Diversity and change in pre-accession Central and Eastern Europe since 1989

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Summary In 2004 eight Central and East European countries are joining the EU. This article explores the changes that have overtaken those countries since the 1989 transition from communism. It begins with a note on the alternative sources of data that might be used, and the difficulties of arriving at a summary of the nature of social policy development and the social conditions that have evolved in the countries. It then presents an analysis of the broad changes across the whole region, now comprising 27 countries, the common phases of change they have shared, and the way that they have diversified into some countries that are already close to the circumstances of existing EU members and some which are in a desperately disintegrated state. The main part of the article presents data on public expenditure, social policies, and social conditions that can be found in the eight new members, and discerns the common and divergent patterns of change that can be found. In the conclusion, issues of path dependency, diversity, and Europeanization are considered. The prospects for the eight new EU members are summarized, and a judgement is made that there are grounds for optimism in their future capacity to sustain social solidarity through social protection and support.

Key words diversity and path dependency, EU accession, social policy in Central and Eastern Europe

Résumé En 2004, huit pays de l'Europe centrale et orientale ont rejoint l'Union européenne. Cet article explore les changements que ces pays ont adoptés depuis la transition du communisme en 1989. Il commence avec une remarque sur les différentes sources de données qui peuvent être utilisées et sur les difficultés d'aboutir à une synthèse de la nature des développements de la politique sociale et des conditions sociales. Ensuite, il présente une analyse des grands changements qui ont eu cours dans la région dans son ensemble comprenant maintenant 27 pays. Les phases communes de changements qu'ils ont partagées et la manière dont ils se sont diversifiés dans quelques pays qui sont déjà proche de la situation des Etats membres de l'UE-15 tandis que d'autres sont dans un état de désintégration désespéré. La partie centrale de cet article représente les données de dépenses publiques, les politiques sociales et les conditions sociales dans les huit nouveaux membres de l'UE et discerne des modèles de changement communs et divergents et les compare avec les modèles de l'UE-15. Les perspectives pour les huit nouveaux membres sont résumées et nous jugeons qu'il y a place pour un certain optimisme dans leur capacité future de développer la solidarité sociale à travers la protection sociale.

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Introduction

As a background to this special collection which compares the European Union (EU) accession countries from the East and the South, this article presents and analyses the social policies and social conditions that have characterized the countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which are joining the EU in 2004. Patterns of anticipatory adjustment, including cognitive alignment, and varieties of social solidarity and social stress will be identified that throw light on the question of whether the CEE countries are moving closer to the existing members, and what this might mean in the context of the already existing variety of social trajectories along which the member states have travelled in recent years.

Joining the EU has been an evolving and sequential process that has spanned the last 30 years. In 1957 the European Economic Community was founded with just six countries, but with new countries joining in 1973, 1981, 1986 and 1995 there were 15 members by 2003. The number of people in this political and economic club has grown from 210m in 1957 to 362m in 2003, and after the 2004 expansion it amounts to 427m. The 2004 expansion is the biggest expansion to date, with 10 new countries, eight of which are from CEE. These countries are the 'Visegrad' countries, named after the royal summit of the Kings of Poland, Bohemia (now mostly the Czech republic) and Hungary at the Castle of Visegrad in 1335, and emulated in a meeting of the corresponding Heads of State in 1991), Slovakia and Slovenia, the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, plus Malta and Cyprus. Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are hoping to join in 2007, making a potential total EU population of 526m. It is estimated that the cost of the 2004 expansion between 2000 and 2007 will be €107b, of which €15b will come from the new members themselves, leaving a net cost of €92b to the 15 existing members. By contrast, it is estimated that the reunification of Germany has cost €600b since 1990 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2266385.stm).

The focus of this article is on the CEE countries, which like the Southern European accession countries which joined the EU in the past, have weaker economies, shorter traditions of democratic elections, and their own particular mix of social and health concerns. The collapse of communism in 1989/91 left these countries with a multi-stranded development agenda covering the complete reconstitution of their political, economic and cultural identities. The overlapping phases of these changes in the different countries, combined with the intense interest of the international community in the outcome, has resulted in debate about this process which has come to be known collectively as 'the transition', and the role of Europeanization or globalization in this process. Much of this debate has been conducted in terms of economic and political structures, processes and performance, with relatively little attention having been given to social issues and social policy changes. However, the experiences of ordinary people and the social supports they have had available to cope with the transition, will have a long-term impact on the future developmental paths of the CEE countries and their capacity for full and positive membership of the EU club.

The article begins with a note on the data and evidence with which we can examine the changes that are taking place in the CEE countries, and the mechanisms we might deploy for comparing them. The general patterns of change since the collapse of communism are outlined across all the 27 countries that now comprise the successor states of the Soviet Union, and a review is presented of various typologies that have been devised to capture this pattern of changes. Subsequently the article focuses more closely on the eight CEE accession countries, and examines changes in their social polices and underlying social conditions. Patterns of change, convergence and divergence are set out. The trends and stages that emerge from this review act as a data source within which the more detailed country studies of this special issue can be set.

A note on the evidence base

The difficulty with general comparisons is whether they hold right across a society, or even across its welfare system. What are we comparing? To what extent does the particular welfare area that we examine affect the argument? Following the critiques that have been mounted against Esping-Andersen's 1990 regime classification, heavily based on the interests of working-age men, by those who claim that it does not adequately capture the experiences of women (e.g. Lewis, 1992), it follows that it may also be unsuitable for ethnic minorities, older people, children, sick and disabled people, and so on: 'the discriminating properties of generalised models of welfare regimes are now being more and more questioned' (Lewis, 1998: 20). Some of the interests of these groups may be located within the kind of services they need (for example health care), and some located within the characteristics of people themselves. For example Alber and Standing (2000) acknowledge that in assessing the range of national strategies that might have been influenced by 'social dumping', there are considerable differences between labour issues and social service issues. Anttonen and Sipilä (1996) found that in considering the social care of children and older people, welfare regime types were at variance with those derived for income support. Indeed Pestoff (1996) argued that it was better to classify social policy changes in CEE by service than by country, suggesting for example that it made more sense to distinguish between services where change had been rapid (unemployment) and those where it was slow (pensions), or severely deteriorated (health and housing).

A further issue in tackling these questions is that of the methods that we can use, and the kind of data that each can generate. Unfortunately, there are sharply varied costs attached to different methods. For example, reanalysing published national data is one of the cheapest and most readily accessible forms of data. However, these data are highly abstracted measures, frequently confined in comparative analysis to social security expenditures.

The alternative is to collect original data for the purpose to hand. There are of course many case-studies in the literature covering one or two countries or one or two services. Systematic comparative case-studies of a small group of countries, regions or cities have become more common, and are much better at identifying unique and common dynamics and mechanisms of the way in which social policies are evolving across the region. Beyond this, the identification of social outcomes is best done through systematic household surveys, ideally with a repeat ('panel') design, such as the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey which has had 10 survey rounds since the early 1990s, the data from which is publicly available at the site (http://www.cpc. unc. edu/projects/rlms/home.html) located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Another example, that combines qualitative data and a panel survey design, is four rounds of interviews with the same Russian households since 1996, designed to identify changing social needs and household survival strategies (Manning and Tikhonova, 2004; now funded for two further rounds in 2004–5).

