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The Eastern European Fertility Crisis

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Introduction

In 1989 Poland, Hungary and East Germany abandoned communism and broke free of the Iron curtain. Then, on December 26th of 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics officially dissolved ending nearly 70 years of communism in Europe. Following these events a rapid large scale social, political and economic transition took place. Many of these countries adopted new constitutions and became democracies, closely aligning themselves to Western Europe and the United States. However, with these profound political, social, and economic changes occurring in Eastern Europe, scholars observed another trend: increasingly lower fertility rates.

In the years following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (the defense treaty that united the USSR with the rest of the Eastern Bloc), it became evident that the fertility rates in the former Warsaw Pact countries were declining. However, not only were the fertility rates in these countries declining; they were declining to some of the lowest levels in the world. In her article "The Post-Communist Fertility Puzzle", social demographer Sunnee Billingsley states "As of 2004, 15 countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have entered lowest-low fertility (fertility rates at 1.3 or under) at least once" (Billingsley 2009, 194). Additionally, many Eastern European countries continue to have some of the lowest birth rates in the world, with eight former Warsaw Pact members being found in the bottom 20 countries with the lowest fertility rates in the world, the largest proportion of countries to share a geographic region in the bottom 20 (Central Intelligence Agency n.d). Interestingly, this drop in fertility has coincided with the various social and economic changes that have swept across region since the fall of communism, asking the questions of could the phenomena be related?

Author Background

Social and political issues taking place within Eastern Europe, and, notably, Poland, are of great interest to the author. The author is the child of Polish immigrants living in the United States, and also has several family members currently living in Poland. Additionally, the author himself identifies as both a Pole and an American, holding citizenships to both countries. Culturally, the author is closely connected to his family's homeland as he speaks Polish fluently and has visited Poland several times.

Structure of the Paper

In this paper I will examine the decline in fertility in the post-communist countries of Europe. For the most part, I will be using the blanket term of "Eastern Europe" to refer to these countries, as that is the official term the United Nations uses. Although, at times, I will also use the term Central Europe to refer to Eastern European countries that are geographically closer to Western Europe.

In order to conduct my analysis I have gathered data in regards to fertility in Eastern Europe from before and after the 1989 revolutions. Amongst this data I have gathered actual fertility rates, which are measured using the standard Total Fertility rate (TFR) defined by the World Health Organization as the "total number of children born or likely to be born to a woman in her life time if she were subject to the prevailing rate of age-specific fertility in the population" (The World Health Organization n.d). To supplement my data on fertility rates, I have also a looked at factors such as GDP, democratic stability, and death rates. Furthermore, I have examined the social changes in Eastern Europe in a more qualitative manner through examining news articles and videos, documentaries, and other forms of media. Finally, I have looked at some of the arguments put forth by other scholars in regards to why this drop in fertility has taken place.

However, there are some important limitations to take into consideration in examining the data. Mainly, there has not been a lot of research done on Warsaw Pact demographics that is not tied to Soviet propaganda pre-1989 (Wertherell and Plakans 1997, 245). It is a similar situation for data on pre-1989 GDP's as well, as the Soviet Union would record its GDP data inaccurately (Balcerowicz 2002, 36). As a result, the pre-1989 demographic and economic statistics that will be provided in this paper may be skewed.

In regards to how I have conducted my research, there are also limitations that must be taken into consideration. Notably, the purpose of this paper is to provide a general overview of the fertility decline in Eastern Europe. Thus, my research is not all encompassing, and I will not be focusing on every country that is considered to be in the region. Additionally, many of the conclusions that I will be coming to will be generalizations based on observed trends throughout the region. In regards to this I would like to highlight that Eastern Europe is a large and culturally diverse area, and that the social, economic, and cultural circumstances do differ significantly from country to country.

In terms of how my analysis will be presented, I have divided this paper into multiple sections. In the first section, I will take a closer look at the actual rates of fertility in Eastern Europe. In the second section, I will briefly explain the negative effects of the population decline in Eastern Europe. In the third section, I will discuss relevant history and background information. After explaining the background information, I will then review existing literature on the fertility crisis in Eastern Europe in the fourth section. Mainly, this literature will focus on explaining the phenomenon. In the penultimate section I will examine the changes that have occurred throughout the region from a more qualitative approach. Finally, in the sixth section I will discuss my findings. I ultimately, aim to conclude that the various social and economic changes in Eastern Europe have impacted the fertility rates in the region.

