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The ethno-demographic impact of co-ethnic citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) grant preferential access to citizenship to co-ethnics living outside their borders. This overlaps with several key regional demographic trends, such as a dramatic decrease of fertility rates, high emigration and changes in the ethnic structure of the populations. The paper analyses co-ethnic citizenship policies of five CEE countries in order to assess their demographic impact on both the kin-states and on the communities of co-ethnics living outside their kin-state. It argues that, despite their important potential, co-ethnic citizenship policies in the region have yielded little ethno-demographic benefits. The size of both core ethnic groups in the kin-state and of co-ethnic communities living outside the kin-state has decreased throughout the region. Moreover, on several occasions, the situation of co-ethnics has worsened as a direct consequence of co-ethnic citizenship policies.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship; ethnicity; kin-states; demography; diaspora; nationalism; Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

The fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) rekindled struggles over state and national building in the region. The ensuing processes of redrafting constitutions and citizenship laws provided unique chances to redefine the boundaries of the nation and to integrate diverse populations. But the moment was also propitious for pursuing projects of national consolidation based on exclusion, preferential inclusion and ethnic engineering. Whereas the legal exclusion of specific ethnic groups has rarely been explicit, the preferential inclusion of co-ethnics – people regarded as sharing special ethnic, cultural or historical ties with the country – became a characteristic of the citizenship laws of CEE countries. This could be understood in view of the specific historical and demographic circumstances of a region that was fittingly defined as ‘a territory where peoples, cultures, languages are fantastically intertwined, where every place has several names and men change their citizenship as often as their shoes’ (Garton Ash 1989, 47).

The comparative research on citizenship as status of membership of a state has grown considerably in the last decades (Hansen and Weil 2001; Howard 2009; Vink and Bauböck 2013). The relationship between citizenship and ethnicity has been studied comparatively
as well as normatively (Brubaker 1992; Joppke 2005; Dumbrava 2014a), including in the context of the post-communist CEE countries (Pogonyi, Kovács, and Körtvélyesi 2010; Shaw and Štiks 2012; Žilović 2012). There is a broad consensus about an overall liberalisation and de-ethnicisation of citizenship policies in Europe in the last decades. However, this consensus is primarily informed by the experiences of Western countries. Shevel (2009), for example, questioned the common assumption about the importance of stable statehood and uncontested national identity for developing civic citizenship regimes (Weil 2001) by showing that the Ukrainian ‘civic’ citizenship policy was triggered by irreconcilable disputes over national identity. Conventionally, immigration (and emigration) has been seen as a key explanatory factor for citizenship policy, as it was taken for granted that access to citizenship follows access to territory. However, for many new citizens of CEE countries, the acquisition of citizenship precedes (and sometimes circumvents) access to territory or immigration.

The literature on co-ethnic citizenship is mainly concerned with the drivers of these policies, namely the historical, cultural, demographic and political determinants of co-ethnic citizenship. In this paper, I focus on the effects of co-ethnic citizenship policies on the demographic situation of the kin-states and of co-ethnic communities living outside their kin-states.

Politicians and other defenders of co-ethnic citizenship often claim that these policies can play a significant role in the ethno-demographic consolidation of kin-states by reversing population decline caused by low birthrates and emigration and/or by increasing the relative proportion of the constituent ethnic nation (for example, ethnic Romanians in Romania). For example, in 2010 the Minister for Bulgarians Abroad argued that co-ethnic citizenship policy will generate a yearly inflow of about 30,000 of new Bulgarians, which ‘will help the country to solve its demographic crisis’. Responding to concerns about shrinking population, the Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister for Nation Policy stated in 2015 that the government aimed to make ‘one million new Hungarian citizens through the simplified naturalisation procedure’ by 2018. In the case of Romania, Waterbury (2014, 40) argued that the policy of granting citizenship to culturally similar Moldovans has ‘the potential to challenge the political demography of Romania by diluting the political impact of ethnic Hungarians’.

