

THE EMERGENCE OF COHABITATION IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT: EVIDENCE FROM BULGARIA AND RUSSIA

DORA KOSTOVA¹

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1980s Central and Eastern European countries faced a fundamental political transformation which was followed by significant transitions in all spheres of life – economic, institutional, cultural. Socio-economic reforms had different “speed” and outcomes concerning the overall development of the countries in the region. By the mid-1990s some of them experienced severe economic recession with triple-digit inflation (like Bulgaria), while in others the economic landscape was changing for the better and inflation was reduced to single-digit levels (like Slovenia and the Czech Republic).

In terms of speed and effectiveness of the economic reforms, Bulgaria and Russia were often grouped together into the group of “laggers” among the countries in transition. The overall economic situation in the two countries in the 1990s was characterised by an aggregate economic decline, high inflation, rising inequality and poverty (World Bank 1999). During the period of economic restructuring numerous reforms were initiated, including reforms in the legal system, social welfare, as well as in the systems of education and health-care. These significant macro-level institutional changes affected individual lives in many different aspects. Moreover, they were particularly important for the central decisions in one’s life, such as the family life transitions – timing and occurrence of family formation, entry into parenthood, and their interactions with other life domains like education, and/or work career.

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed swift development in the transition to first marriage and non-marital cohabitation, childbirth within and outside of marriage, and marital (union) dissolution in Bulgaria and Russia. Data from official statistics and all available demographic observations confirm a remarkable decline in total fertility, accompanied by a rapid fall in marriage rates. The proportion of children born outside of marriage increased signifi-

¹ PhD student at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Kostova@demogr.mpg.de

cantly. Non-marital cohabitation emerged and became a wide spread form of first union within a very short period of time. This rapid development in the pattern of family formation in the 1990s was in absolute contrast to the early and nearly universal first marriage and the two-child family model prevailing in Bulgaria² and Russia³ in the 1960s until the end of the 1980s. Avdeev and Monnier (2000) affirmed that to get married at the end of education or military service for a young Soviet woman or man was almost an obligatory stage in the passage to adulthood. Similar observations for Bulgaria can be found in Spasovska (2000).

FAMILY AND MARRIAGE AND THE EMERGENCE OF COHABITATION

The universality of marriage in Bulgaria and Russia in the second half of the 20th century was widely discussed in the literature (Vishnevskiy 1998; Willekens and Scherbov 1994; Spasovska 2000; Philipov 2001, 2002). Marital family was often pointed out as the only accepted form of family living in the two countries during socialism. Similarly, non-marital births were sanctioned by the public opinion; therefore marriage was a precondition for having children in the two countries (Rotkirsh 2000; Zhekova 2002).

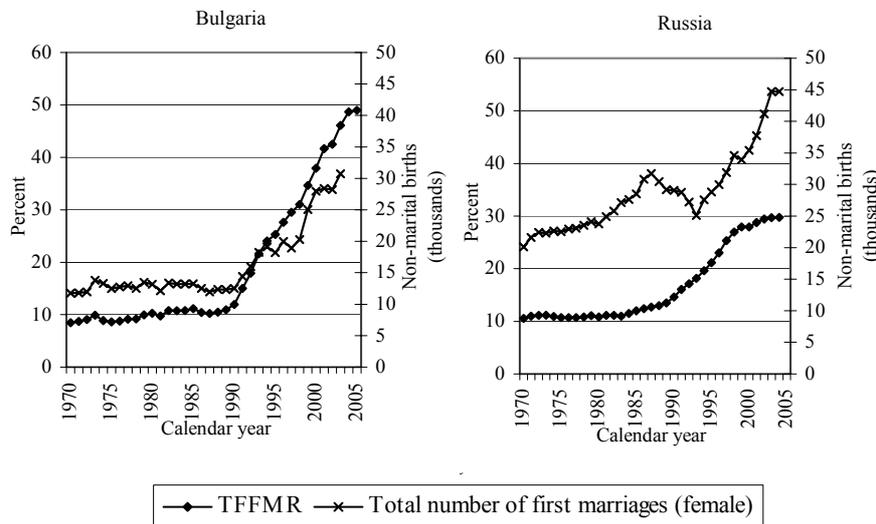
In order to provide an explanatory framework for our analysis of the development of non-marital cohabitation in Bulgaria and Russia, we initially trace the development of marital family formation back to the beginning of the 1970s. In addition, we provide an overview of the existing data on emergence of cohabitation in the two countries. Furthermore, we use the development of the interaction between first childbirth and first marriage (the trends in the non-marital childbirth) as a proxy for the development of the union formation in Bulgaria and Russia in the 1970 throughout the 1990s.

Marital family before and after the collapse of socialism

In Figure 1 we present the first marriage formation trends among women in Bulgaria and Russia for the 1970–2004 period. On the left Y-axis (black line) we plot the total female first marriage rates (TFFMR). Its values in the range of 0.9–1 are indicative for the “value” of the marital family in both countries before the collapse of the Socialism.

² See for example Spasovska (2000), Zhekova (2002), Philipov (2002).

³ See for example Zakharov and Ivanova (1996), Ivanova (2002).



Source: (1) GGP Contextual database 2006; (2) Council of Europe (Recent Demographic Developments, 2005).

Notes: Due to reduced data collection in Russia, TFFMR for Russia is available only for the period before 1996.

Figure 1
TFFMR and the total number of first marriages (female), Bulgaria and Russia,
1970–2004

In the first years after the beginning of the transition, first marriage rates went down sharply. Unfortunately, due to reduced data collection in Russia (mainly for the statistics on marriage and divorce), many of the indicators provided by the Russian Statistical Institute (Goskomstat) are available only until 1996 (as TFFMR). Thus, in order to present the first marriage trends in Russia in 1997–2004, we also plot the total number of first female marriages (grey line, corresponding to the right Y-axis).

Evidently, the two presented indicators witness a sharp decrease in first marriages in Bulgaria in the first half of the 1990s. The values kept their low levels thereafter. In Russia, the total number of first female marriages was gradually decreasing in the 1980s through the 1990s. Nevertheless, the TFFMR kept at relatively stable level (of around 1 marriage per woman) until 1991. The drop that followed was at levels similar to that in Bulgaria. Yet, after a short stabilisation period, in the beginning of the 2000s we observe a recovery in first marriage formation in Russia. Total number of first marriages in 2004 were at the levels observed in the beginning of the 1990s (Russian Academy of Science 2006).