The Numbers

In recent years, as Eastern Europe has underwent it's fertility transformation, various demographic organizations have been documenting Eastern Europe's fertility trends. According to the United Nations World Fertility Patters report, the global total fertility rate is 2.5 children per woman, with Europe having the lowest levels of total fertility in the world at 1.6 (United Nations 2015, 3). In contrast, Africa, the continent with the world's highest total fertility rate has a TFR of 4.7 children per woman (United Nations 2015, 3). Thus, the issue of low fertility rates seems to be one occurring in all of Europe. However in regards to Eastern Europe the United Nations reports that the fertility rates in Eastern Europe are some of the lowest in Europe (United Nations 2015, 3). The United Nations does report projected growth in Eastern Europe from a TFR of 1.6 to a TFR of 1.7 by 2030, however even this still puts Eastern Europe as the region with the second lowest TFR in Europe after Southern Europe (United Nations 2015, 22-24). While on the rise, it is important to consider that there was still a significant drop in fertility from about 2.1 between 1970- 1975 to about 1.6 from 1990-1995 (United Nations 2015, 23). Additionally, even with the increase, a fertility rate of 1.7 is still the below the replacement rate which according to the United Nations is at about 2.1 children per women (United Nations 2017). Thus, even with a projected rise in fertility rates, the rates of birth in many Eastern European countries are still below replacement level.

When examining these fertility rates more closely and by country, the numbers become even more severe. For instance according to The World Bank , in the year 2017 the total fertility rate was 1.2 for Moldova , 1.37 for the Ukraine, 1.38 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.39 for Poland, 1.48 for Slovakia, 1.53 for Hungary, 1.54 for Bulgaria, Belarus, and North Macedonia, 1.58 for Slovenia, 1.6 for Estonia, 1.63 for the Czech Republic, 1.64 for Romania, 1.69 for Lithuania, and 1.76 for Russia (The World Bank, 2019). In comparison with the time period before the fall of communism many of these numbers are

drastically different. In 1980 the fertility rate was 2.48 in Moldova, 1.95 for the Ukraine, 2.1 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2.28 for Poland, 2.32 for Slovakia, 1.91 for Hungary, 2.05 for Bulgaria, 2.03 for Belarus, 2.49 for North Macedonia, 2.06 for Slovenia, 2.02 for Estonia, 2.08 for the Czech Republic, 2.43 for Romania, 1.99 for Lithuania, and 1.89 for Russia (The World Bank, 2019). Through this country by country analysis of TFR rates, it is evident that the decline of TFR rates in Eastern Europe is significate, and the actual scope of the TFR drop becomes much clearer.

What Low Fertility Rates Mean for Eastern Europe

The issue of declining fertility rates in Eastern Europe asks the question of what does this mean for Eastern European countries? In their paper Billari, Kohler and Ortega state that "lowest-low" fertility rates can have a drastic impact on a population, pointing out that a fertility rate of 1.3 will reduce a population in half every 45 years (Billari, Kohler and Ortega 2004, 642). As one can imagine, the halving of a population in such as way creates a variety of social and economic issues within a country. In regards to Poland, a country with TFR of about 1.39 (The World Bank, 2019), Nalaskowski discusses how a low fertility rate will impact the population in regards to age. He brings up that with Poland's dropping population the age of the country's workforce is expected to drop by over 3.8 million by 2035, decreasing the number of people to take care of minors and the elderly by 18% and increasing the number of retirees dependent on working people (Nalaskowski 2014, 49). What this means for Poland is that there will be more citizens seeking retirement pensions from the government, and fewer people to generate wealth within the economy to sustain paying retirement pensions. The issue of aging populations is but one of the risks a country can face in experiencing a lowest-low TFR, and it is an issue that is already beginning to impact some Eastern European countries.