In this paper, I analyse five CEE countries and kin-states that have strong co-ethnic citizenship policies, meaning that they grant preferential access to citizenship to wide groups of co-ethnics (e.g. descendants of former citizens or ‘ethnics’) and on very few conditions (e.g. exemptions from residential requirements). These countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. I challenge the claim that co-ethnic citizenship policies yield significant ethno-demographic benefits either for kin-states or for co-ethnics living outside their kin-states.

**Co-ethnic citizenship and ethno-demographic consolidation**

The inclusion of co-ethnics living outside borders through citizenship policies is often linked to broader projects of ethno-demographic consolidation aiming to increase the size and strength of the core ethnic group that controls the (kin) state (Brubaker 2011; Waterbury 2014). The apparent advantage of these policies is that they promise to bring together under the same political roof (citizenship) all members of an ethnic
group without having to move populations or redraw state borders. But this strategy is bound to run into several practical and normative dilemmas.

In the absence of effective ethnic migration policies, co-ethnic citizenship policies might not affect the ethno-demographic composition of a country because most of the new (co-ethnic) citizens would not move into the country. However, if co-ethnic citizenship is matched with extensive voting rights for non-resident citizens, as in the case of Hungary after 2010, the political impact of co-ethnic citizenship might be significant, even in the absence of notable demographic changes (Pogonyi 2014). The establishment of cross-border political majorities, bases on the votes of co-ethnics, could change dramatically the terms of the domestic political competition and could lead to reinforcing the political dominance of a core ethnic group.

The offer of extraterritorial citizenship in the kin-state might be attractive for co-ethnics, due to its additional rights and privileges, as well as its emotional and symbolic charges. However, such offer might be regarded by the countries in which they live (host states) as undue extraterritorial intervention (Bauböck 2010). The host state might then retaliate by curtailing the rights of ethnic minorities, which will worsen the situation of co-ethnics and encourage some of them to emigrate. Given access to more attractive destinations, which can itself be derived from the citizenship status in the kin-state, these co-ethnics will not necessarily move to the kin-state.

If many co-ethnics acquire the citizenship of the kin-state and also move into its territory, they are likely to change the ethno-demographic situation of the country and to consolidate the demographic position of the core ethnic group. However, if too many co-ethnics move into the kin-state, this would weaken the demographic and political situation of co-ethnics who stay put. The diminishing presence of co-ethnics in 'historical' territories, which are regarded as belonging to the ethnic group, will also weaken the political claims of the kin-state over these territories and further delegitimise kin-state’s support to co-ethnic communities (Bauböck 2007).

Depending on policy choices and particular circumstances, co-ethnic citizenship may achieve some ethno-demographic goals but fail to deliver others. This is something rarely understood or acknowledged by the supporters of such policies who often claim that co-ethnic citizenship policies can fortify and unify the nation by both improving the ethno-demographic situation of kin-states and by strengthening the position of co-ethnics living outside their kin-states.

In the remainder of the paper, I assess the impact of co-ethnic citizenship on two main dimensions of ethno-demographic consolidation: (1) the demographic consolidation of the kin-state and (2) the demographic consolidation of co-ethnics communities living outside their kin-state. I first give an overview of co-ethnic citizenship policies of five major kin-states from CEE.

Co-ethnic citizenship in five CEE countries

After 1990, most countries in CEE acted as ‘nationalizing states’ (Brubaker 1996) seeking to promote and strengthen a core ethnic group to the detriment of others. In the same time, many of these countries were confronted with a significant demographic decline, due largely to dramatic falls in fertility and extensive emigration. Preferential access to citizenship on explicit or implicit ethnic grounds has been a common strategy in the region
through which countries have sought to nationalise the state while hoping to counteract demographic decline (Waterbury 2014; Dumbrava 2016).