Much policy is identified through formal government legislation, yet the implementation of such policies can be weak or even non-existent. Unfortunately there has been only a small literature based on interviews with those who are required to implement policy, although it is beginning to grow. For example, Manning et al. (2000) conducted repeat interviews over 12 months with policy officials, addressing the issue of employment and unemployment policy in three cities in Russia in the late 1990s. Part of a wider project, the evidence reported was that the policy actors in Russia were often unaware of the policy options that they faced, and naïve about the ways in which implementation can falter.

One final (and in the context of CEE, probably the most significant) data source has been the 'UNICEF monitoring project'. This is funded by the World Bank, and managed by the Innocenti Research Centre in Florence. Since 1993 the project has monitored the social needs of children and families throughout the 27 countries of the region, to identify social policy developments, and to gather a consistent and publicly available data source for further use. Each annual report has contained a mixture of regular data and special in-depth studies of particular social groups, social needs, or policy developments. The annual data sources include: a policy survey in each of the 27 countries carried out by UNICEF field officers; UN (e.g. WHO), World Bank, OECD, and official government published data; and guest expert summaries of case-studies and other independently published research material. A summary of the numerical data is provided on line for free as the TransMONEE database (http://www. uniceficdc.org/resources/transmonee.html), from which many of the figures in this article have been drawn.

In reality we have to use what data we can, and take care in drawing our conclusions. In this article several kinds of data have been combined.

Post-communist successor states

In the same sense that Western welfare state regimes have been analysed as distinct and internally coherent, state socialist societies had their own distinct and consistent approach to welfare issues. In this respect they warranted the attribution of a particular type of welfare regime, which could be set alongside the better-known types of Western welfare states. In common with West European societies, state-socialist social policy was dovetailed with labour policies, so that there was sufficient investment in the reproduction, maintenance and motivation of human capital for the economy, while social needs and problems were addressed sufficiently for political legitimacy to be retained – at least for the most part.

However, the means of achieving these broad policy goals were quite different (George and Manning, 1980; Manning and Shaw, 1998). The social care of small children and older people was heavily institutionalized, hospitals and schools were run in a centralized bureaucracy funded by central government, income support was handled by trade unions, and the majority of housing was allocated by industrial enterprises to their own (and other) favoured workers. Indeed this particular feature – the allocation of substantial welfare resources through the enterprise, such that employment was the key passport to a variety of social supports (even food) – was a remarkable aspect of the system. The distribution of employment was thus the key element of social administration, and had been structured in much the same way since Stalin's labour codes and constitution of the 1930s had officially abolished unemployment. Since the government controlled almost all domestic production, taxation was unnecessary.

Nevertheless, this apparently monolithic system was not static. Even within Russia, there were marked phases over which social policy had developed during the course of the 20th century, swinging from periods of relatively liberal and welfare-oriented expenditure (such as the 1920s under Lenin, the 1960s under Khrushchev, and the 1980s under Gorbachev) to periods of tighter labour control and more restrictive services (Stalin from the 1930s to the 1950s, and Breshnev in the 1970s) (Manning, 2003). Such policy shifts are of course a feature of any political and economic system over time, and we cannot understand the developments that have occurred in more recent years within the region, and particularly within the CEE countries, without some appreciation of both common trends and phases, and also patterns of convergence and divergence within and between individual, and groups of, countries.

A system that covered the 27 countries that now comprise the region was unlikely to have been applied uniformly. There is no doubt that the regions and countries of state-socialist

Europe contained long-standing variations that Russification, the Warsaw Pact and COMECON had been unable to eliminate. For example, Estonia had for years had the highest standard of living and the most advantageous social policies of the USSR (George and Manning, 1980), in marked contrast to the republics of the Northern Caucasus, or Central Asia. Czechoslovakia had been on the verge of West European economic and social compatibility in the 1930s. Slovenia had been the most liberal and comfortable of the regions in Yugoslavia, where employment was not guaranteed and the economy aspired to decentralized self-management. Poland had continued as a deeply Catholic country throughout the 20th century. Examples could be multiplied.

What has changed since the communist parties lost control of the CEE societies in 1989, and eventually the Soviet Union in 1991? The initial effect was of course political. Social movements and civil unrest had been growing throughout the late 1980s, and early elections were seen as the primary target of those (mainly middle-class) citizens who yearned for greater political freedom. This was rapidly followed by the informal and formal growth of markets for consumer goods, and eventually for money, industry and services. New actors appeared in these arenas. For example, many of the green movements that had been allowed, and in some cases encouraged, to form in the 1980s, gave important experience to the younger generation in self-organization and political mobilization. A great many of these activists swapped movement activism for institutional politics once the opportunities presented themselves (Lang-Pickvance et al., 1997). The new markets, however, were rapidly populated by criminals, displaced academics, and, not least, re-invented members of the nomenklatura, who had lost their positions of power with the collapse of the communist parties.

Over the ensuing decade, deeper cultural changes have emerged. With the fission of 10 countries into 27, ethnic and religious affiliations have come to the fore to varied extents across the region. In the absence of official party ideology, but with a lingering distrust of Western commercialism, people have increasingly turned to religion for an alternative set of beliefs with which to make sense of their lives. In some countries this has resulted in tense political cleavages, and issues of poverty and social protest have split along religious dimensions (Manning and Tikhonova, 2004). Alongside this, commercialism has turned the arts and literature upside down, as state subsidies have been withdrawn, and freedom to publish has emerged. Perhaps it is not surprising that general social surveys record a deep ambivalence towards the changes of the last 10 years across the region (Bradshaw et al., 2003).

However, those driving these changes from both inside and outside the region were not particularly concerned either personally or in principle with the meeting of social need. On the whole the majority of the new actors were men. A particular kind of state-socialist gender equality has been de-institutionalized, and women have had to continue to cope with the double burdens of paid work and family responsibilities that had been a mark of state socialism, but under more trying circumstances (Pascall and Manning, 2000). Social needs and the social policies designed to meet them have not been a priority in the new societies, while social and health problems have mushroomed. By the beginning of the 21st century, poverty and inequality, infectious diseases and alcoholism, and homelessness had all risen sharply, while life expectancy, employment rates and populations had declined (UNICEF, 1999; 2003).

Nevertheless, the 21st century has marked the beginnings of a turnaround in the fortunes of several of these countries, and the prospects of improvement for certain sections of almost all of them. But these improvements are not necessarily sustainable, nor are they spread throughout different social groups. Policies are not the same as outcomes, and the average trends for political involvement, income, and

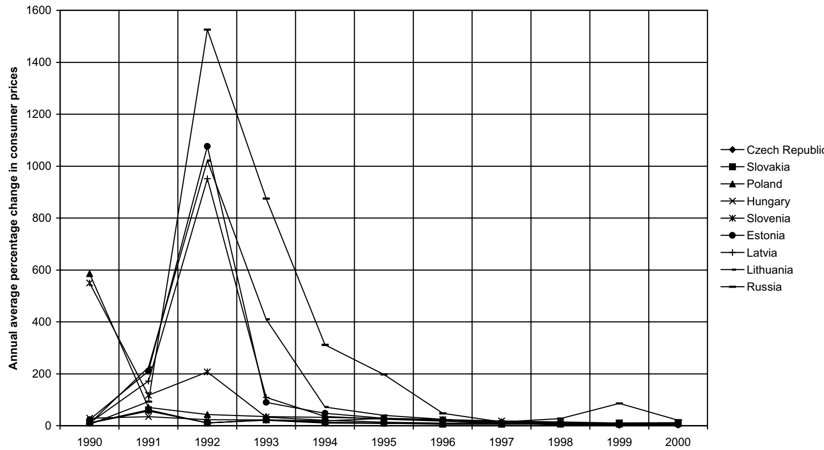

Figure 1 Annual inflation rate

Note: Each figure includes the eight CEE accession countries, plus Russia for comparison.
Source: Unless otherwise stated all figures are generated from the micro-data available through TransMONEE 2001, Florence: UNICEF.

social and health status contain growing diversity, which may generate as yet hidden problems for the future.

