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Migration cycles and transitions in South-East Europe: from emigration to immigration countries?

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Extended Abstract

BACKGROUND

At the turn of the millennium, a large number of former socialist countries were facing the integration into the European Union (EU), the second-largest economic area of the world. Next to overall change of societal regimes, modernisation of economies and restrictive stability measures, the accession of new member states, which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 respectively, also shaped the regulatory frameworks regarding migration: inclusion into the area of freedom of movement, step-wise opening of access to EU15 labour markets, gradual accession to the Schengen area but also harmonisation of migration policies towards third-country nationals. This resulted into changing intensities and directions of migration flows in South-East European countries, which in turn significantly altered the migration patterns of the EU.

The proposed paper focuses on migration processes in six South-East European countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Slovakia), comparing them with trends and developments in Austria and Italy – altogether eight countries which are in the scope of the SEEMIG project that investigates longer term migratory, human capital and demographic processes of South-East Europe, as well as their effects on labour markets, national and regional economies. While the temporal scope of this paper is the last decade of the enlarging EU, it is necessary to regard these developments not only from a short-term perspective, but also from a mid-term (since 1990) and longer-term perspective (since 1950). As such, the paper aims to answer the question of how migratory processes changed in the South-Eastern European region (a) during the last 60 years, (b) since 1990 after the fall of the Iron Curtain, (c) during and after the recent rounds of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, and (d) since the onset of the economic and financial crisis in 2008.

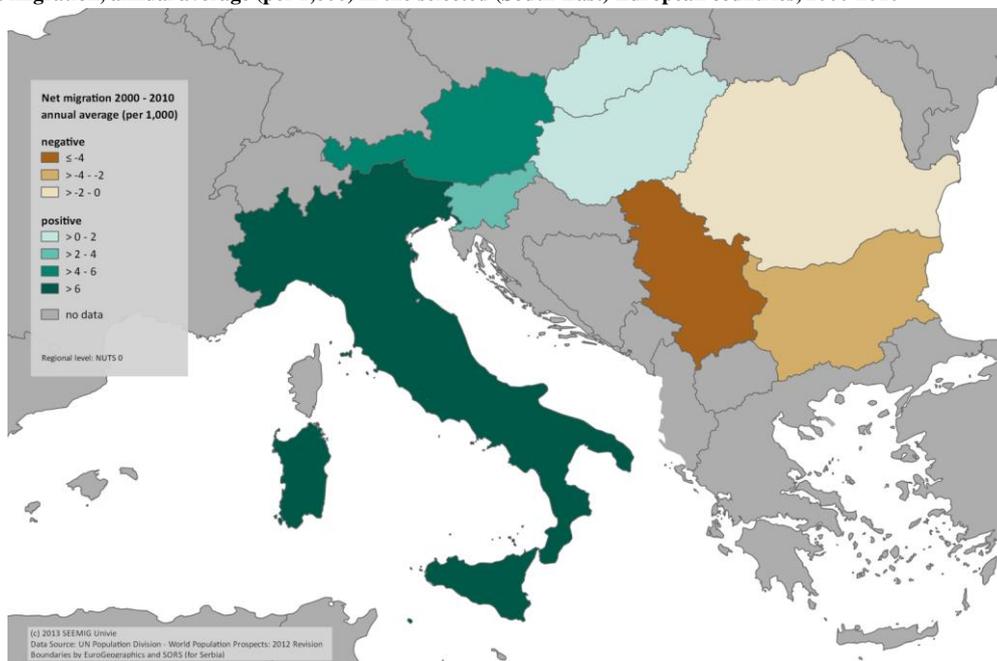
THEORETICAL APPROACHES

For the long-term analysis, we will apply the model of migration cycles developed by Fassmann (2009) that describes the transition from countries of emigration to countries of immigration by

various stages. According to this framework, the transition is driven by demographic dynamics, labour market structures and (short-term) economic cycles. This concept also takes into account that the adaptation of societies and the legal systems to handle new or evolving migratory circumstances are lagging behind the actual developments.