Background in Post-Communism

After the Second World War, most countries in Eastern Europe fell into the Soviet zone of influence. The Soviet Union worked to restructure the governments of these countries, forming communist parties to run the countries, and restructuring the economies of these countries (Bunce, 1985, 4-8). Resultantly, the divide between democratic Western Europe and communist Eastern Europe came into existence. This divide was known as the Iron Curtain, this name symbolizing the intensity of the Soviets desire to seal themselves and Eastern Europe off from the democratic West (Encyclopedia Britannica 2018). Eventually as a reaction to the creation of NATO these countries officially united their alliance in 1955 in the creation of the Warsaw Pact, a political and military organization (Remington 1973, 61). The official members of the pact were Poland, Romania, The Soviet Union, Albania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria (History.com, 2009). These Warsaw Pact countries stayed under Soviet influence for many years, however there had long been popular resistance among Warsaw Pact countries, such as with the Prague Spring in 1957 in Czechoslovakia or the Solidarność (Solidarity) movement in Poland in the early 1980s (Kramer 1989, 1535). Over the years these popular movements had their toll on the durability of Iron Curtain and of communism in Eastern Europe.

In the 1980's the Iron Curtain's stability was further weakened after Mikhail Gorbachev become the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. Gorbachev's foreign policy towards Eastern Europe called for no military intervention on the U.S.S.R's part in the case of communism collapsing in other countries, and thus many Eastern Europeans felt more empowered to fight for regime changes in their countries (Kramer 1989, 1535, 1545-1515). Initially, Poland overthrew communism in a peaceful revolution through its Solidarność movement in 1989. Shortly after Poland, the East Germans were inspired to do the same, and after their peaceful revolution the Berlin Wall which had

divided communist East Berlin from democratic West Belin fell. It was demolished in November of 1989. Country after country, the anti-communist sentiment spread, leading to peaceful anti-communist revolutions in all of Eastern Europe (except in Romania), until finally the sentiment spread into the Soviet Union itself leading to its collapse in 1991 (U.S. Department of State n.d). Thus, communism in Eastern Europe was over and the region found itself amid an economic, political, and social transition.

This transition phase is known as post-communism. More closely, post-communism is defined as "the cultural or political situation following or resulting from a period of communist government, now especially that of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s" (*Oxford Dictionaries.com* n.d). Once it began, post-communism had a profound effect on the countries of Eastern Europe. Primarily, in post-communism one of the main goals of many former Warsaw Pact countries was to develop Western style democracies in their countries, with similar systems based on rule of law and checks and balances (Schopflin 1991, 236). Post-communism has, accordingly, been a period of great change and transition for all Eastern Europe, as Eastern European counties have left communism and adopted Western forms of government.

However, it is important to note that the political outcomes in these countries have been different. For instance, while a majority of former communist Eastern European countries have joined the European Union, there are still several countries that have not joined, those countries being Albania, Belarus, most of former Yugoslavia (except for Croatia and Slovenia), Moldova, Russia, and the Ukraine (WorldAtlas.com, 2018).. Some of these countries such as the Ukraine have been working more closely with the Union in recent years, others such as Bosnia and Herzegovina have applied for membership to the Union (WorldAtlas.com 2018). Russia, on the other hand, leads its own Political and Economic alliance with its former Soviet Republics, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

(*CTGN* 2017). The *Economist's* World Democracy Index ratings of these countries also significantly differ, with the EU countries generally falling within the 6.0-7.99 (flawed democracy) range, the CIS countries falling within the 0.0-3.99 (authoritarian regime) range, and the unaffiliated countries such as the Ukraine or Serbia falling within the 4.0-5.99 (hybrid regime) range. (The Economist 2019). Understandably, these political outcomes are not the only ways in which former Iron Curtain states differ from each other today.

Economically and socially, there have been large discrepancies as well. According to the 1999 report from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, for instance, mortality rates among males aged 40-59, which were relatively the same among all Eastern European countries in 1989, have drastically fallen in Central Europe countries, and risen in among the Baltic and CIS states (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1999, 15) The same report also shows a significant increase in poverty among CIS states since 1989, and only a light to moderate increase in poverty for countries in Central Europe and the Baltic States (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1999, 16). Finally, the report points out that since 1989 the real GDP rates of the Baltic States and Central Europe initially fell, but recovered and are on the rise, while those of the CIS states have tanked and plateaued at a level significantly lower than before (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1999, 58). As can be seen from this data, while post-communism did create a wave of sweeping changes throughout Eastern Europe, those changes have not been equal.