Changes in social policy since 1989

One of the classic questions that the collapse of state socialism has posed for the understanding of macro-change in European societies is that of how the societies of CEE have diverged in their development since 1989, and why. So far as social policy is concerned there have been three phases.

Phase One

Initially there were some rapidly implemented policies put in place by the new governments in the anticipation of the social consequences of the emergence of market mechanisms in the post-communist era. Quintessential among these was the issue of the expected explosion of unemployment, and the related loss of income that this would mean for families who had traditionally been supported by large state subsidies to consumption, with few accumulated savings to rely on. Economists had argued that there was a large overhang of underemployed people who would be released quickly by enterprises facing the chill winds of the global economic marketplace (Ellman, 1989; Standing, 1991). New schemes for fairly generous unemployment benefits were enacted in most countries, including Russia. Otherwise little social policy changed prior to the round of new elections that had taken place by the very early 1990s.

Phase Two

With the new governments, most of which were characterized more by their distance from the communist parties than internal coherence or social rootedness, new social policy debates began to emerge in Phase Two. Here, a more complex picture of change emerges. First, unemployment benefits were cut back, as an

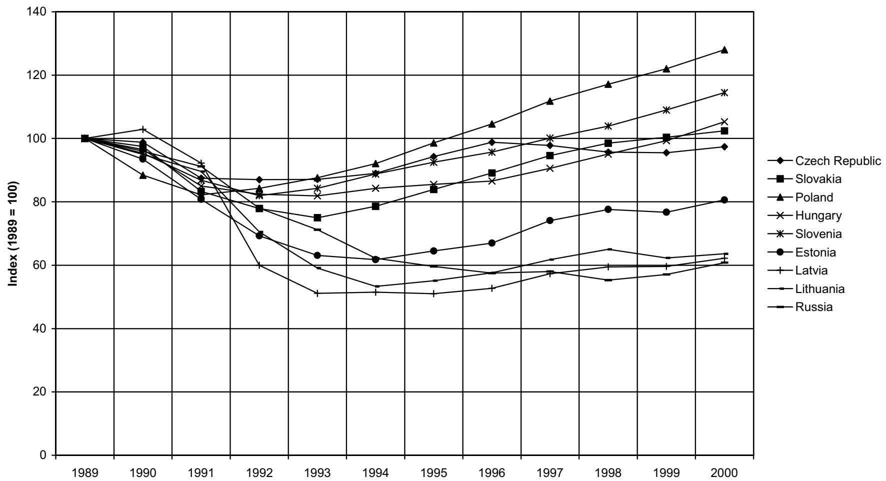

Figure 2 Real GDP growth

unsustainable expense. An extended debate emerged about what actually was developing in the region's labour markets, especially marked in relation to Russia, where predictions ranged from dangerous collapse, to sustained boom (Manning et al., 2000). Second, the key policy actors who were involved in thinking about policy changes were involved in new and varied policy networks. For some, the prospect of emulating the EU, in terms of both living standards and political and economic security, led to discussions about devising either social-democratic or corporatist welfare systems. For others, and in particular Russia, the heavy hand of the International Monetary Fund made loans and credits dependent on following a liberal ideology in which an American-style residual welfare state was paramount. In the event, the collapse of industrial production in the Russian case, together with a chaotic transition to the political management of routine domestic mechanisms such as the collection of taxes with which to fund social expenditures, meant that residualism in welfare was inevitable. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s, most countries had gained control of their new market-based economies, and inflation rates came down dramatically (Figure 1).

Phase Three

The third phase was marked in 1998 by two key turning points: the return of five Central European countries to levels of economic production that they had enjoyed in 1989; and, in marked contrast, the further lurching collapse of the Russian currency, with a related and sudden jump in rates of poverty, inequality, inflation and unemployment. Although all six countries began the decade with similar levels of absolute GDP, Figure 2 shows the divergence between them in GDP growth by the end of the decade in all its clarity.

Divergent paths across the region

However, there are further divergences concealed beneath this major bifurcation. Within Russia, regional inequality has grown to the point at which the most advantaged areas, such as Moscow and its environs, have per capita incomes four or five times those of the least advantaged areas, such as the Northern Caucasus, with very contrasting patterns of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Manning and Tikhonova, 2004). Within

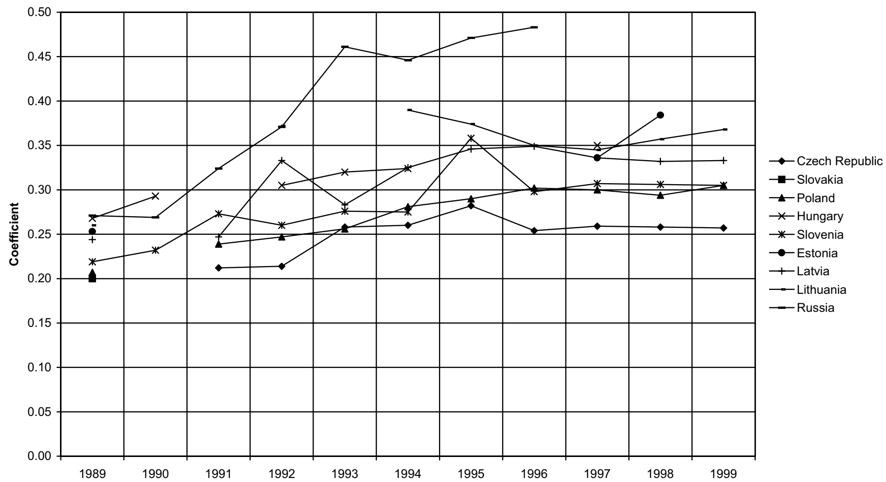

Figure 3 Distribution of earnings: Gini coefficient

Central Europe we find that, for example, Poland's spectacular economic recovery to 129 percent of 1989 GDP contrasts with the Czech Republic's more modest 106 percent. The price that has been paid for this is that Polish inequality is far higher (at a Gini coefficient of 0.34 compared to 0.24, and with double the rate of Czech unemployment) (2001 figures from UNICEF, 2003: 89–92). Looking at the range of inequality since 1990, it is clear that the whole group has experienced a rise in inequality, but that there has also been a growing spread, with Russia in a league of its own (Figure 3).

There have been a number of typologies that have emerged in the literature for grouping together the various paths that these 27 countries have begun to travel. Table 1 summarizes a selection of them, as they have emerged over time.

These models focus on different dimensions for comparison, and appeared at different dates in a rapidly changing region. The first two, from the World Bank and UNDP, describe the general attitude of governments towards the introduction of democratic and market institutions in the mid to late 1990s. The dimensions of such typologies are not explicitly clarified in the literature. By contrast, the EBRD 'transition indicator' is an explicit combination of eight dimensions of economic institutional reform, ranging from legal institutions, to banking, to government ministerial structures and policies (see EBRD, 1999: 25). The score ranges between 1 (little evidence of any change) to 4 (change to a quality typical of Western Europe). Thus 3.4 suggests a substantial level of reform, whereas 2.4 suggests a far more modest change. Deacon (2000: 151) uses a variety of official and research reports to estimate the direction of travel of countries towards two broad groups of social policy tradition; but UNICEF, despite funding a long-term programme to track changes in social policy across the region, still groups countries by GDP. There are thus few if any examples in this literature that use social policies explicitly as the comparative dimension. Similarly it is difficult to find comparisons based on the outcomes of social policies, or social problems.