The 1991 Constitution of Bulgaria provided that ‘a citizens of Bulgarian origin shall acquire Bulgarian citizenship through a facilitated procedure’. This clause aimed to extend citizenship to ethnic Bulgarians who lived in the territories left outside the boundaries of the modern Bulgarian state, which includes about 2.5 million people living in Macedonia, 235,000 people living in Ukraine and other smaller Bulgarian communities from Serbia, Turkey, Moldova, Greece, Turkey and Russia (Smilov and Jileva 2013). The citizenship law of 1998 established a special procedure through which Bulgarians ‘of origin’ could acquire citizenship. This procedure required applicants to have residence in Bulgaria. In 2001, an amendment to the citizenship law exempted Bulgarians of origin from all naturalisation conditions (including residence) apart from clean criminal record. Further changes were introduced in 2010 in order to ensure the speedy processing of applications submitted by Bulgarian co-ethnics. The criteria for establishing the Bulgarian ‘origin’ were specified by the Law on Bulgarians Living outside the Republic of Bulgaria of 2010. The law defines a Bulgarian of origin as a person who: (a) has at least one ascendant of Bulgarian origin; (b) has Bulgarian national consciousness and (c) stays permanently or continuously on the territory of another country. Supporting evidence of ethnic origin are birth certificates, ancestors’ citizenship documents, having Bulgarian as mother tongue, certificates attesting applicants’ membership in Bulgarian institutions such as the Bulgarian Church, schools, etc. Since 2010 applicants are required to obtain certificates of Bulgarian origin issued by the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA). SABA may require applicants to submit notarised declarations of national consciousness, documents issued by Bulgarian or foreign authorities, court decisions and documents issued by Bulgarians organisations from abroad (Paskalev 2013).

After becoming an independent state in 1991 Croatia sought to consolidate a nation state centred on the political and demographic dominance of ethnic Croats. The citizenship law accompanying the declaration of independence played a key role in this project. The law included special provisions for the acquisition of citizenship by ethnic Croats living in and outside the country. It referred to all ethnic Croats living in the territories of the Former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (FSRY), especially the 0.5 million Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The citizenship law stipulated very few conditions for the preferential acquisition of Croatian citizenship. It basically required applicants to declare that they considered themselves Croatian. However, authorities asked further proofs of Croat-ness, such as certificates issued by the Catholic Church, and in some cases made a decision based on the applicants’ family name (Ragazzi, Štiks, and Koska 2013, 7). The citizenship law of 2011 provided for the preferential acquisition of citizenship by the ‘members of Croatian people who do not have a place of residence in the Republic of Croatia’. The new procedure required more substantive proofs of ethnicity such as ‘previous declaration of ethnic membership in legal transactions, allegation of such membership in particular public documents, protection of rights and promotion of interests of Croatian people and active participation in Croatian cultural, scientific or sport associations abroad’ (Ragazzi, Štiks, and Koska 2013, 16).

The fall of communism and the break of the Eastern bloc reanimated Hungary’s claims about the reintegration of Hungarian co-ethnics living in the territories lost after the First World War. Following the conclusion of the Trianon Treaty in 1920, about 3.3 million
Hungarian ethnics remained outside the new Hungarian borders in what became territories of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine. According to the census data from these countries, the number of self-declared ethnic Hungarians in the 1990s was about 2.8 million. The issue of co-ethnic citizenship has been on the Hungarian political agenda since 1990. The citizenship law of 1993 provided for the facilitated naturalisation of people of Hungarian descent residing in Hungary. In 2001, Hungary adopted a special law providing for a special status and a number of social and economic benefits (not citizenship) to co-ethnics living outside the country. After a failed referendum on dual citizenship in 2004, Hungary extended full citizenship to non-resident co-ethnics in 2010 and enfranchised non-resident citizens in 2011 (Harpaz 2016; Pogonyi 2018). In order to prove Hungarian ancestry applicants must submit a number of documents such as civil certificates of ancestors, proof of citizenship, school transcripts and residence permits (Pogonyi 2013, 3).