The liberalization of union formation model and the emergence of cohabitation

Official statistics in both countries provide partial and very recent data on the emergence of cohabitation. First representative data on consensual union in Russia (term used by Goskomstat was *not registered marriage*) was collected in the micro-census in 1994. Data revealed that in 1994, 4% of women aged 16 or more live in a non-marital union (Russian Academy of Science 2006, p. 228). However, the same proportion increases to 6.7% if numbers are related only to women living in a union; it goes to 14% if only the young women under the age of 20 are considered (Table 1).

Eight years later, the census in 2002 reported an overall increase of 3%. Yet, among the young women under 20 the increase was much more substantial. In Bulgaria, first official data was collected with the Fertility and Reproductive Behavior Survey, conducted in parallel to the census in 2001. The survey was representative for women at reproductive ages (15–49) and men aged 15–59 years. Apparently, in 2001 13.1% of Bulgarian population at reproductive ages lived together with a partner, without officially registered marriage (National Statistical Institute 2003b).

Table 1
Proportion of women living in cohabitation (not registered marriages) among all women, Bulgaria and Russia, census data by age groups

Age	Bulgaria*	Russia**	
	2001	1994	2002
16–17	..	28.9	53.4
18–19	..	11.4	32.6
20–24	..	6.7	19.0
25–29	17.6	5.9	14.2
30–34	..	5.8	11.8
35–39	..	6.1	9.3
40–44	12.1	6.4	8.0
45–49	..	6.6	7.7
50–54	..	6.9	7.3
55–59	10.4	7.0	6.7
60–64	n.a.	6.7	6.3
65–69	n.a.	7.0	6.1
70+	n.a.	8.2	6.1
all	13.1	6.7	9.7

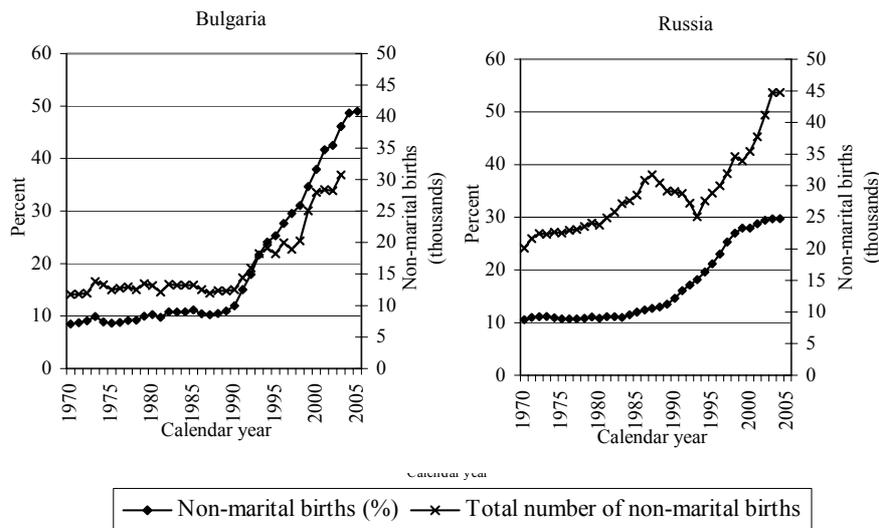
Source: (1) Russian Academy of Science 2006; (2) NSI 2003.

Notes: (1) * for Bulgaria data is aggregated for both sexes and age groups 15–29, 30–44, 45–59; “all” refers to 15–59 years old; (2) ** for Russia women in union only.

Unfortunately data availability does not allow us to present the period development of non-marital cohabitation in Bulgaria. We try to make an approximate estimation of its spread by studying the interaction of first marriage and first childbirth.

In Figure 2 we plot the trends in non-marital births in Bulgaria and Russia in 1970–2004. We present both, the total number of births by non-married mothers, as well as their proportion of all births. For about two decades (until the early 1990s), non-marital births in both countries comprised about 10% of all births. The increase in the last 15 years was much more pronounced in Bulgaria, where in 2004 non-marital births made up almost half of all births (48.7%). Same proportion for Russia in 2004 was 29.7%, or almost every third child was born by a non-married mother.

The continually increasing number and percentage of non-marital births in both countries in the last 15 years is an indication that the increase of *births outside of marriage* is not necessarily synonymous with children being born outside a family union of some type” (Council of Europe, 2001).



Source: Contextual database, 2006.

Figure 2
Percentage and the total number of non-marital births, Bulgaria and Russia,
1970–2004

Emergence of cohabitation in the context of socialism – how similar are Bulgaria and Russia?

To better understand the development of Bulgarian and Russian family formation patterns over the last two decades, it is meaningful to place them in the framework of institutional changes through the second half of 20th century.

In Bulgaria civil marriage was introduced in 1945 and became the *only legal marital form* confirmed with an explicit text in the Bulgarian constitution two years later. The same law (in 1945) regulated the legal separation - divorce, which substantially facilitated the procedure of union separation. In the beginning of the 1950s, urged by the destabilisation of marital institution (divorce rates doubled within the first five years after introducing the civil divorce legislation (Stefanov 1974)), the government initiated a new, more restrictive law on divorce.

A large-scale family policy “Decree on encouragement of fertility” (*Ukaz za nasyrchavane na rajdaemostta*) aimed at strengthening the socialist family as nucleus of the socialist society was launched in 1968. Along with favorable changes such as increase in the child benefits, duration of maternity leave and childcare allowances, restrictions such as prohibition of induced abortions for families with less than two children and additional taxation, called “bachelor tax” were introduced. The bachelor tax was meant to sanction *single adults who did not form marital family* by the age of 21 (tax rates were 5% of the income for people aged 21–30, and 10% for people aged 30 and more). Financial sanctions were envisaged also for married couples with no children five years after getting married. Even though the family policy was in power until the end of the 1980s, an increase in the fertility rates was visible only in the first half of the 1970s (Philipov, 1993). Afterwards, the levels kept their stable values close to replacement rate to maintain an average number of two children in a family.