However, an attempt to make such a comparison, based on social policy effort and social outcomes, was developed for a UN-

Table 1 Typologies of social policy and reform in CEE (1995–2000)

World Bank (World Bank, 1996)
Most reform: Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, Czech and Slovak Republics
Some reform: Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Albania, Romania
Less reform: Kyrgistan, Russia, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakstan
Laggards (no reform): Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkistan

UN Development Programme (UNDP, 1999a)
Liberal approach: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Baltics
Late reformers: Bulgaria, Romania
Non-liberal: Belarus
Conflict over whether to liberalize: Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia
Political breakdown: Armenia, Albania

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD, 1999)
'Transition Indicator'
3.4 Central Europe
3.2 Baltics
2.4 Western CIS
2.2 Central Asia

Deacon (2000)
West European welfare state: *(mixed Bismarck Insurance, e.g. payroll taxes, and Scandinavian state finance)* Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia
Conserve state and workplace benefits: *(which may collapse and lead to residualization)* Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia

sponsored intergovernmental conference of CIS countries in 2000 (Manning, 2001). How can we usefully group these countries? There is no doubt their economic situation is highly varied. Nevertheless, there is a clear pattern that has emerged. The EU accession group is marked by a return to growth, less poverty (although not necessarily low unemployment), lower rates of teenage pregnancy, and lower rates of infectious diseases. We might characterize this group as the *recovery group* in which economic growth has returned, governments have the capacity to tax and spend for social intervention, and social costs have been contained. At the other end of the scale are the Central Asian and Caucasus countries (and regions of Russia in Northern Caucasus). These typically exhibit very high rates of poverty, growing levels of infectious disease, extremely low levels of government expenditure as a proportion of GDP, a return to traditional patterns of marriage, and economies that for the most part have failed to return to a vigorous pattern of growth. This might be called the *disintegrating group*. In between these two extremes are a variety of countries struggling with different problems. We can separate two types. Those in which *conflict* has disrupted economic and social life to such an extent that it is difficult to identify a stable trend in terms of social costs and their amelioration. We might include the Balkans and Caucasus areas here. Finally there are those countries in which economic growth has only just materialized, where as a consequence a large section of the population is suffering, but in which there is every potential for a better future in terms of available raw materials and levels of education. This group is *struggling* and may or may not join the EU accession pattern in the future. The preeminent case is of course Russia, highly significant for the region as a whole because of its overwhelming size. Indeed this country is so big that it is more appropriate for us to remember the huge regional variations within it, and consider that some of its regions should perhaps more appropriately be classified with other groups: the Northern Caucasus with the rest of the Caucasus regions, for example; or Moscow with the EU accession group.

So, diversity there surely is. How and why this manifests itself within the EU accession states from CEE remains a contested issue, which we will now explore by focusing explicitly on social policy and social conditions.

The EU accession states from CEE

As we saw in Figure 2, the countries of CEE have returned to growth, and to levels of GDP that they were enjoying at the start of the transition years. The Baltic states, which were among the most privileged areas in the old Soviet Union, are also doing well, but remain somewhat behind CEE. Altogether we can see that the accession countries are distinct from both the rest of Eastern Europe and from Western Europe. The economies of the former have yet to recover to anywhere near their GDP levels of the late 1980s, although some, such as Russia, have now returned to sustained growth. In contrast, the countries of the latter have absolute levels of GDP which are typically two or three times as high per capita.

The CEE accession countries appear to be, then, a distinct group, although whether this has been a result of their passage towards EU accession, or a selection effect resulting from the EU's choice of 'winners', cannot easily be disentangled. A closer examination of both social policy changes and the developing social conditions within this group of eight countries reveals a mixed pattern of trends, such that it is not clear to what extent they will remain such a distinct group.

Changes in social policies

In this section we examine a few example policies, leaving outcomes to the following section. In the absence of data with which we can compare these countries in such detail, we can examine general data from the TransMONEE database, and then case-studies from the literature to look at several key aspects of social policy changes.

Public expenditure

The first key issue is the pattern of government expenditure in general, and on specific areas of social policy. We know from the 'disintegrating group', for example the Central Asian countries, that government expenditure has fallen dramatically as a proportion of GDP, where GDP itself has also fallen. Governments of most Former Soviet Union (FSU) countries spend less than 25 percent of GDP. This has not been the case for the EU accession countries, where there has been a very noticeable convergence around the 40–5 percent norm typical in the rest of Europe (Figure 4). This is perhaps the clearest indicator of these countries' desire to conform to typical West European practice.

If we look specifically at health and education expenditure (Figures 5 and 6), we can see that in both cases there has been no clear trend in the proportion of GDP devoted to these areas, with expenditure moving within a band of 4 to 7 percent. This level of expenditure is not far out of line with the rest of the EU. For education, there is a remarkable convergence of both EU and accession countries on an expenditure of 4.5 percent on public education. In the field of public health care there is wider variation in EU countries of between 7 and 11 percent of GDP expenditure, whereas the accession countries are struggling at their best to reach 7 percent. However, there is internationally a strong association between total GDP and health expenditure, since health increasingly takes on

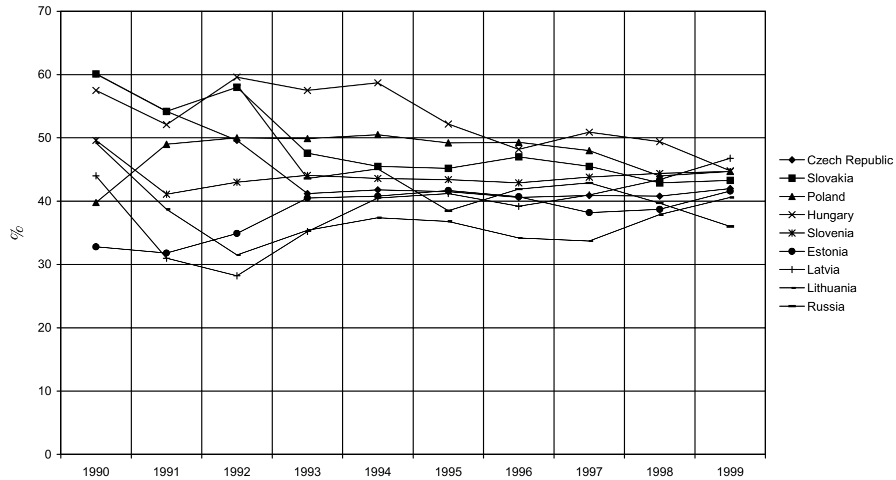

Figure 4 General government expenditure/GDP ratio

the character of a consumer good as economies grow. As the GDP of the accession countries rises, we can therefore expect growing expenditure on public health care in the future.

Policies for pensions and health

Policies across so many countries are difficult to summarize graphically, and here we necessarily have to turn to a selection of case-studies. There are useful published case-studies of pensions, which in the arena of income support are critical, partly because of cost but also for potential impact on poverty rates. The other area is that of health care – again a critical and central social policy concern.