After the regime change in 1989, Romania adopted a special policy for the restoration of citizenship to former citizens who had been arbitrarily deprived of their citizenship (by the communist regime) and to former citizens and their descendants who lost Romanian citizenship for reasons non-imputable to them (territorial changes) (Knott 2018). The undeclared goal of this policy was to recreate the national community of the pre-communist state by re-incorporating the Romanians co-ethnics living in the territories lost by Romania in 1940 – mainly Bessarabia (in Moldova) and Northern Bukovina (in Ukraine) (Iordachi 2013). Those who qualify for the restoration can acquire Romanian citizenship without being resident in the country. In 2009, the scope of the policy was extended to descendants of former citizens up to the third generation. However, the amendment limited the preferential treatment to descendants of former citizens who have been Romanian citizens by birth (Iordachi 2012). Because the Romanian policy on the restoration of citizenship targets former citizens (and descendants) and not co-ethnics, the scope of the policy does not match perfectly with the scope of the Romanian ethnic diaspora. According to census data from 1930, almost one-third of the population of inter-war Romania was composed of people belonging to ethnic minorities (Iordachi 2012, 318). Most descendants of these people can acquire Romanian citizenship through the restoration procedure. However, there are several communities of Romanian co-ethnics that were never part of the Romanian state and thus do not have preferential access to Romanian citizenship (such as ethnic Romanian from Serbia).

Serbia became an independent state reluctantly in 2006 after the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Long before that moment Serbia began to forge a complex relationship with co-ethnic Serbs living in the territories of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (FSRY) (Rava 2013, 23). In response to several waves of refugees crossing into Serbia, the 1996 Law of Yugoslav Citizenship provided for a special procedure of ‘acceptance’ of citizenship by ‘expelled’ people from other territories of the FSY. However, it is estimated that only about 40,000 people acquired citizenship through this procedure out of more than 500,000 refugees. Štiks (2012, 26) argues that this was a deliberate attempt by Serbia to prevent people from settling in the country in the hope that they will eventually return to repopulate ‘Serbian’ territories remained outside the reach of the state. The 2004 Citizenship law (amended in 2007) included special provisions for the facilitated acquisition of citizenship by ‘persons of Serb nationality and ethnicity without residence in Serbia’ (entitlement) and by ‘persons of other
nation/ethnicity from the territory of the Republic of Serbia without residence’. This procedure also applies to emigrants, their spouses and descendants, and persons who were born and fled from FSRY territories and are residents of Serbia. The law does not require any proof of Serb or other ethnicity apart from a written statement in which the applicant recognises Serbia as his/her state. In practice, however, the Ministry of Interior demands certain proofs of origin such as evidence of previous declarations of Serb ethnicity in censuses (Rava 2013, 21).

The ethno-demographic impact of co-ethnic citizenship on the kin-state

All five CEE kin-states recorded population decline since the 1990s and it is estimated that this demographic trend will continue in the future (Figure 1). The demographic decline has been more pronounced in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania (above 10%). The projected population loses will be particularly significant in Bulgaria (about 40% decline in 2050 compared to 1990), Croatia (25%), Romania (30%) and Serbia (32%). The total fertility rates (TFRs) in each country dropped considerably after 1990 reaching very low levels in the 2000s. Although these rates increased slightly in recent years, they remain well below the replacement level (2.1 children per women in industrialised countries). Of all five countries, only Hungary maintained positive net migration rates in the last two decades.

According to national censuses, all five kin-states had strong ethnic majorities in the 1990s (above 75%). Whereas the majority ethnic groups have consolidated in Croatia and Serbia, mostly due to ethnic wars and displacement, they diminished slightly in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. The diminishing of ethnic majorities in Romania and Hungary is due partially to the fact that a considerable number of people refused to declare ethnic affiliation in recent censuses.

Against this background of diminishing populations, all five kin-states promoted policies that linked con-ethnic citizenship with ethno-demographic consolidation. According

![Figure 1. Changes in population size and projections for five CEE countries (in millions). Source: World Bank.](image-url)
to the 2011 Bulgarian census, ethnic Bulgarians constituted 84.8% of the population of Bulgaria. The most numerous ethnic minorities were the Turks (9%) and the Roma (4.9%). Bulgarian nationalists deplored the demographic decline of ethnic Bulgarians – from 85.6% in 1992 to 76.9% in 2011 – while lamented about the ‘abnormal’ reproduction of the Roma, whose demographic share in the population increased from 3.6 to 4.4% between 1992 and 2011. In 2000, the TFR of ethnic Bulgarians was 1.1 compared to the TFR of Roma of 3.0 (Koytcheva and Philipov 2008, 373). This situation nourished nationalist discourses about the ‘disappearance of ethnic Bulgarians’ and the ‘gypsisation’ of Bulgaria (Kotzeva and Dimitrova 2014). Together with a renewed commitment to encourage childbirth, policy makers turned to co-ethnic Bulgarians, whom they regarded as a resource for ethno-demographic revival.