As reflected in the short descriptive overview, during its 45 years of ruling power, Bulgarian Socialist state put a lot of intentional effort to promote *stable marital family*, early marriage, and a two-child family model. As Dimitrova (2006b) noted in her study on bio-politics in Socialist Bulgaria, the family institution was “designed” to fulfil the gap between the official hypocrisy and control over the individual on one side, and the real life on the other.

Some recent studies focused on contemporary Bulgarian family formation, comparing the trends before and after 1990 (Koytcheva 2006; Di Giulio and Koytcheva 2007), report an increase in the spread of cohabitation, particularly in the 1990s. Women from the low socio-economic strata – with low education or coming from large families with parents having low level of education, as well as women from Roma ethnic group, were found to be the forerunners of the new family formation behaviour. Emergence of cohabitation in Bulgaria was interpreted primarily as a consequence of the difficult economic situation

during the first years of the transition period whereas non-marital cohabitation was the preferred family form because it was less costly than the wedding.

Another study particularly aimed at revealing the diffusion of the second demographic transition in Bulgaria and its premises, transformations and consequences from a sociological and demographic perspective (Dimitrova 2006a) draws exclusive attention to shifts in *values* and *norms* in the Bulgarian society in the second half of 20th century. Exploring European (EVS) and World Value Surveys (WVS), the author argues that in the beginning of the 1990s there were relatively small differences between the young generation and the generation of their parents (noted as “innovative” and “conservative” clusters of the Bulgarian population) in their standards and ideals towards family formation, child-bearing, and the role of the child in the family. Dimitrova (2006a) claims that at the beginning of the transition period people were more traditional and pro-family oriented. The next WVS wave held in Bulgaria in 1997, revealed deepening of the gap between the two groups in their values. The young generations became more tolerant towards divorce, contraception, family planning, abortion, and lone motherhood. Another important conclusion made by Dimitrova (*ibid.*, p. 287) was that nowadays in Bulgaria “marriage transformed from the only socially accepted family form, into a “guarantee” for mothers and children’s welfare, whereas some more important family features such as quality of family life and partners’ relationship are better valued than a “signature” in the City Hall”.

One of the leading theorists of demographic transition in Russia, Anatoly Vishnevskiy (Vishnevskiy 1998, p.112) reveals the development of the Russian family through the 20th century. Russian family has gone through modernisation from the agricultural patriarchal family, where individuals did not have individual rights and property (described by the author with the motto “man for the family”), to the modern westernised type of family in a very short time. In the first years after the October revolution there was a belief that the communist society does not need the institution of family. This idea could not stay vital for long and was abolished in the beginning of 1930s. Nevertheless, the same idea of collectivisation of everyday family life came in light many times through the conceptual development of the communist ideology. One of the manifestations of this concept was the housing situation in urban USSR, where the practice was to place a number of families (usually two or three) together in shared apartments. In this way, running from one extreme to another, modernisation of Russian family (named by Vishnevskiy “conservative modernisation”) was going very slowly. Values of the patriarchal family remained prevalent in people’s minds until end of 1980s where in the 1989 census “having respect for parents” was placed as the most important feature which mothers want to see in their children’s personality.

Vishnevskiy (2006) provided a periodization of legal changes in the family legislation which distinguishes periods according to the state control on the family system. *Until the mid-1930s*, the state has been very liberal towards marital and family matters. Civil marriage was introduced in 1917 and gained momentum very fast. At the same time, it became clear that not all de-facto marriages were getting registered, and in 1923 a survey counted approximately 100 000 not registered marriages. In 1926 with the implementation of new family code, both registered, and de-facto marriages were made *equal* in terms of recognition of children, the right on common property, and alimony after divorce, etc. Consensual unions became common among urban youth and particularly among students. Lass (1928) reported results from a survey according to which 16.5% of all male students and 31.7% of all female students lived in not-registered consensual union. This very early emancipation from patriarchal traditions created vacuum in the value system and led to the degradation of the institution of family (Vishnevskiy 2006).

Rapid leap into restrictive and state controlled family legislation followed in the 1930s, *which lasted until late 1950s*. Not-registered marriages were not recognised. Moreover, they were announced invalid and the term “children born out of wedlock” was restored. Divorce became a long-lasting, costly procedure, which decreased the number of legal divorces, but increased substantially the de-facto separations.

The last period (*from 1960s onwards*) revived the liberal frame of state regulations in the institution of marriage. The 1960s were marked as a starting point of shifts towards modern family behaviour. Rotkirsh (2000) used the term “*moral grey zone*” to distinguish the actual behaviour of Russian youth in big cities from the prevailing social norms. In the late 1960s many Soviet women felt “obliged” to be sexually experienced before marriage, whilst in the official ideology of the main social institutions such as schools, mass media etc. standards of exclusive marital sex were preserved. This led to great ambivalence and confusion among young people. They started value also love in itself, and partnership did not necessary lead to marriage anymore. Nevertheless, official registration of marriage was very important for the organisation of not only the family, but also private life in general – for getting an accommodation, for travelling abroad, for moving from one region to another, even for prolonging education. Thus, because of the strong state control in the Soviet Union (also with regards to private family matters), not-registered marriages as well as the so-called fictive marriages existed together with the “firm Soviet family” (Vishnevskiy 2006, p.95).

Even though it was not socially acceptable and official statistics did not register such unions, many demographers draw attention to the existence of consensual unions (called in Russia not-registered marriages) also during Soviet time (Zakharov 2005; Vishnevskiy 1998; Rotkirsh 2000 etc.). Harchev (1965)

provided results from a survey conducted in the beginning of 1960s according to which 65% of the interviewed young boys and 28% of the young girls had lived in a de-facto marriage before they registered it officially. Yet, the lack of official data compelled scholars to use proxy-information such as the rise in non-marital births, trying to estimate the scale of diffusion of not registered marriages (Tolts et al. 2005). Using more recent data, Zakharov (2005, p.25) provided evidence that already in the cohorts born in the 1930-1950s, every fifth partnership started with cohabitation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