Pensions Studies of pension reform have highlighted conflict between the two national ministries of labour and finance as the key axis through which both international and domestic reform agendas get shaped and translated into specific policies. While there was initially quite a slow pace of change, pensions policy is now developing quite rapidly in the region.

In a study of reforms in Russia and Latvia, Chandler (2001) argues that there have been great variations in pension reforms right across the region, and that these have been driven more by politics than international economic pressures. She notes that the Chilean system, widely touted by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and parts of the World Bank, have been accepted as a good idea by some countries, particularly their ministries of finance, but not by others. After a detailed examination of Latvia and Russia, she concludes that Latvia adopted the internationally prescribed private multi-tier pensions system as a way of identifying itself as a political entity, and finding a sense of independence from its USSR past, and with an eye on shaping up for future EU membership. Russia, by contrast, she notes has been much more suspicious of external solutions, and slow to reform its pensions system.

Müller (2002) also offers a comparison of pensions policy in two countries. She argues that, while of course there has been variation in detail, in fact most CEE countries have gone down the road of privatizing pensions. However, in two exceptional cases, the Czech Republic and Slovenia (to which one might

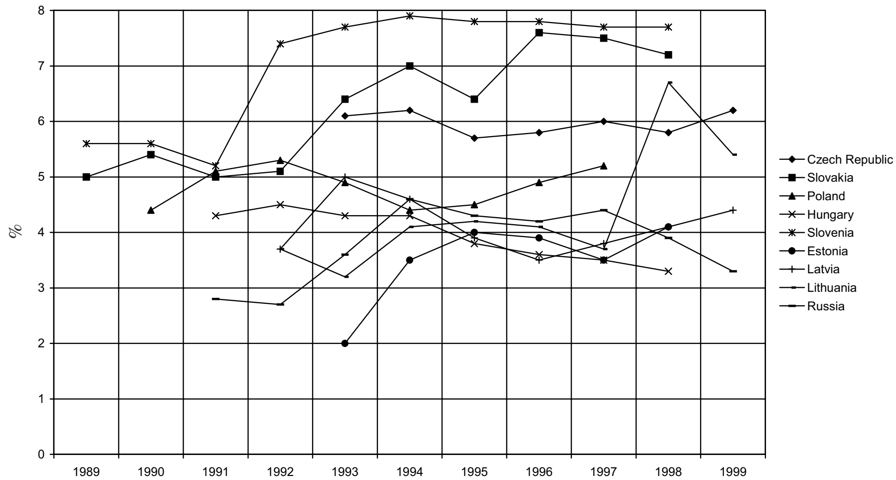

Figure 5 Public expenditure on health/GDP ratio

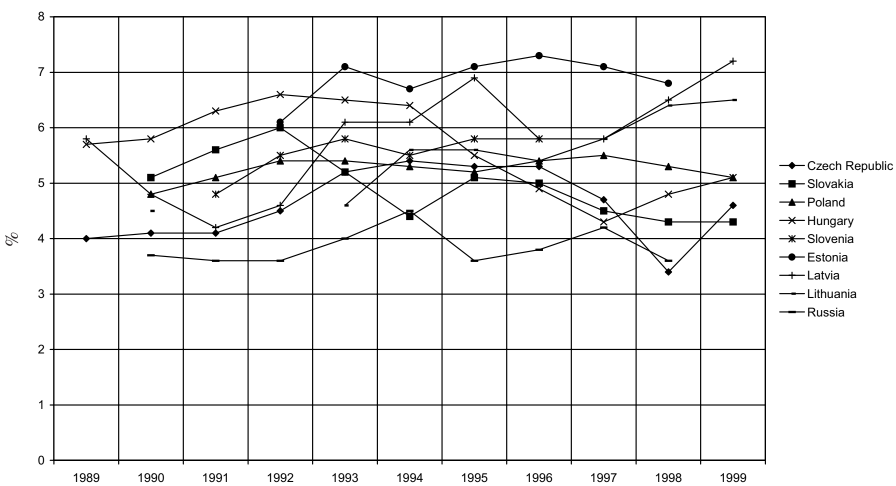

Figure 6 Public expenditure on education/GDP ratio

add Russia), there has been a rejection of the neo-liberal pensions privatization agenda adopted by the majority. She approaches this problem of exceptionality through the use of the concept of 'epistemic communities' of policy actors. In particular, she observes that ministry of finance officials form a separate community, often closely linked to international economic advice channelled through international agencies. By contrast, ministry of labour officials are more closely linked to domestic politicians and pressure groups. The finance epistemic community typically gets involved with pensions reform when debts are difficult to manage, and where external loans and help comes but with neo-liberal strings attached (usually in the form of privatizing the pensions system). In these two exceptional cases, Czech and Slovene debt was at a relatively low level, and therefore the finance ministries were not so interested in seeking external help, nor concerned about the possible impact of pensions on debts. In addition, in Slovenia it was particularly clear that the key policy actors came from the ministry of labour, the trade unions and the pensioners lobby, who actively rejected proposals put by the World Bank.

Health Health policy interacts far less with issue of poverty or public finance than pensions, and on the whole this area has remained subject to national and local debate and innovation. It is also a good example of the gap between legislation and the reality of social provision on the ground – we should be careful about assuming that social provision can be judged merely by the existence of official policies.

Lawson and Nemec (1998) present an analysis of health policy drawing on a similar approach to that of Müller, although from a rational choice rather than policy community orientation. They compare health reforms in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. They suggest that there are basically two types of health-care development. Poland and the Czech Republic have opted for a more decentralized system, with a range of insurance providers, whereas Hungary and Slovakia have retained a monopolistic state insurance system, and more centralized services. Salaries and fee-for-service remuneration methods also vary across these countries, and the conclusion is that in none of them is there a clear vision of the direction in which health policy should travel, and that this in all probability reflects the fact that the policy communities in each country on this issue are small, and have not been stimulated into debate by a strong externally driven argument, as has been the case for pensions.

McMenamin and Timonen (2002) update the situation in Poland, which has attempted a wide-ranging health reform since 2000. However, they conclude that since health policy continues to be driven strongly by internal, and unstable, political currents, the implementation of the new system has been weak, with some privatization, continued high levels of informal payments, too many specialists, and half-hearted attempts to get competition through a purchaser–provider split, and to de-politicize health funds.

The overriding impression is that despite, or perhaps because of, a locally focused politics of health policy, CEE remains firmly within mainstream European health traditions, with most countries setting up state-controlled health insurance mechanisms, and with little internal competition. This is clearly evidence against the argument that there has been an Americanization of social policy in CEE, just as the adoption by some countries of a pensions structure championed by the International Monetary Fund does not mean that they have broken away from the pattern typical for the EU. Many EU countries also have three-pillar pensions schemes. It will also be apparent from the next section that social conditions within CEE are incompatible with the characterization of the region as adopting a residual welfare regime.