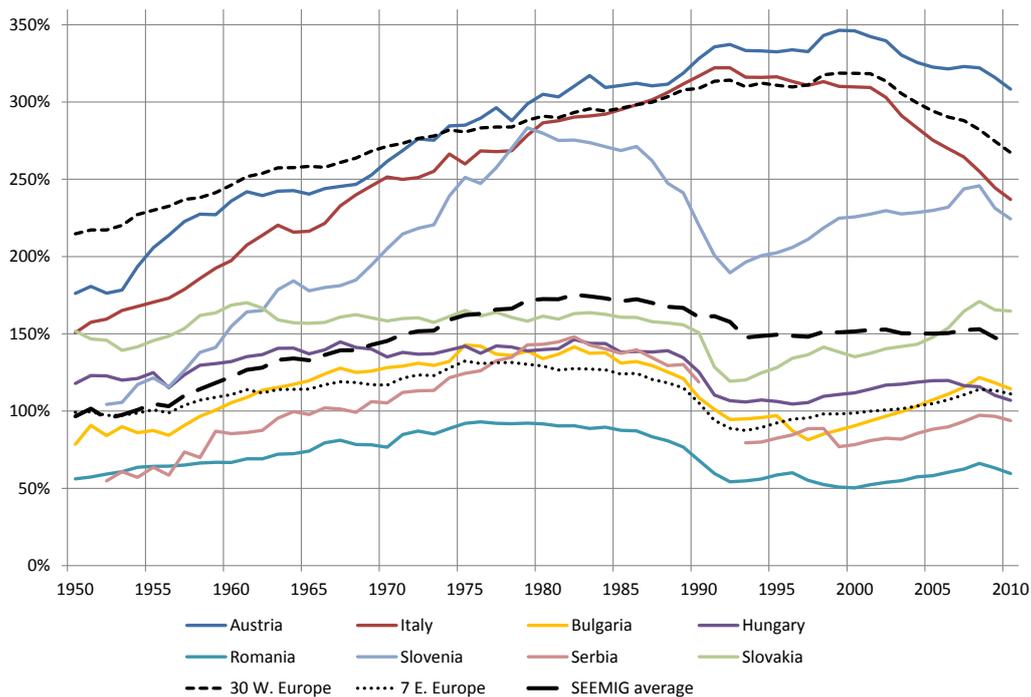
Within this context, we build upon first findings from the SEEMIG (Managing Migration and its Effects in South-East Europe) project funded by the by the European Union's South-East Europe Programme, which aims to explain and to understand the demographic developments within the region in the context of broader socio-economic and political developments (Melegh 2012, Fassmann/Gruber/Musil 2013). These findings reveal simultaneous trends of convergence and divergence with respect to demographic and economic developments, especially in the long-term perspective (i.e. since the 1950s). In the case of net migration, the observed diverging trends since the 1960s are often affected by historical turning points.

Map 1: Net migration, annual average (per 1,000) in the selected (South-East) European countries, 2000-2010



The paper will also consider other conceptual approaches such as the linkage of migration and macro-structural changes in the context of economic positions of countries at the global and regional scale Böröcz (2009). Although some elements of neoclassic macro-economic theory of migration is supported, as looking at such changes as percentages of world average and thus evaluating historical development of various regions and countries accordingly. In our analysis we argue that the application of GDP per capita differentials can be improved in validity, if historical developments are linked to the global position of a country. For this reason, economic differentials and developments should be re-contextualized into the world system approach. Beyond that, we also aim to demonstrate that a macro-structural approach is also helpful - in a modified way – for a better understanding the paths of the long-term developments in historical patterns. In the case of (former) state socialist economies, the direct intervention of world capitalism had a long lasting impact on the migratory networks and links of these countries. However, we aim to show that the end of the era of socialism did not have the same impact in all countries in the region, especially since different development levels affected the ability to regain some of the losses in the productive sector.

Figure 2: GDP per capita in selected South-East European countries compared to the world average, 1950-2010



Source: Maddison database, own illustration

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

The quantitative part of our analyses will not be restricted to migration stocks and net migration rates, but will also take into account the developments of in-flows and out-flows separately. We draw on data on migration stocks and net migration numbers for the period 1950 to 2012 that was collected from eight National Statistical Organisations in the course of the SEEMIG project. Beyond that, we make use of a new dataset of global migration flows that quantifies country to country in-flows and out-flows since 1990 (Abel 2013; Abel/ Sander 2014). This new dataset, which is based on estimates using place of birth data, enables us to disentangle net migration numbers and to analyse in-flows and out-flows separately. In order to quantify the model of migration cycles (Fassmann 2009), we also consider demographic, labour market and economic developments, especially for the period after 1990. Although our analysis is focussing on the scale of countries, we will also consider regional differences on the sub-national scale to demonstrate the socio-demographic and economic heterogeneity of NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 regions, i.e. the extent of within-country variations during the most recent period.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The findings of our analysis will contribute new insights on changing migration patterns and trends in six South-East European countries (as well as Austria and Italy) and will facilitate the assessment of these changes in a demographic, economic and political context. By applying various theoretical concepts to the South-Eastern European region, the paper seeks also foster the understanding theoretical approaches of international migration, and to highlight how interconnected these approaches are when applying it to a particular regional setting. The results of our quantitative analysis will illustrate the model of migration cycles in six south-east European countries as well as Austria and Italy and will assess how and if these countries experienced the transition from emigration to immigration. The use of migration flow data allows us to analyse these transitions by taking into account both emigration flows and immigration flows over time and to assess these flows separately.

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