In this paper we look at the way in which the socio-economic transformations in Bulgaria and Russia at the end of the 20th century influence the pattern of first union formation. We elaborate on the identification of *marriage* and *family* in the era of Socialism, as well as on the emergence of *non-marital cohabitation* and its development between 1969 and 2004. Our main analytical focus is on the following questions: *Did changes in the union formation behaviour start with the collapse of the socialist system at the end of the 1980s, or the socio-economic transition acted as an accelerator of an ongoing process? At what stage of development has cohabitation in both countries arrived: a deviant behaviour, a stage in the partnership career leading to a marriage, or an alternative to the marriage?*

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF STUDYING FIRST UNION FORMATION

The event of interest in the present study is union formation, and, in particular *first union formation* as a section of the individual life trajectory. Together with the end of the formal education, the first job, leaving the parental home, and the birth of first child, first union formation is one of the key events in the transition to adulthood (Liefbroer and de Jong Gierveld 1995; Corijn 1996; Billari 2001). We focus on first union formation for several reasons. *First of all*, because there seems to be a “gap” between the official statistics, and the actual patterns of union formation in Bulgaria and Russia after the societal transition at the end of the 1980s (Zakharov 2005; Koytcheva 2006; Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007; Hoem et al. 2007). *Secondly*, because of the low levels of divorce (and disruption) rates in Bulgaria, it is difficult to study patterns of the second union formation with the sample size of our dataset. In addition, there are different incentives for the entry into non-marital and post-marital cohabitation. Thus, in societies where the early and (almost) universal marriage was a norm

(like in Bulgaria and Russia), it is more valuable to study determinants of unmarried cohabitation as a “competitor” of the direct first marriage.

Analytical method

A proper study on transitions in life course as suggested in Espenshade and Braun (1982) should give consideration to age, historical time, and duration of stay in a particular state of being. In the present analysis we use a continuous *time* axis to represent the waiting time from the age 14 until the first union formation. An individual remains in the state of origin “single, never in a union” until a transition to the destination state “being in first union”. The *competing risk framework* (Hachen 1988) fits best to the present study, because an individual can exit from the state of origin either by starting a consensual union, or by entry into a marital one.

As a statistical tool in the analyses of event history trajectories, we use intensity regression model (proportional hazard model). The most general mathematical representation of the hazard function is:

$$\ln h(t) = \gamma T(t) + \beta' X(t)$$

where $\ln h(t)$ is the logarithm of the risk of occurrence of the event in the moment t , $\gamma T(t)$ is the baseline hazard duration dependence, $\beta' X(t)$ are the observed covariates (time-constant or/and time-varying), and t is the time passed from the initial point of analysis until the end of the observation (at the occurrence of the event, or at censoring). The baseline hazard is a piecewise log-linear spline. Each of the covariates in the model contributes proportionally to the shifts in the baseline; however, they cannot change its shape. Estimations are done with the help of statistical software aML, version 2.09 developed by Lillard and Panis (2003).

GGS data

The empirical analyses are based on data from the 1st wave Generations and Gender Surveys⁴ (GGS) carried out in Bulgaria and Russia in 2004. The first wave GGS provides comparative retrospective histories on partnership dynamics and childbearing, as well as a rich body of information on future intentions,

⁴ More about the survey design can be found in UN report on GGP survey instruments (United Nations 2005) and Vikat et al. (2007).

present household situation, quality of partnership relations, parent-children relationship etc.

We narrow our analyses to *women* at ages 18 to 49 at the time of the interview. We begin the observation at the 14th birthday of the respondents, thus the period of observation transforms to 1969 – 2004. In this way we can compare union formation development *before* and *after* the transition to market economy at the end of the 1980s. GGS is the first dataset which allows studying the emergence of cohabitation over such long period of time, both in Bulgaria and Russia.

Further, we exclude from the analyses women who defined themselves as belonging to ethnic minorities and narrow our analyses to ethnic Bulgarians and Russians. We also exclude cases with incomplete information on union formation histories, or missing data for the construction of time-varying covariates – school graduation, or date of birth of first child. After re-defining our target population and the cleaning procedure, the sample size for the analyses of Bulgaria was reduced to 3982 women. Correspondingly, the Russian sample was reduced to 3245 usable cases.

Variables

One of our main research interests is to reveal changes in the family (union) formation behaviour after the collapse of socialism, as well as to answer the question whether these changes started with the collapse of the system or the transition acted as an accelerator of an ongoing process. Thus, *calendar time* plays a key role in our analyses. It is constructed as a piecewise linear spline that covers the period from the *origin* (the 14th birthday of the respondent) until *occurrence* of event or censoring. The period of observation starts in 1969 when the oldest respondents in our samples turned 14 and covers 35 year period (1969–2004).

To evaluate the interaction between fertility and union formation in Bulgaria and Russia throughout the studied period, we include in the analyses a time-varying covariate to account for the effect of *pregnancy-and-motherhood status* on the transition to first union. Such a variable will give us grounds to elaborate on the stage of development of cohabitation in the two countries – whether it is mainly a childless union (a prelude to marriage), or it is approaching the third stage to become a well-accepted family environment for having children (an alternative to the marriage). We consider the *pregnancy-and-motherhood* status as a sequence of categorical states: *childless non-pregnant*, *childless pregnant* (with first child), and *mother* (after the birth of the first child).

Another key variable in our analysis is *education*, which influences first union formation through its two dimensions – time spent in education and com-

pleted level of education (Thornton et al. 1995). The quasi-time-varying⁵ education covariate comprises four categorical levels: *in education*, *low* (including no education, primary, basic and incomplete secondary school), *middle* (completed secondary school with exam), and *high* (including every education higher than secondary).

In order to account for the effects of respondent's upbringing and parental family characteristics, we include in the analyses a group of variables to characterise the socio-economic status of the respondent in her childhood: parents' level of education, size of the parental family, the experience of living with both biological parents in the childhood, as well as the type of the settlement where the respondent grew up. Nevertheless the effects of these covariates are not presented due to space limitation.

COHABITATION AS FIRST UNION IN BULGARIA AND RUSSIA

Periodization

Based on the social and economic developments of Bulgaria and Russia, we divide our period of observation (1969–2004) into sub-periods. In the case of Bulgaria we distinguish between **three** different stages of development: *socialism* (up to 1989), a *period of economic restructuring* (1990–1997) and a *period of stabilisation* (from 1998 onwards). We believe that the second half of the 1980s, known as Perestroika was particularly important for the liberalisation of the Russian society, therefore in Russia we differentiate **four** sub-periods: *socialism* (until 1985), *Perestroika* (1986–1991), *period of economic restructuring* (1992–1998), and *period of stabilisation*⁶ (from 1999 onwards).