The Bulgarian government has expressed concern about the demographic situation of the country and has made explicit link between co-ethnic citizenship and demographic recovery. According to the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011–2020), Bulgaria sought to encourage Bulgarians of origin to resettle permanently in Bulgaria in order help ‘overcoming the negative demographic trends’ (see Note 9). Efforts to encourage ethnic Bulgarians from abroad to resettle in the country in order achieve an ethnic balance in ‘ethnically sensitive areas’ (Guentcheva, Kabakchieva, and Kolarski 2003) were, however, unsuccessful.

The demographic effects of the Bulgarian co-ethnic citizenship policies are well below expectations. As stated by the Minister for Bulgarians Abroad in 2010, more than 1 million Bulgarian co-ethnics were ready ‘to permanently relocate to Bulgaria, buy a house and find work’. However, Eurostat reports fewer than 45,000 acquisitions of Bulgarian citizenship between 2002 and 2013. According to Harpaz’s (2015) reading of governmental statistics, the number of acquisitions is higher, amounting to about 97,000 (between 2002 and 2012). If we add the 16,000 acquisitions of citizenship reported for the period 2014–2015, we arrive at about 120,000 acquisitions since 2002. The largest number of applications for co-ethnic citizenship is filed by Bulgarians from abroad, primarily from Macedonia and Moldova, Ukraine and Serbia. In the National Strategy on Migration, asylum and Integration (2011–2020), it is claimed that about 90% of acquisitions of citizenship in Bulgaria are based on the special procedure for co-ethnics. However, this seems exaggerated; for example, data for 2008 show that only about half of citizenship acquisitions were based on co-ethnic preference (Smilov and Jileva 2013, 15). In 2015, only 5682 out of 10,720 citizenship acquisitions concerned co-ethnics. These figures fall short of the officially advertised 30,000 new (co-ethic) citizens per year.

Despite the official rhetoric, the Bulgarian policy of co-ethnic citizenship does not seem to tackle demographic problems. Since 2001 the policy targets persons who live ‘permanently or continuously on the territory of another country’. The limited number of co-ethnics who acquire Bulgarian citizenship (and settle in the country) does not have any significant demographic impact.

Croatia emerged from the Yugoslav wars as a fortified nation state. The share of (self-declared) ethnic Croats in the state increased from 78.1% in 1991 to 90.4% in 2011. However, the number of ethnic Croats living outside the state remained significant. Croatian inclusive policy of co-ethnic citizenship sought to reach out to these large communities of co-ethnics (which amounted to about 25% of Croatia’s resident population) without encouraging them to resettle in the country. Štiks (2012, 25) estimates that
about 1,150,000 persons acquired Croatian citizenship between 1991 and 2006 on grounds of ethnicity, including 800,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 100,000 in Serbia (and Montenegro) and 10,000 in Macedonia. It must be noted that the number of those who acquired Croatian citizenship on this basis was larger than the number of those who declared Croat ethnicity in CEE censuses. According to census data from the 1990s, the number of self-declared ethnic Croats in other countries of the region was about 940,000 (of which 760,000 lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina). By 2011, this number decreased to 690,000 (a decrease by 200,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone).

Despite having granted citizenship to more than 1 million people in the last two decades Croatia has not avoided the demographic decline. This is because the policy of co-ethnic citizenship was intended from the outset to provide political support to co-ethics and not to encourage immigration. In 2011, the citizenship law introduced residential conditions for Croatian emigrants who wished to re-acquire citizenship in an attempt to promote the ‘demographic recovery’ of the country (Ragazzi 2013, 9). However, this change is unlikely to produce significant demographic results because most Croatian emigrants also qualify for preferential acquisition of citizenship based on co-ethnicity, in which case they do not have to reside in the country. With the pool of co-ethnics from the neighbouring countries diminishing, the number of acquisition of Croatian citizenship has fallen dramatically in recent years. According to Eurostat data, only 56,275 persons acquired Croatian citizenship by naturalisation between 2003 and 2013.