A Review of Literature

The alarmingly low rates of total fertility in Eastern Europe have prompted many scholars to examine the issue closely, and many have developed theories and hypothesis in order to explain the phenomenon. One popular theory that researches point to is the Second Demographic Transition Theory, According to Lesthaeghe the Second Demographic Transition or (SDT) has brought about developments form the 1970's and onward that have

led to sustained sub-replacement fertility levels in Western countries, living arrangements other than marriage, disconnections between marriage and procreation, and a lack of a stationary population (Lesthaeghe 2014,18112). As for the reasons behind SDT Lesthaeghe discusses the importance of higher order needs, that is, an increase in education and growth of income, more expressive and existential needs, self-actualization, and individual autonomy (Lesthaeghe 2014, 18114). Thus, according to the SDT theory a change in values and a cultural shift from a materialistic society to a post materialistic one leads to a decrease in marriage, a lack of interest in procreation, and an increase in migration, all of which negatively impact fertility.

Scholars have examined this the theory in order to explain the current demographic crisis in Eastern Europe. For example in regards to Russia, Zakharov strongly argues for an SDT as being the reason why fertility rates are declining in that country. To make his point he examines marriage rates in Russia. He notes that Russians born in the 1970's and onward have received more post-Soviet socialization (Zakharov 2008, 932). He then notes that this cohort has higher rates of older marriage, higher rates of non-marital cohabitation, and higher rates of birth outside of marriage than before (Zakharov 2008, 934). He also points out that the fertility of women under the age of 20 has almost halved in recent years (Zakharov 2008, 936). Zakharov ultimately looks at the correlation between marriage and fertility rates and argues that the changes in Russian marriage patterns are indicators of an SDT occurring in Russia. Similar to Zakharov, Walford and Kurek also look at SDT indicators such as lower TFR rates, an increase in extra-marital unions, and a higher child bearing ages, but in Poland. They find that those phenomena are happening in Poland since the 1990's in ways that are relatively comparable to how they happened in England and Wales, countries considered to have already undergone SDT's (Walford and Kurek 2015, 512-514). Accordingly, Walford and Kurek, too claim that an SDT is occurring in Poland.

On the other hand, another theory, referred to as the economic crisis theory, that has been advanced by scholars examines the effects economics have on a population's fertility rate. Billingsley summarizes this theory, originally pioneered by Becker (1960). According to Billingsley this theory claims that fertility is based upon the cost of children, which are mediated by household income (Billingsley 2009, 197). In this theory, the direct and indirect pros and cons of having children are weighed against the costs and the household income, thus in a region with economic turbulence, such as Eastern Europe during the post-communist transition, fertility would decline, as families decided that they cannot afford a child.

In regards to this theory there have also been several scholars who have been supportive of it. Corina and Paniccià (1996), for instance, argue that the cost of marriage and creating a family is higher for those at younger ages in several Eastern European countries and that economic difficulties have worsened these cost for younger couples, leading to marriage at a later age. They also point to unemployment as a factor in the later age of marriage and postponement of child bearing in these countries (Corina and Paniccià 1996, 14). They argue that this along with an increase of male migration and male mortality have led to there being less women married while younger and more fertile, which they correlate with lower TFR rates (Corina and Paniccià 1996, 15). They also point out that as a result of the transition from communism the price of raising a child has skyrocketed, and that government financial incentives to support fertility have been less effective due to this increase (Corina and Paniccià 1996, 15). Corina and Paniccià thus conclude that the drop in fertility rates in the countries they examined is an outcome of greater societal changes, which stem from economic hardship.

An issue that has been pointed out about the economic crisis theory, however is that it examines the relationship of fertility and economics from a macro scale. For example, in their

analysis of fertility patterns and economic uncertainty in Russia during the 1990's, Kohler and Kohler come to conclusions that contradict the economic theory. Initially they note that in a macro analysis of fertility rates and economic disparity, the two are related with a strong correlation existing between the fall of the Gross National Product of Russia in the 1990's and Russia's TFR drop during that period (Kohler and Kohler 2002, 237-239). However, while their initial findings seem to support the economic crisis theory, Kohler and Kohler point out that from a micro analysis the situation is different. Their micro analysis findings show that childbirth is actually positively correlated with male unemployment, male unpaid wages, and female unpaid wages (Kohler and Kohler 2002, 246-249). These findings show that while the economic crisis theory may be effective in conducting a macro analysis of fertility declines, it might not always work in regards to analyzing fertility declines among individuals.