Social outcomes

While there is no clear pattern from the examination of social policies, a review of data on social conditions in CEE suggests that there is now a sustained recovery from the difficulties of the early 1990s. In turning to social outcomes, we need to bear in mind that patterns of change can be caused by a variety of factors that may or may not be realistically under government control. There have been a number of 'headline' social changes associated with the transition period for these countries since the early 1990s. A good example is the crime rate, which has come to symbolize for many observers the high social cost of the transition, particularly in Russia. Crime rates

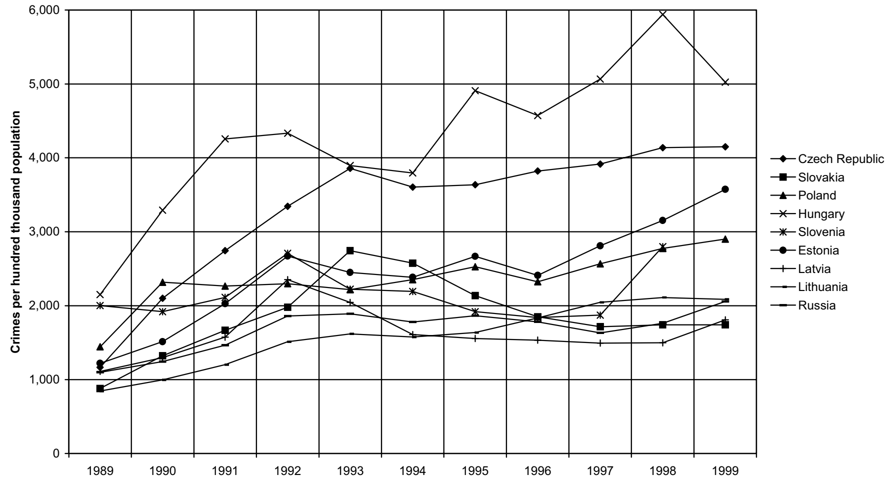

Figure 7 Registered total crime rate

are notoriously difficult to compare. Recorded rates depend on the efficiency of the police force, such that never more than around 50 percent of crimes are recorded in any country. Public surveys are affected by the public's fear of crime. Nevertheless, the actual data is perhaps surprising. Crime rates have been growing right across the EU in the last 10 years, based on the more reliable social survey approach. Comparing burglary and robbery rates for EU and CEE countries in the mid-1990s, for example, two things become clear: the rates are notably similar in both halves of Europe, and Russia does not stand out as exceptional (a useful source for details is the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute – http://ruljis.leidenuniv.nl/group/jfcr/www/icvs/index.htm). UNICEF data on recorded rates allows us to examine trends for the CEE countries across the decade in Figure 7.

Another dramatic change often noted has been the jump in middle-age death rates for men (Figure 8). On 29 July 1999 the UNDP announced that 'a human crisis of monumental proportions is emerging in the former Soviet Union. The transition years have literally been lethal for many people. The hardest hit are the men of the region, who are living shorter, more unhealthy lives' (http://www.undp.org/rbec/pubs/hdr99/pr.htm). The shape of this crisis was demonstrated through life expectancy among men, which had fallen to 58 years (10 years lower than the life expectancy for men in China), mainly caused by a rise in mortality among the middle aged. As a result of the growing gap between the life expectancies of men and women across the region, the UNDP calculated that there were a total of 9.7m 'missing men', of which Russia accounted for the majority, at 5.9m (UNDP, 1999b: 40–2).

Much of this elevated death rate has been attributed to stress and related alcohol consumption, but clearly the worst is over and there is a growing convergence of these rates in recent years. However a longer-term problem may be building up through a rise in infectious diseases, of which tuberculosis has been widely used as a symbol (Figure 9). We can clearly see here that some of the former Soviet Union countries are diverging from the other EU accession countries.

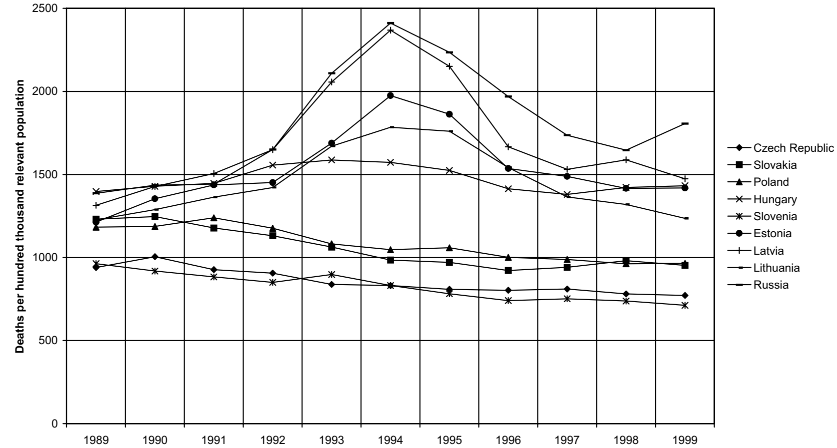

Figure 8 Age 40–59 male mortality rate

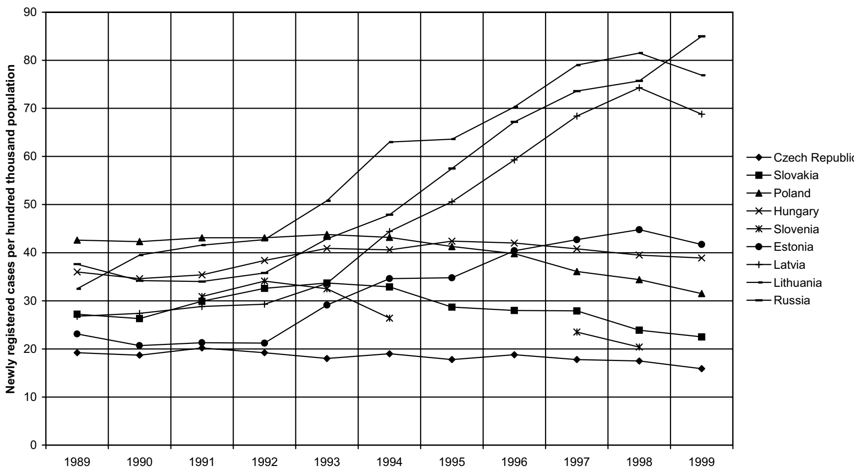

Figure 9 Tuberculosis incidence

A final example of a social indicator that has come to represent the difficulties that have developed in the years of transition is the unemployment rate (Figure 10). This was the key problem expected in Phase One of the transition, but one which has not emerged in quite the dramatic fashion that had been feared. Although traditionally measured by the rate of benefit claims, the more widely comparable (and legitimate) measure through the Labour Force Survey method suggests that for most CEE countries there was indeed a growing convergence around 14 percent by the end of the decade – a relatively high rate of unemployment by European standards. However, the latest OECD data for the end of 2003 show that there is a slow drift downwards in the CEE unemployment rates for all countries, but with the Czech Republic and Hungary now successfully driving below the EU

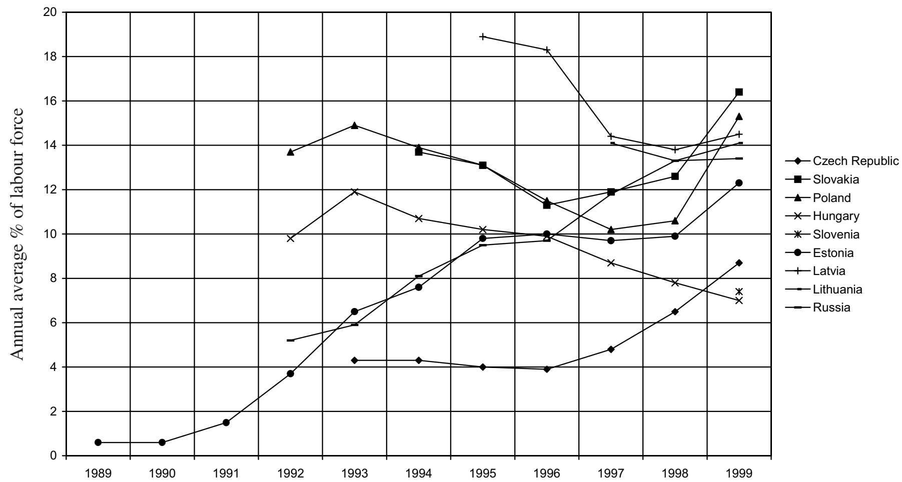

Figure 10 Unemployment rate (Labour Force Survey method)

average of 9 percent (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/13/18595359.pdf).

