. In short-term view, the convergence is not likely, whereas in long-term one there is lot of factors to affect the fertility behaviour to be closer. Probably, the generalisation of that for all the post-communist countries is possible, stressing chiefly cultural factors of fertility among others as the differential in future.

Finally, both the countries will sure to experience the increase of the TFR thanks to recuperated births, the difference between the fertility levels will be probably low combined by possible variance of fertility timing flowing from some cultural perturbations. There is no rational reason for divergence whereas several ones, mentioned above, are the ground for thinking opposite. Of course, they are some very indistinct political factors, which can influence the changes in both ways.

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