In the first sub-period (*socialism*) economies in both countries were state-owned and centrally-planned; unemployment did not exist; in addition there was a high female labour force participation supported by a well functioning family policy for reconciliation of work and family.

⁵ Unfortunately, first wave GGS questionnaire does not include full education histories. Thus we constructed education covariate applying some assumptions and imputations. Firstly, we assume that education in the two countries has been rather an uninterrupted process. We suppose that after graduation from the highest level of education, respondents were continuously out of education with the educational level attained. Similarly, the period before the graduation was categorised as in education. Secondly, we assume that the effect of being in education on the intensity of union formation is the same for all levels of education. The study of Zabel (2007), as well as the OECD reports on educational systems of Bulgaria and Russia (OECD 2002, OECD 2004) give us certain confidence that the bias of our results is not very harmful.

⁶ Differences in the length of the last two sub-periods are determined by the economic development of the two countries.

In 1986, in Soviet Union a program of economic, political, and social restructuring was launched. The period of 1986–1991, well known as Perestroika, marked the beginning of the democratisation of the Russian society. The program was designed to begin establishing a market economy by encouraging limited forms of private ownership and the principle of profitability in Soviet industry and agriculture. It had great political influence worldwide, and in particular for the former socialist countries, as it brought to Russian society the freedom of assembly, speech, and religion, the right to strike, as well as the multicandidate elections.

The early 1990s (*period of economic restructuring*) in Bulgaria could be described as an intermediate period in which “old” and “new”, “state” and “private” were functioning together. Reform of the economic system brought to collapse many enterprises and thousands of people became unemployed. The country faced a deep economic and societal crisis. High inflation, high unemployment, low economic productivity, and, as a result, inability to provide reasonable state family policy, were among the most essential characteristics of that period. Very similar characteristics describe the period of economic restructuring in Russia (third sub-period in the periodization provided above). It started after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1991 and included several financial crises followed by short recovery periods. The overall economic situation was characterised as years of aggregate economic decline, high inflation, rising inequality and poverty (World Bank, 1995, 1998). Thus, the family policies, designed to have a very wide scope did not have resources to provide reasonable family support.

The end of the deep economic crisis of 1996/1997 in Bulgaria marked the beginning of the stabilisation period (third sub-period). Similarly, the structural reforms introduced at the end of the 1998 and the beginning of the 1999 to recover Russian economy from the severe 1998 crisis indicated the beginning of the stabilisation period (1999 onwards) for the Russian economy. In both countries this period was characterised by getting control over the inflation process, reducing the unemployment, and raising the economic productivity. Privatisation, tax reform, bank restructuring as well as international trade policy were among the implemented measures in Russia (International Monetary Fund 2000). Since the 2000 economic indicators in Bulgaria and Russia have shown a steady growth (Contextual database, topic Economy). Nevertheless the system for childcare- and family support did not manage to recover from the economic shock and the state support was insufficient. Further in our analysis we address union formation developments and shifts in behaviour with regards to this periodization.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Bulgaria

Before starting with the analysis, we present some of the main descriptive results, characterising the union formation practice of our respondents. About one third (31%) of them started their first union as a direct marriage, 43% moved in together without an official marriage and 26% have never been in a union. These are striking results for a society in which marriage, even if losing its dominance, is still the traditionally prevailing union form (Zhekova 2002). We need to place special attention on a peculiar engagement practice that was vastly popular already in the socialist time. It was largely accepted that a couple could move together as soon as they were engaged to be married until the wedding ceremony was arranged (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2007). In the questionnaire design there was no explicit question about the purpose of moving together with a partner. Thus, we probably register a number of unions as cohabitation for which wedding ceremony had been already planned at the time of moving together.

To avoid analysis of “misleading cohabitations”, we consider four months (the median length of cohabitation before its transformation into a marriage in the years before 1989⁷) as a threshold value to distinguish consensual unions in which a commitment for marriage had already been made. Further in the descriptive results presentation, as well as in the multivariate analysis of the transition to first union in Bulgaria, we consider as a direct marriage all cohabitations, which were transformed into marriage within four months after moving in together.

In Table 2 we present the proportion of first unions beginning by cohabitation, by the birth cohort of women. The proportion of first unions that started as cohabitations increases over generations. Starting from levels of around 20% for women born in the 1955–64, it increases to more than 50% for the ones born in the late 1970s⁸.

⁷ Results not presented here. For more information see Kostova (2007).

⁸ Due to the very young age of the respondents of the youngest cohort (aged 18–24 at the interview), only 22% of them have ever been in a union. Therefore results are presented only for illustration. We will avoid making conclusions based on that cohort.

Table 2
Proportion of first unions beginning with cohabitation by birth cohort among Bulgarian women

Age at the interview	Cohort	Percentage
45–49	1955–59	19.6
40–44	1960–64	25.1
35–39	1965–69	28.9
30–34	1970–74	36.2
25–29	1975–79	53.7
18–24	1980–86	67.8

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity

To explore further the changes in the nature of cohabitation, we attach cohabitation to the first childbirth. In Table 3 we present the first births by the union status of the mother at birth (the event sequence in the woman's life trajectory). While classifying the union status, we distinguish between births in cohabitation, direct marriage, and marriage preceded by cohabitation. We also take into account the timing of conception i.e. whether it was before or after the marriage.

Apparently, there are generational differences in the interaction between the union status and the first birth. Nearly 90% of the women born in the late 1950s and in the 1960s had their children within a marriage. Traditionally, for the biggest part of them (more than 65%) both conception and birth were preceded by marriage. Yet, the proportion of pre-marital conceptions showed an increase over generations. About 33% of all first births in the cohort of 1975–79, were conceived before marriage, while this percentage was 15% for the women born in the 1955–59. Apart from becoming more frequent, cohabitation became more acceptable family environment for bringing up children. Almost 15% of the first births by women born in the late 1970s were born in non-marital cohabitation.