Although Hungary’s demographic decline in the last two decades has been slower that of other countries in the region, its situation is expected to worsen in the future, as the country’s population is projected to shrink by 14% by 2050. In this context, the Hungarian co-ethnic citizenship policy has an important demographic potential. According to Eurostat data, about 84,719 people acquired Hungarian citizenship through naturalisation between 1996 and 2010. Other sources report about 320,000 acquisitions of Hungarian citizenship between 2011 and 2013 (mostly by non-residents) and 622,531 acquisitions between 2011 and 2014 (Bálint 2014). We can thus estimate the total number of acquisitions at around 800,000 – which amounts to about 8% of the Hungarian resident population.

Because ethnic Hungarians enjoy a strong majority in Hungary, the co-ethnic citizenship policy does not seek to increase the ethnic homogeneity of the population. However, the policy might, in practice, increase ethno-demographic diversity since, by extending citizenship to all former citizens, Hungary opened the door to many non-ethnic Hungarians. As Nagy (2014, 38) noted, only one-third of the 10 million Hungarian citizens who remained outside Hungary’s borders in 1920 were ethnic Hungarians.

The main effects of the Hungarian co-ethnic citizenship have been political rather than demographic. The policy has huge political consequences since diaspora voters tend to support nationalist parties. For example, 95% of the votes cast outside Hungary in 2014 went to centre-right FIDEZS, which brought the party the one extra seat necessary to secure absolute majority in the parliament (Pogonyi 2015, 85).

The Romanian population has decreased by more than 3 million since 1992 and its decline is projected to accelerate in the future (to almost 1/3 of the 1992 level by 2050). This demographic crisis is caused by low fertility rates and massive emigration (Dumbrava 2016). In 1998, the government proposed a plan to encourage return migration, but the initiative remained largely declarative (Suditu et al. 2013). It was also suggested that
granting preferential citizenship to co-ethins living in Moldova could provide an important source of immigrant workers.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite sensationalist reports about one million of co-ethnics taking up Romanian citizenship (Escritt 2009), the actual number of acquisitions is much lower. Between 1991 and 2012, the administration processed only 226,507 applications (Iordachi 2012, 361). The process was streamlined after the accession of Romania to the EU, leading to a surge in the number of processed applications (from 4512 in 2008 to 21,999 in 2009) (Bărbulescu 2013, 5). Taking into account an estimated 25,000 applications processed yearly between 2013 and 2016 (and assume that most of these applications were successful), we arrive at about 300,000 of total acquisitions of citizenship based on the procedure of restoration.

The demographic impact of the Romanian policy of restoration of citizenship is limited. The number of restorations of citizenship has remained low and the great majority of those who re-acquired Romania citizenship on preferential grounds do not move into the country. The typical applicant is a citizen of a non-EU country, such as Moldova or Ukraine, who applies for citizenship from abroad and moves to another EU country as soon as he/she gets hold of a Romanian passport. The Romanian citizenship policy thus turns (non-resident) foreigners directly into emigrant citizens.

The Serbian co-ethnic citizenship policy targets primarily Serbs living in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania, Albania and Hungary. Despite the generous co-ethnic policy implemented by Serbia after 2004, only a small share of co-ethnics moved to Serbia. According to data released by the Serbian Ministry of Interior in 2012, only about 300,000 new citizens acquired Serbian citizenship on preferential grounds, most of them holding the citizenship of another post-Yugoslav country (Tripkovic 2012).

The Serbian policy is not linked to a clearly defined ethno-demographic strategy. The citizenship law explicitly targets applicants ‘without residence in Serbia’. The preferential treatment is extended to co-ethnics of all ethnicities represented in Serbia, which means that Serbia opens the door of citizenship to ‘most of the population of neighbouring countries’ (Rava 2013, 21). There is a key difference, however, between co-ethnic Serbs and other co-ethnics as the former have the right to be admitted, while the latter have only the possibility of admission (Vasiljević 2012).