An alternative way of posing the question of whether, how and why CEE countries have changed is to think about the extent to which changes have impacted on specific social groups. A useful target is to examine groups that welfare states are designed to protect, and which were successfully supported under the old state-socialist system, to see what impact the transition might have had, for example, on women and children.

Pascall and Manning (2000) analyse the changes in social-welfare support for women in CEE countries in five different roles. They focus more on the common experiences than variations between them. On the whole they identify a weakening in support for the position of women in these roles. As *paid workers*, while the pay gap has not changed much, they suggest that unemployment is greater for women. TransMONEE data only partially supports this conclusion. Of the nine countries in this sample, there is no substantial gap in gender unemployment rates except for Poland, Estonia and Russia, all of which exhibit a higher rate for women.

As *partners/wives*, Pascall and Manning suggest women retain strong, legally enshrined rights in marriage, but weakened reproductive rights. Certainly the divorce rate has accelerated in the 1990s, and combined with reduction in GDP across the region, rising unemployment and reductions in employment-based rights, this has been a difficult time for women (Figure 11).

As *mothers*, women have received reduced family allowance, nursery provision, sick-child leave and parental benefits, and as *carers* they have seen a dip in health and pre-school support (Fajth, 1999). As *active citizens* they are exercising a lower profile in political roles, although some growth in social-movement activity. Pascall and Manning conclude that gender relations in CEE are based on two earners, but differ from the Scandinavian models in their more extensive expectations of women as unpaid workers. The dominance of the breadwinner model in the EU – already reduced by the accession of Sweden and Finland – will be further reduced as CEE countries join with a longer history of high women's employment participation.

Turning to children, Pascall and Manning (2002) looked at the possible effects on children of EU accession by CEE countries. One

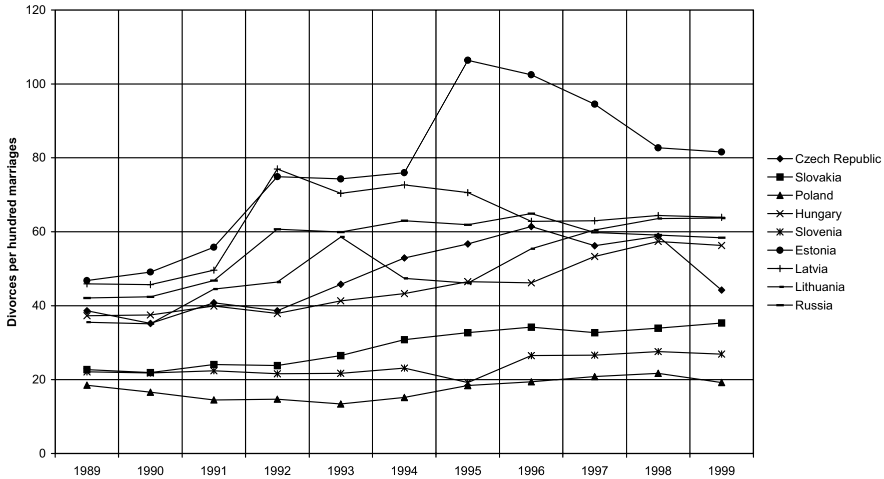

Figure 11 General divorce rate

Note: The general divorce rate can rise above 100% – it is merely the ratio between numbers of marriages and divorces in any year.

of the basic indicators of the well-being of children in any society is the rate of infant mortality (Figure 12). This is regarded by all governments and health professionals as a key measure of the effects of social and economic change, including the impact of social policies. The pattern here shows clearly a steady improvement throughout the last decade. Most of the CEE countries have achieved a reduction of around 50 percent, and are now below 10, which is at least as good as the US rate, with Slovenia and the Czech Republic below the typical EU rate of seven.

The life chances of children are also heavily dependent on the provision of education, and this is also an area in which CEE countries have performed well. Classroom sizes, a key indicator of the quality of schools, are coming down, and the proportion of each cohort of young people enrolling in higher education has been accelerating, particularly in recent years.

Pascall and Manning (2002) note that more Austrian and German children lived below their national relative poverty thresholds in the early 1990s than Czech or Slovak, and more UK children with two parents than Hungarian or Polish. Children of lone parents in Poland and Hungary in the same period were not much more subject to poverty than children of two-parent families. However, Förster and Toth (2001) provide a detailed review of the impact of changing family income support policies in the CEE countries enacted in 1995, particularly the general move to income testing and targeting, and demonstrate from survey data that more children have been precipitated into poverty by these changes. Jarvis and Redmond (1997) suggest that while levels of child poverty vary, policy changes for reducing child poverty are similar, with a general move from a more continental type to an Anglo-Saxon type.

Conclusion

This review of change in CEE countries, and the wider FSU region, has identified a number of trends and phases. Rather like a stream swirling over rocks, we can observe a complex picture of movement, sometimes slow, some-

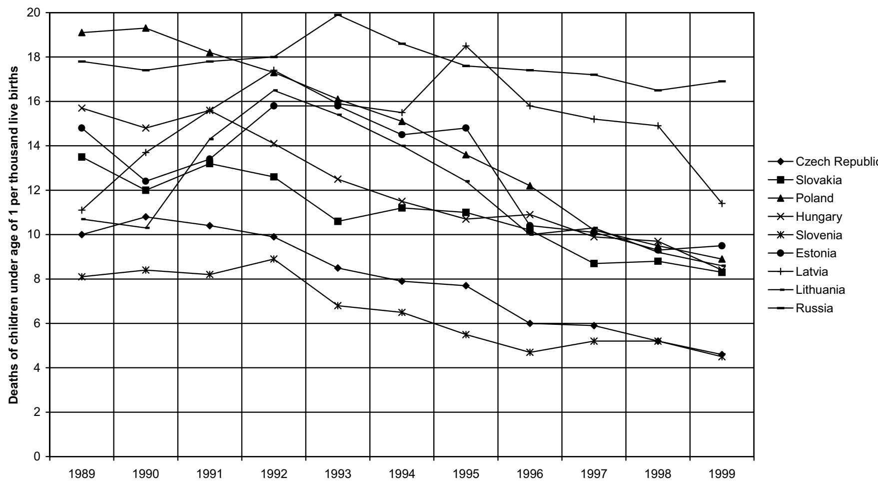

Figure 12 Infant mortality rate

times rapid, in which the currents at play converge, diverge, circulate and reverse. Some patterns are nevertheless particularly clear. First, there were three distinct phases that all the East European countries have been through in the divestment of the past and the adoption of democratic, market and new cultural practices. Second, in the course of these changes, diversification opened up quickly, with the 'Visegrad' countries recovering well, but with the Baltic countries slower to leave their Soviet past behind. Third, we have seen more detailed variations developing between the eight accession countries. Different pension schemes, different health-care systems, different levels of economic growth, inequality and health conditions have become apparent. However, it is also clear, especially in the decade since the invention of the 'welfare regime' typology (Abrahamson, 1999) that EU countries are themselves resolutely and systematically different. In the manner of an expressionist painting that is less clear in its outlines the closer you observe it, the closer the accession countries grow towards the EU, the more varied they will find the existing members.