Other scholars have taken a look at both the SDT theory and economic theory in order to come to their conclusions. Sunnee Billingsley argues that the decline in birth rates across Eastern Europe can be related to an SDT, or the economic crisis theory. She notes, however, that the applicability of these theories varies by different groups of countries. She found that most countries experienced postponement after the transition and that in many countries the postponement was positively tied to economic growth. In her findings, the countries that experienced stopping of births in lieu of postponement, or significantly less postponement, experienced more economic struggle after the transition from communism (Billingsley 2009, 202-211, 220). Billingsley's research seems to support either an SDT in countries where postponement was correlated with economic growth and stopping of births in counties that were economically damaged, supporting the SDT theory and Becker's (1960) economic analysis of fertility.

Other scholars have reached similar conclusions to Billingsley. For instance Philipov and Kohler conclude in their paper that the quantum of fertility (the number of children born to a women during her lifetime) has decreased in both Russia and Bulgaria, while that has not been the case in Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic, which have been more economically well off than the former. Those countries rather experienced tempo effects (a change in the timing of when a women choses to have a child) (Philipov and Kohler 2001, 55). Similarly, Sobotka, also states that the positive economic changes in the economically more successful Eastern European countries effected what fertility looked like in those countries, leading to a postponement in childbirth, while lower economic conditions in countries such as Russia led to people having less children and at younger age (Sobotka 2003, 476-477). Like Billingsley, several other scholars agree that an SDT encouraged postponement occurred in Eastern Europe in countries that were socially and economically better off, while a stopping occurred in countries that struggled as a result of the transition. It, thus, seems that this approach is gaining popularity and traction in academic circles.

Besides the SDT theory or the economic crisis theory, scholars have advocated for other explanations of the TFR changes in Eastern Europe. Like the SDT theory, Thornton and Philipov make an ideological argument, however the way in which they view this ideological shift differs from a traditional SDT approach. In their research Thornton and Philipov claim that Eastern Europeans had observed the increasing tolerance of pre-marital sex, abortions, cohabitation, and same sex marriage in Western European Countries during the late 20th century (Thornton and Philipov 2007, 51). They also argue that after the fall of communism, Eastern Europeans turned their attention to Western European countries which they saw as more modern, successful, and developed (Thornton and Philipov 2007, 28). Accordingly, the increasingly lower birth rates in Eastern Europe stem from an ideological shift. However unlike traditional SDT arguments, according to this argument the shift results from Eastern

Europeans adopting Western European values which they saw as conducive to success and modernity; there is less of a focus on self-actualization.

Another contribution to the debate points to capitalism itself as the catalyst for the TFR trends in Eastern Europe. In his paper Frejka states that the change from a planned socialist economy to a free market one is the root cause of the fertility decline in Eastern Europe (Frejka 2008, 160). He claims that the social conditions in communist Eastern Europe were favorable to childbearing due to conditions such as free housing, free education, and a lack of career opportunities. He then points out that the transition to a capitalist system raised the costs of goods, increased competition among workers, created new career opportunities, put pressure to pursue higher education, and decreased state welfare, resulting in conditions that negatively impact fertility (Frejka 2008, 161). Frejka's argument examines the social and economic conditions in Eastern Europe. His examples do not necessarily contradict an SDT or an economic crisis, but rather tend to show that an SDT or economic crisis stem from transition to capitalism. Ultimately he claims that the transition to capitalism itself is the culprit behind Eastern Europe's decline in fertility.