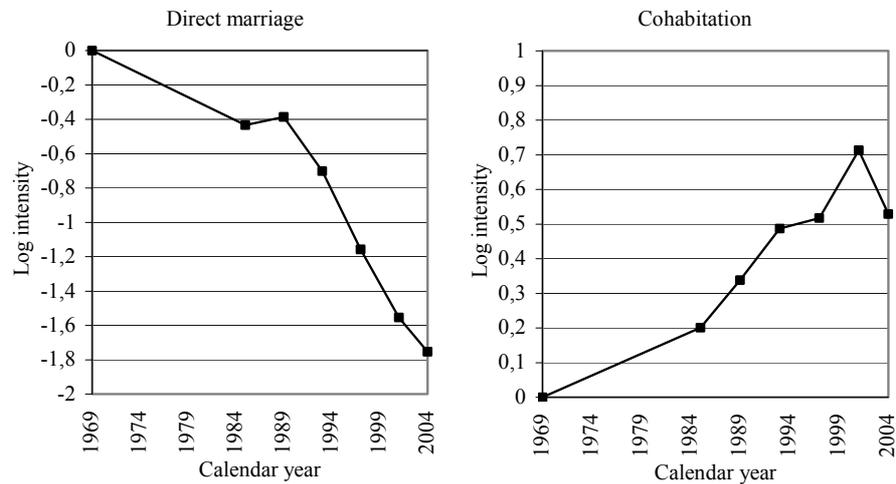
Table 3
*First birth by union status of the mother (women with children only),
 percentages, Bulgaria*

Cohorts (age at the survey)	1955–59 (45–49)	1960–64 (40–44)	1965–69 (35–39)	1970–74 (30–34)	1975–79 (25–29)	1980–86 (18–24)
<i>Union status at birth</i>						
Lone motherhood	7.5	4.2	5.5	4.9	5.2	6.1
Cohabitation at first birth	4.4	4.7	5.8	7.4	14.9	31.1
Cohabitation/conception/ marriage/birth	3.7	6.2	7.0	7.6	15.8	12.1
Conception/direct mar- riage/birth	12.2	13.9	16.4	17.3	17.8	11.4
Direct marriage/ conception/birth	72.2	71.0	65.3	62.8	46.3	39.4
N	295	662	602	648	404	132

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity.

Further, we present results from the event-history modelling, in which we are able to take into account the influence of calendar time, social and family background, as well as the personal characteristics on the changes in the patterns of first union formation in Bulgaria. We will discuss the results of the final model, which accounts for the effect of all the covariates. Additionally, results from interaction models will be presented when applicable.

The development of cohabitation and direct marriage over the calendar time are plotted in Figure 3.



Source: own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity.

Notes: Standardised for level of education, parental family characteristics, and pregnancy-and-motherhood status.

Figure 3

First union formation intensities by calendar year in Bulgaria

Both curves show that changes in the pattern of first union formation in Bulgaria did not start with the dramatic societal transformations in 1989. The intensity of direct marriage decreases through the whole period of observation. Yet, the decline after 1989 is much steeper and there is no indication of slowing down. Simultaneously, cohabitation as a first union was already evident in the 1970s and the 1980s. A significant increase in the intensity of entering consensual unions is observed in the second half on the 1980s and throughout 1990s. However, in the first years of the present decade the process has shown a moderate decline.

The effect of education on the transition to first union is presented in Table 4. Expectedly, being at school has proved to be an obstacle to the union formation process. It decreases the risk of forming a union by about 50% (compared to women with completed secondary school). Furthermore, the level of education influences the risk of forming marital and non-marital unions in a different manner.

Table 4
*The effect of level and enrolment in education on entering
 first union in Bulgaria*

	Cohabitation	Direct marriage
<i>Level of education</i>		
Still in education	0.57	0.49
Lower than secondary school (incl. no education)	1.68	0.95
Secondary school	1	1
University and higher	0.89	1.44

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity.

Notes: (1) Calendar year effect is presented in Figure 3a, standardised for calendar time, parental family characteristics, and pregnancy-and-motherhood status.

Having a low level of education (or non at all) increases the risk of entering cohabitation as a first union. However, there are no significant differences between women having secondary or higher education in their transition to first cohabitation. On the contrary, having university degree increases the risk of direct marriage, while the two categories of lower than tertiary education demonstrate rather similar risks of transition to direct marriage.

Further we reveal an association between becoming a parent and the intensity of union formation in Bulgaria. Pregnancy showed to be highly motivational for transforming a relationship into a union, and, in particular, for establishing marriage. Expecting a child increases the intensity of getting married by 25 times compared to non-pregnant women without children. It also amplifies the intensity to enter non-marital cohabitation, but to a lesser extent (see Kostova 2007a).

In order to examine the changes in the effect of pregnancy-and-motherhood status on union formation over the period of observation, we computed an interaction model between parity-and-motherhood status and calendar time. The results (Table 5) demonstrate an increase in the intensity to enter cohabitation among pregnant women – it has doubled through the studied period. There is also an increase of 35% among the non-pregnant women without children, while for the mothers the change over time is very small. With respect to marital union formation, a decrease in the union formation over time is observed among all three groups of women. The reduction between the two ultimate periods is more pronounced among the non-pregnant nullipara (76%) and mothers (68%), while among pregnant women it is reduced “only” by 31%.

Table 5
*Trends in relative risks of union formation 1969–2004,
 by pregnancy-and-motherhood status in Bulgaria*

Parity	Cohabitation			Marriage		
	1969–89	1990–97	1998–2004	1969–89	1990–97	1998–2004
Childless, non pregnant	1	1.35	1.35	1	0.65	0.24
Childless, pregnant	4.96	5.20	10.01	19.18	20.48	13.13
Mother	0.66	0.75	0.71	0.94	0.33	0.32

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity.

Notes: (1) Standardised for the effect of education, and parental family characteristics; (2) Time of conception is calculated by deducting 7 months from the date of actual birth. Data on interrupted pregnancies are not available in the dataset.

Russia

We will follow the same structure of presentation of the results of first union formation in Russia. We will first present some main characteristics describing the Russian sub-sample. About 84% of the women have ever entered into a union. Among them, more than a half started their first union in a direct marriage (59%), while the other 41% entered non-marital cohabitation. These results show that a substantial proportion of women in Russia started with cohabitation.