To what extent are these patterns evidence of diversity from a common origin, or path dependency from diverse origins? Path dependency has been the subject of wide-ranging multi-disciplinary reflection (Goldstone, 1998), and is generally used to explain stability in systems where relatively unique initial conditions fix developments despite changing circumstances. There are two variants of path dependency theory, the more general of which suggests that path dependency results from some kind of institutional lock-in of actors' behaviours, for example through resource dependency, cultural habits, or costly alternatives. A more restricted version concentrates on a single mechanism for retaining path conformity – 'rising rates of return' (Pierson, 2000). This approach posits that the main reason for staying on a path is that there are increasing benefits as a result of past investment or the costs of moving onto a new path, which Pierson argues are particularly applicable to political systems. Korpi (2000) has explored these effects on West European social policy: the survival of the 'Scandinavian model', despite the pressures of global financial flows or EU membership, suggests such path constraints; there are similar path constraints behind the resistance of the German policy community to substantial changes in German welfare arrangements.

Path dependency has been extensively used in the 'transition literature' to explain a variety of patterns in the CEE countries. The most pervasive has been the explanation for social policies that have carried over from the 1980s. In a sense all of these countries were recognizably part of the same economic and social system, epitomized visually by the common pattern of state-socialist urban development and infrastructure that developed in the middle of the 20th century. The continued presence of enterprise welfare provision, including childcare, housing, food and so on, is a good example. Such arrangements are used by management to retain skilled workers, and in that sense give 'increasing returns', which neither management nor their workers have an incentive to give up.

However, the policy constraints that operated from the USSR for 50 years were in the end too weak to contain the desire by local elites for autonomy and freedom to take their own developmental paths. This they have done, in interaction with two further influences: the ambition of some to join the EU club, including its social dimension, on the one hand; and on the other, the neo-liberal policy solutions proffered and often formally required in return for help from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Deacon, 2000). Altogether, alongside the economic pressures of global economic forces, these various factors help us to make sense of the complex mix that characterizes social policy in the accession countries.

Two recent collections looking at the likely impact of the EU accession on CEE countries place diversity at the centre of their analyses. Ingham and Ingham (2002: 11) cite three factors: the substantial population increase; the lower per capita GDP; and the small chance of them joining monetary union in the near future. In addition, while the economic benefits for the accession countries have been estimated variously between 2 and 20 percent growth in real income, the benefit for existing countries will be no more than 0.2 percent growth (p. 12). They take diversity as a problem by definition, and conclude that this must mean the strategy of enlargement has political rather than economic motives.

By contrast, a special issue of *West European Politics* (25 (2), 2002) takes diversity as a research problem, and looks at its political and social dimensions with a view to understanding, and in part celebrating, it as a continuing aspect of both sets of countries over the last 10 years which is likely to continue into the future. The editors conclude that there is relatively little variation in political culture and ambition between old and new members. This contrasts with economic and social conditions where they highlight variation between 'Visegrad' and FSU countries; between groups within the accession countries; and of course between old EU members and the new countries. Nevertheless, they point out that there is little social policy in the 'acquis' that will cause difficulties for the new members, unless fiscal discipline is compromised. They observe that there is already great variety between the pension schemes of older EU members, for example. Indeed, they argue that the newcomers have had a much more dynamic appreciation of the alternatives they face, and have proved more adept at social-security change than existing 'eurosclerotic' EU members over the last 10 years.

In the Introduction, Zielonka and Mair (2002: 13–14) observe that there is a 'risk of elevating manifestations of social differences between East and West to an almost mythical level, cautioning against a presentation of Eastern Europe simply as a region of abandoned children, street beggars and tuberculosis patients that may spread its social diseases westwards'. However, when looking for the detail with which to analyse the course of change in these countries, Kovács finds that 'the lack of comprehensive and comparative works [make] it extremely difficult to reconstruct the recent history of welfare in the ECE states' (2002: 182). He offers three narratives to describe welfare state changes: 'leaping in the dark', 'marking time', and 'muddling through'. The first suggests a neo-liberal ascendancy whereby there has been rapid demolition of old welfare structures in favour of a residual, US-style welfare state. The second suggests that there has been little change from the statist mentality of the old socialist system, and that the inefficiencies of the old system remain. The third counsels a more mixed view that allows for growing varieties of both policies and social conditions across the region. It is this third approach that has been discovered in this article.

In a recent special edition of *Global Social Policy* (3 (2), 2003) focused on Europeanization, globalization and social policy, Michelle Beyeler separates economic from political pressures and logics, and also the rational actor viewpoint from that of institutional cultures and traditions. Yet it is not always easy to know what a government considers rational in any particular circumstance. Alber and Standing (2000) observe that it may be as rational to lower labour and social costs in a 'race to the bottom' in the face of economic competition, as it is to raise social and labour standards in a 'race to the top' in the face of political competition. This uncertainty as to how to understand the likely future of welfare state change in Europe is mirrored in the fierce debates that have developed about the nature and course of the transition from communism (see for example the special edition of *East European Politics and Societies* 15 (2), 2001).

A number of questions flow from these considerations. How long do historical continuities cast a shadow over policy innovation? To what extent can variations in policy-actor networks help us to understand and predict the direction of travel? Who gains from EU expansion? A fundamental question here is whether we are witnessing the effects of Europeanization or globalization. Market imperatives, and the way they are filtered through institutional structures and networks, combined with the advice of international agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have resulted in a variety of studies and a complex debate which is to a certain extent shaped by different concepts, methods and foci. Zielonka and Mair (2002: 14) observe that although Eastern Europe did indeed have serious social problems inherited from state socialism and an unprecedented economic recession in the 1990s, nevertheless 'convergence of social systems is thus possible, but it is necessary to adopt a dynamic rather than a static view of such convergence, and to accept that it is globalisation rather than Europeanisation as such that constitutes the prime motivator'.

The data reviewed here, however, do not support the latter part of this conclusion. It is true that there are indeed many points of convergence with existing EU members: patterns of economic and political practice, social policy developments in pensions and health care, and the social circumstances of the general population. Moreover, although there are dynamic variations between CEE states that are growing, they are mostly within the range of variations already existing within EU members. In addition, CEE policy actors have been engaged at a variety of levels in European and international policy debates, and have shown resistance to policy options that might be classed as a globalized 'race to the bottom'. To the extent that old EU members have been responding to globalization, then so too are the new members; but a clearer picture is that the accession states are themselves recovering towards the general EU social situation.

From this range of data, whether based on survey, case-study or interview, a number of general observations can be drawn. First we can see that there has been a recovery from the economic and social difficulties that were experienced by all these countries in the 1990s. Nevertheless, there are variations between them, both in the policies that they have developed, and in their social and economic performance. Clearly, the FSU countries have struggled the most. It is understandable that change and loss of treasured policies, especially when these take place against a backdrop of pressure to consider neo-liberal alternatives, may suggest too much loss and too little gain to commentators closely involved in any one country. However, the data presented in this article are not consistent with such deep pessimism. While they may not have the same potential for rapid development that has been the experience of Spain and Ireland since joining the EU, it would appear that the new CEE members are currently poised for a period of economic growth, and dynamic and flexible policy making, with an improving social base which may look quite positive after a further 10 years of EU membership.

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