**The ethno-demographic impact of co-ethnic citizenship on co-ethnics**

Overall, the number of (self-declared) co-ethnics living outside their kin-states\textsuperscript{13} has declined considerably in the last two decades (Figure 2). According to official censuses,\textsuperscript{14} all the major (self-declared) co-ethnic communities in the CEE have diminished numerically in the two decades after 1990: ethnic Bulgarians in Ukraine, ethnic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, ethnic Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, ethnic Romanians in Ukraine, and ethnic Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo. The case of self-declared ethnic Romanians is an exception (120% increase in the last decade) due to a recent massive re-identification of ‘Moldovans’ as ‘Romanians’ in the Republic of Moldova caused by particular political developments in the country. It is important to note that the demographic decline of co-ethnic communities is generally greater than the overall demographic decline of the countries in which these communities live. For example, between 1990 and 2011, the number of self-declared ethnic Hungarians
living in Romania decreased by 24% (0.4 million), while the population of Romania decreased by only 13%.

After becoming independent in 1878 Bulgaria maintained territorial claims over several Balkan regions that came under the spiritual authority of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The new parliament refused to grant citizenship to ethnic Bulgarians from these regions in order to maintain Bulgarian presence in those territories (Smilov and Jileva 2013, 4). Nowadays Bulgaria does not press territorial claims in the region, but is engaged in an ‘identity war’ with Macedonia. By encouraging Macedonian citizens to acquire Bulgarian citizenship on grounds of (Bulgarian) ethnicity, Bulgaria challenges the official interpretation of the Macedonian national identity (Smilov and Jileva 2013, 16). Despite occasional protests by Macedonian politicians (Neofotistos 2009), the squabble has not prevented many Macedonian citizens from applying and obtaining Bulgarian citizenship.

According to census data, the number of self-declared ethnic Bulgarians living in Macedonia was only 1370 in 1991 and 1418 in 2011. Most Macedonian citizens seek Bulgarian citizenship for the practical advantages offered by the EU passport. Neofotistos (2009) claims that the gesture of acquiring citizenship has ‘no bearing whatsoever on Macedonian citizenship and ethno-national identification’. If anything, the Bulgarian policy of co-ethnic citizenship contributed to bolstering the nationalist discourse linking demography and the survival of the Bulgarian nation.

The ethno-demographic consolidation of Croatia was mainly a result of war-driven ethnic migrations. The first function of the Croatian co-ethnic citizenship policy was to sanction these population movements by formally including Croats into the state. The second function was to provide additional support to co-ethnics from outside the borders (alongside military and political support). At the end of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia participated in the settlement talks and secured the status of constituent people for ethnic Croats. The issue of Croatian co-ethnic citizenship did not trigger major reactions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An agreement on dual citizenship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia was signed already in 2007, although it took Bosnia and Herzegovina four years to ratify it (Sarajlić 2013). Despite promoting partially
overlapping co-ethnic citizenship regimes, Croatia and Serbia have evaded disputes over dual citizenship.

The major impact of the Croatian co-ethnic citizenship was political rather than demographic and it was felt in Croatia more than in the diaspora. The Croatian ‘diaspora voting machine’ played a key role in securing successive electoral victories for the right-wing party Croatian Democratic Union (Ragazzi, Štiks, and Koska 2013, 20; Pogonyi 2014). Following the reform of the electoral system, diaspora voters were granted a fixed number of seats in the parliament. This arrangement has decreased the political influence of the diaspora, although the impact of non-resident votes (per seat) remained higher than that of the votes cast by resident citizens (Waterbury 2014, 45).

The number of self-declared ethnic Hungarians decreased from 2.8 million in the 1990s to about 2.1 million in the 2000s. For example, the number of self-declared ethnic Hungarians decreased by one quarter in Romania and Serbia and at a higher rate than that of the national demographic decline. In Slovakia, the number of self-declared ethnic Hungarians decreased by more than a quarter in the conditions in which the country experiences a slight demographic growth.