Finally, a recent theory used to explain declining birth rates in Europe focuses on the postponement of birth to a later age. In their research, Billari, Kohler and Ortega highlight that in recent years in Southern, Eastern and Central Europe the mean age of a women's first birth has been increasing annually (Billari, Kohler, and Ortega 2004, 644). This results in the fertility rates of these countries being lowered. Billari, Kohler and Ortega also point out that this postponement likely stems from a lack of employment opportunities, and that people are choosing to delay having children to an older age to find work or obtain an education (Billari, Kohler, and Ortega 2004, 655-656). This ties the theory very closely with the economic crisis theory proposed earlier, however there is also more to this theory than the economic aspect. Billari, Kohler and Ortega further point out that this postponement creates a social feedback

loop. That is, people look to others to see when they had children, social norms are created in regards to when to have children, people choose to get married later for economic stability and better quality partners, and childlessness begins to make people more competitive in the employment marketplace (Billari, Kohler, and Ortega 2004, 657-659). In summary, according to this theory postponement occurs as a result of socioeconomic factors that lead people to choose to have children later when they are more financially stable. This creates a social feedback loop in which society encourages postponement, lowering the countries fertility rate over time.

From examining the literature surrounding the fertility decline in post-communist Eastern Europe , it is clear that the Second Demographic Transition Theory and Becker's (1960) theory of economics and fertility are some of the most common explanations for the decline. Some scholars have examined the Eastern European region using only one of the aforementioned theories, while others have chosen to examine countries separately to find which explanation fits best with a given country. However, there is another group of scholars that have used explanations other than an SDT or economic crisis. For example these scholars have attributed the TFR decrease in Eastern Europe to the region comparing itself to the West, transitioning to capitalism, and people postponing childbearing to wait for better financial stability. Yet this third group of scholars still focuses on new cultural, and economic influences, such as proponents of an SDT or economic crisis. All in all, while there are many different explanations on the specific reasons behind the fertility decline in Eastern Europe, there is consensus that the TFR declines are related to cultural and economic changes.

Changes: The People's Point of View

In the years since the transition, the various changes in the societies of Eastern Europe have been massive, especially from the people's point of view. In my own experience as a child of Polish immigrants, I have heard my parents talk about these changes when my family would

visit Poland during my childhood. My mother, for example, to this day consistently brings up supermarkets, and how they have revolutionized grocery shopping in Poland. My mother always says that during her childhood the stores were small, clerks would fetch items for people to buy from usually empty shelves, and the lines were huge. People were also given food ration cards, and people could only buy food allocated to them through those cards. Today, my mother says, thanks to supermarkets, getting a healthy amount of food is actually possible in Poland, and it is quick, convenient, and easy. Not only that, but my mother also says that the introduction of supermarkets in Poland makes the country feel more modern, and more Western, something which she appreciates. This introduction of supermarkets has also happened everywhere in Central Europe and even in countries like Russia (Machek 2012; Tracey and Wilson 2019). The introduction of supermarkets may not seem important, however, it is an indicator of the economic, social, and cultural changes that have happened in Eastern Europe since the transition.

In general this transition has also created significant cultural changes within Eastern European countries. For instance there is a growing sense of freedom, self-autonomy, and care-freeness found in the cultures of the region. *Euronews* shows an example of this in a short video clip. In the clip, they interview a 27 year old Polish man who gives historic tours of Warsaw. In regards to Poland's new sense of freedom he says "My generation, is the first generation for the last 200 years that didn't fight for anything" (Euronews 2014, 00:07:08). In a different part of the video clip a tailor, Tomasz Clapala, notes that he feels free and happy in regards to how easily he can now travel with his Polish passport (Euronews 2014, 00:03:04). In Hungary this sense of freedom can be observed through simply walking the streets of a larger city such as Budapest. In the "Budapest" episode of *Rick Steves' Europe,* Rick Steves' points out that Budapest has only grown more lively since the fall of communism, with the camera panning to show a shot of people sitting in cafés, sipping beer, eating dinners at restaurants and enjoying

life in a care-free manner (*Rick Steves' Europe* 2004, 00:24:35). The people of both Poland and Hungary feel a sense of freedom in their countries that hasn't been felt in generations, and they are grateful for it.