We have found similar striking results for Bulgaria. Yet, in the case of Bulgaria consensual unions formed before 1989 were very quickly (median length of four months) transformed into marriage. The Kaplan-Meier estimations for the transition of first cohabitation to a subsequent marriage in Russia⁹ demonstrate that besides its development over time, cohabitation was a rather durable union already in the 1970s and 1980s (median length of cohabitation before its transformation into marriage was 12 months). Thus, in the presentation of the descriptive results, as well as in the multivariate analysis, we consider all unions a direct marriage, in which coresidence and the official marriage registration happened in one and the same month (and year).

The proportion of first unions that started in a consensual union increased substantially over generations (Table 6). About 20% of all first unions of women born in the late 1950s began their independent life in cohabitation; the proportion increased to more than 50% among the ones born twenty years later.

⁹ Results not presented here. See Kostova (2007a).

Table 6
*Proportion of first unions beginning by cohabitation
 by cohorts in Russia*

Age at the interview	Cohort	Percentage
45–49	1955–59	22.2
40–44	1960–64	26.8
35–39	1965–69	38.0
30–34	1970–74	46.0
25–29	1975–79	54.4
18–24	1980–86	70.9

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Russian women, Russian nationality.

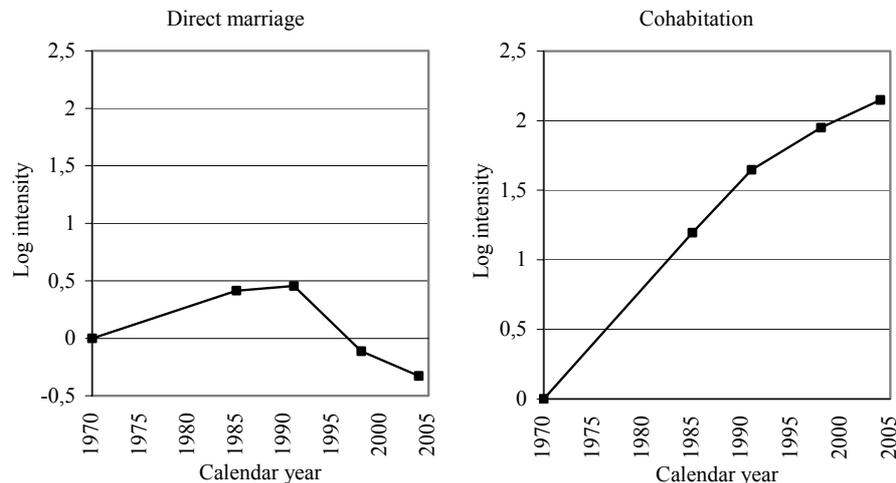
To illustrate the development of the *nature* of non-marital cohabitation over the generations in Russia, in Table 7 we present the interaction of first union formation and first childbirth. The most traditional sequence: direct marriage/conception/birth (almost 75% among mothers of 1955–59 cohorts) is losing its dominance among younger women. Likewise, cohabitation as an upbringing family environment is gaining popularity. More than 15% of the first births given by women born in the late 1970s were within a non-marital consensual union; the same proportion has doubled compared to the cohorts of their mothers (born between 1955–59). Evidently, there are great generational differences in the interaction between the first birth and the union status of the mother at birth in Russia. In addition to becoming the more frequent first union, cohabitation has developed into a better accepted family environment for bringing up children.

Table 7
*First birth by union status of the woman (women with children only), percents,
 in Russia*

Cohorts (age at the survey)	1955–59 (45–49)	1960–64 (40–44)	1965–69 (35–39)	1970–74 (30–34)	1975–79 (25–29)	1980–86 (18–24)
<i>Union status at birth</i>						
Lone parenthood	7.3	8.5	9.7	11.6	7.7	11.7
Cohabitation at first birth	7.3	8.1	13.0	14.0	16.2	22.9
Cohabitation/conception/ marriage/birth	3.1	6.9	6.9	7.2	10.5	12.2
Conception/direct mar- riage/birth	7.8	7.9	7.8	7.9	9.0	9.4
Direct marriage/ conception/birth	74.7	68.6	62.6	59.4	56.6	44.1
N	587	573	423	458	389	188

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Russian women, Russian nationality.

Further, we proceed with the result from the multivariate analyses of entry into cohabitation vs. direct marriage in Russia. The first union formation developments over time, plotted in Figure 4 suggest that cohabitation was already present in Russia in the 1970s and the 1980s. The rates of entry into non-marital cohabitation continued increasing in the 1990s. At the same time direct marriage intensities were also increasing until 1989, followed by a steep but, in comparison to Bulgaria, less striking decrease. Our results are coherent with the findings of Spielauer et al. (2007) and Hoem et al. (2007). Both papers suggest that the in Bulgaria rates of entry into first union decreased in the transitional period (the 1990s) while in Russia there was rather a shift between the two types of first union.



Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Russian women, Russian nationality.
Notes: Standardised for level of education, parental family characteristics, and pregnancy- and-motherhood status.

Figure 4
First union formation intensities by calendar year in Russia

The effect of education on first union formation in Russia, presented in Table 8 is in contrast to the results from Bulgaria. Women with university and higher education have 40% higher rates of entry into cohabitation than those who graduated from secondary school.

Table 8
The effect of level and enrolment in education on entering first union in Russia

	Cohabitation	Direct marriage
<i>Level of education</i>		
Still in education	0.82	0.70
Lower than secondary school (incl. no education)	1.09	1.15
Secondary school	1	1
University and higher	1.40	0.91

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Russian women, Russian nationality.

Notes: Calendar year effects are presented in Figure 3b, standardised for calendar time, parental family characteristics, and pregnancy-and-motherhood status.

Regarding the effect of education on the rates of entry into direct marriage, it seems that the level of education did not play a substantial role. Yet, women with low education were more prone to enter first union as a direct marriage, than women with secondary and higher education. Besides, even if attaining quite high values, being enrolled in education was an obstacle to form a union (compared to women that completed their education).