Now, it is an established fact that the changes in Eastern Europe have been unequal, and rather negative for some, however these cultural feelings freedom, autonomy, and worry-freeness are even felt in the Eastern European countries that are typically considered "less developed". For example in the Ukraine, these changes can be seen through the fact that in 2019 the Ukraine hosted it's largest ever and least violent Pride parade in Kiev. The event had thousands of marchers for LGBTQ equality, and only a handful of counter-equality protestors (Schaaf 2019). In Russia this new sense of freedom can be observed through experiencing the hustle and bustle of Moscow, which the *BBC* presents in their documentary series *World's Busiest Cities*. In the episode "Moscow" (2017), journalist Anita Rani discusses the new sense of freedom and westernization that Muscovites feel as the city is modernizing, while visiting Krymskaya Embarkment, a new park built in downtown Moscow from a carpark. As the camera pans to show people enjoying the park she says "loads of people just hanging out, enjoying each other's company, dudes on skateboards. We might take this for granted back home, but it's a really new thing for Moscow" (BBC 2017, 00:48:50). In spite of the highly unequal impacts of post communism, a significant cultural change has occurred across Eastern Europe, in which people feel freer.

Nonetheless, while Eastern Europe has experienced this cultural change and new sense of freedom, there are still many countries in the region where people have been negatively impacted by the transition, and this is an important factor to consider. For example, today many Romanians are forced to work in textile factories for low wages and in abhorrent conditions, essentially working in sweat shops This can be seen in a short video from *Arte* by Eberhard Rühle. In the video Carmen Ciobanu leaves her home every morning after 4 AM to travel to

Bucharest where she works as a textile worker. Her working conditions are abusive and her wages are low, but she is poor and has no choice but to work (Rühle 2017, 00:00:10). The situation is similar in Bulgaria. *Euro News's* journalist Daniel Bellamy, notes that despite an increase in minimum wage, Bulgarian workers still endure the lowest minimum wage in the European Union (Bellamy 2019, 00:00:02). In his video he also portrays how workers such as Elena Marvakova also must endure sweat shop-like conditions in their jobs as textile workers (Bellamy 2019, 00:00:13). In the Ukraine the situation is just as bad, as can be seen in a video released by The World Bank. In the video a village pensioner Nadiia Khomenko is briefly interviewed and says " I am poor. I don't have enough money, even for a very simple life" (The World Bank 2018, 00:01:05). Eastern Europe is still a region with a significant amount of poverty and economic struggle, and while this is not the case for every country in the region , the issue is significant. Additionally, through my own experience, even in a country like Poland that is considered to be relatively well off in Eastern Europe, a significant portion of people live poorly, with many families being forced to live in old and cramped communist-era apartment blocks, as they cannot afford more modern and larger housing.

Since the transition from communism there have been a lot of social changes throughout Eastern Europe For one, institutions such as the supermarket have been introduced, indicating modernization and westernization in the region. People all over the region have also been experiencing a new sense of freedom that has encouraged phenomena such as Pride events or simply the kind of care-free café lounging that has been enjoyed in Western Europe for years. Although, even with these changes it is important to note that there are still many countries struggling with poverty and economic stagnation, and that not all Eastern Europeans are necessarily well off because of the transition. However even in considering those negative impacts the positive social changes are substantial, as even countries such as Russia or the

Ukraine, that are generally considered to be on the less fortunate side of the transition, have experienced them.

Conclusion

The changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe since the transition, align with the demographic theories that have already been discussed in this paper. For instance the issue of low wage sweat shop labor in Romania and Bulgaria (Bellamy 2019; Rühle 2017) goes hand in hand with the Economic Crisis theory, as in such conditions people work difficult jobs for little money and may not be able to afford many children. While the introduction of Western institutions such as the supermarket in Poland or the new sense of freedom felt in cities like Moscow (BBC 2017) could indicate a change in values and an increase in individual autonomy which in turn could indicate a Second Demographic Transition or maybe a desire to be like Western Europe as claimed by Thornton and Philipov (2007). In synthesizing the different theories and data in this paper together, there is strong evidence that Eastern Europe's social and economic changes have influenced the fall in fertility. However further research would need to be conducted in order to confirm that.

Concludingly, there could be a multitude of reasons as to why fertility rates in Eastern Europe have fell so drastically in recent years. However, through the data presented in this paper it is clear that in the years since the fall of communism in Europe, Eastern Europe has experienced a significant number of social and economic changes that have coincided with the fall of fertility in the area. Ultimately, the manner in which these social and economic changes coincide with the fertility fall and align with theories on demographic change, makes it highly likely that these social and economic changes have influenced the fertility fall in Eastern Europe.

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