Results from the interaction between the level of education and the calendar time¹⁰ confirm that the effect of education on union formation in Russia has been changing over time. During the initial period (1969–1985, or as we called it *period of socialism*), highly educated women had about 60% higher rates of entry into cohabitation compared to women with secondary school; the rates were two and a half times higher when compared to women with lower than secondary education. During the years of *Perestroika* (1985–1991), women of lower than tertiary education experienced higher relative increase in the risks of forming first union as cohabitation; as a result, all educational groups arrived at similar rates of entry into non-marital cohabitation. Overall, women with university degree have had higher rates of entry into cohabitation, compared to the other educational groups throughout the 1969–1998 period. Yet, if we compare trends within each of the educational groups, low educated women have experienced the highest increase in the non-marital cohabitation risks over time (rates have increased more than seven times throughout the 1969–2004 period).

In the following we examine the relationship between pregnancy and motherhood status, on the one hand, and union formation on the other. Like in Bulgaria, the rates of transforming a non-residential relationship into a marriage are much higher (9 times) during pregnancy, compared to non-pregnant women. We observe similar, but weaker interaction between pregnancy and

¹⁰ Results not presented here. See Kostova (2007b)

entry into non-marital cohabitation (rates among pregnant women are only four times higher than the ones estimated for non-pregnant childless women).

We present the trends in the effect of pregnancy-and-motherhood status on first union formation (Table 9). Apparently, the decrease in the direct marriage rates was proportional for all categories of the pregnancy-and-motherhood status covariate. Similarly, we estimated a proportional increase in the rates of entry into non-marital cohabitation over the period 1969–1998. It seems that the effect of the pregnancy-and-motherhood status did not change substantially over the time as it was in the case of Bulgaria.

Table 9
*Trends in relative risks of union formation 1969–2004,
by pregnancy-and-motherhood status in Russia*

Parity	Cohabitation				Marriage			
	1969– 1985	1986– 1991	1992– 1998	1999– 2004	1969– 1985	1986– 1991	1992– 1998	1999– 2004
Childless, non pregnant	1	1.96	2.49	3.67	1	1.09	0.72	0.53
Childless, pregnant	5.79	8.87	12.24	9.92	9.57	8.17	6.44	5.00
Mother	0.83	1.42	2.01	1.47	0.74	0.68	0.32	0.39

Source: Own calculations, based on 2004 GGS data, Russian women, Russian nationality.

Notes: (1) Standardised for the effect of education, and parental family characteristics; (2) Time of conception is calculated by deducting 7 months from the date of actual birth. Data on interrupted pregnancies are not available in the dataset.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The 1st wave of the Generations and Gender Survey from 2004 enabled us to select a very dynamic episode of structural socio-economic and political transformations in both countries (1970–2004). The selected time segment comprises the period of socialism (1970s to the mid-1980s), Perestroika (1986–1991), the years of structural reforms, accompanied by deep economic crises (the 1990s), as well as the years of economic stabilisation in the beginning of the 2000s. Analyses of first union formation in Bulgaria and in Russia revealed that the two East European countries have undergone considerable development in the study period, with many variations on a country level.

Our results confirmed that in Bulgaria women with completed primary or lower level of education including “no education” were the forerunners of the novel union formation behaviour (Koytcheva 2006). In contrast highly educated women were more prone to marry directly. A substantially different ef-

fect of education on first union formation was apparent in Russia. The results from the multivariate analysis show that women with tertiary education have had higher rates of entry into cohabitation (compared to the women with secondary and lower education) over the whole period of observation.

In the Russian context we have found a support to the argument that the greater value of *independence and autonomy* among the higher educated women would incite them to postpone marriage for a later period in their life trajectories (Liefbroer 1991; Kantorova 2004). Thus, they would more often start a partnership career by a non-marital cohabitation. On the contrary, the effect of educational attainment on first union formation in Bulgaria confirmed the concept of *accumulation of skills and credentials* (Thornton et al. 1995), according to which less educated individuals will tend to substitute cohabitation for marriage while those with greater school accumulation will be more likely to marry. Similar findings were reported for Hungary (Speder 2005) while no effect of educational attainment on the type of first union was found in the Czech Republic (Kantorova 2004).

Many studies on union formation across Europe and the USA confirm the inflating effect of anticipated parenthood on union formation. The effect of parenthood is greatly significant for the rates at which single people marry directly (Leridon and Villeneuve-Gokalp 1989; Bracher and Santow 1998; Kantorova 2004; Kulik 2005). It also raises the rates at which single people move in together without marriage (Brien et al. 1999; Kravdal 1997), particularly from the mid-1980s onwards, and in societies in which cohabitation has advanced in its development.

For Bulgaria and Russia we studied the effect of pregnancy-and-motherhood status to evaluate the prevalence of the traditional marital family during 1970–2004, as well as to examine the development of cohabitation through the stages of cohabitational typology (Hoem and Hoem 1988; Prinz 1995). In both countries we observe substantially higher rates of entry into marriage during the time of pregnancy (compared to the non-pregnant women without children). However, the strength of the effect and its through development differ in the two countries.

In Bulgaria the occurrence of pregnancy elevates the rates of entry into direct marriage 25 times. Rates were significantly high (and increasing) in the period before the 1989 followed by a moderate decrease thereafter. On the contrary, the “motivation” effect of anticipated motherhood on the rates of entry into non-marital union became stronger over time. It increased more than twice in the period 1998 to 2004 compared to the initial stage (1969–1989). This finding supports the suggestion that cohabitation in Bulgaria underwent a fast development towards becoming a socially accepted union formation for bringing up children.

Like in Bulgaria the norm that a couple will transform their relationship into a marriage when expecting a child is still common in Russia. Overall, the rates of entry into marriage for pregnant women were 9 times higher than the ones for non-pregnant women without children. Nevertheless unlike in Bulgaria the effect of anticipated motherhood on first union formation did not show period development. The decrease in first marriage rates was proportional for the categories of the *pregnancy-and-motherhood status* covariate. Similarly, a proportional increase in the rates of entry into non-marital cohabitation was estimated. In the case of Russia we did not find evidence that the relationship between parenthood and union formation underwent substantial development throughout the period of observation. Apparently in the Russian society marriage and childbirth (or expecting a child) are still very closely interrelated. Therefore, even though losing its ascendancy, the tradition of marriage soon after the conception was still vital in the Russian society in the mid-2000s.

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