The Hungarian citizenship policy has a strong impact on its relations with the neighbours and affects the situation of co-ethnic Hungarians living in these countries. In 2001, Slovakia protested vehemently against the adoption of the Hungarian Status Law, which provided quasi-citizenship benefits to the 0.5 million ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia (Fowler 2002). The nationalist exchanges between Hungary and Slovakia caught ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia in the crossfire. Slovak minority leaders criticised the referendum initiative because it escalated the conflict and encouraged ethnic Hungarians to leave their ‘native country’ (Kusa 2013, 20). A clear sign of the deteriorating of inter-ethnic relations in Slovakia was the adoption of the Slovak Law on the State Language in 2009, which introduced strict rules on the use of Slovak language by institutions (including minority schools) and imposed harsh fines for using Slovak language incorrectly.

In reaction to Hungary’s change of the citizenship law in 2010, the Slovak government amended the Slovak citizenship law in order to provide for the automatic loss of citizenship by Slovak citizens who acquire the citizenship of another state ‘by an act of will’ (Bauböck 2010). Slovak nationalists justified this measure by linking the Hungarian co-ethnic citizenship to ‘the myth of a thousand years of suffering under the Hungarian yoke’ (Kusa 2013, 18). In this context, the Slovak Prime Minister rebuffed the Hungarian demands for more minority rights by stating that ‘the state was established for Slovaks, not for minorities’. The Hungarian government also began to strengthen its links with the nationalist Hungarian party in Slovakia and to sideline the more moderate Hungarian minorities (Pogonyi 2014, 14). As Zsolt Simon – a moderate leader – argued, the Hungarian government did not seek to understand the situation of Hungarians in Slovakia and contributed to the escalation of the conflict by using Hungarian co-ethnics for domestic political purposes (Poplawski 2012). In the meantime, Slovakia continues to withdraw citizenship from Slovaks who acquire another citizenship by will. Since citizenship status is linked to a number of important rights, such as property, social and political rights, the Slovak policy risks turning autochthonous ethnic minorities into mere ‘immigrants’ (Pogonyi et al. 2010, 12). The number of those who lost Slovak citizenship due to the ban on dual citizenship rose to about 1000 by the end of 2015. Ironically, only 59
persons lost Slovak citizenship because of acquiring Hungarian citizenship. The great majority of cases concerned Slovaks who acquired Czech citizenship.

The 2010 amendment of the Hungarian citizenship law caused far less protests in Romania. Bărbulescu and Stavilă (2010) explain this by pointing at the key role played by the main Hungarian party in Romanian (UDMR) in securing the parliamentarian majority of the governing coalition. Despite occasional nationalist rhetoric promoted by the Romanian right-wing parties, the Hungarian minorities in Romania have integrated successfully in the Romanian political system. In contrast to Slovakia, in 2011 Romania passed a new Education Law, which provided, among others, for the right of minorities to be taught history and geography in their own language.

The Romanian citizenship policy has been received with ambiguity in Moldova. When the policy was launched in 1990, there were expectations that it constituted a first step towards the (re)unification of the two countries. However, the Moldovan political elites embarked on an alternative project of national building, centred on a separate Moldovan identity. Although Moldova outlawed dual citizenship (Gasca 2012), this project did not stop many Moldovans from applying for Romanian citizenship. The relations between Romania and Moldova have been particularly tensed during the successive communist governments in Moldova (2001–2009). The Moldovan citizenship law of 2000 required the Ministry of External Affairs to identify and strip of citizenship all persons who held dual citizenship. It also prohibited dual citizens from holding political office. Adopted with one year before the parliamentary elections of 2001, this law was intended to intimidate the pro-Romanian political elites who were suspected to possess Romanian citizenship (Iordachi 2012). Moldova removed the ban on dual citizenship in 2001 and its prohibition on dual citizens holding office was found in violation of human rights by the European Court of Human Rights (Gasca 2010). Following political unrest in Moldova in spring 2009 the Romanian government reacted promptly by speeding up the process of the restoration of citizenship (Bărbulescu 2013). The Moldovan communist government reacted by accusing Romania of ‘revanchism’ and by imposing visas for Romanian citizens – despite an agreement with the EU on a visa-free regime for EU citizens. The Romanian-Moldovan relations improved after this crisis, although rhetorical skirmishes continue to occur. In 2012, for example, several Moldovan deputies required to withdraw Romanian citizenship from several Moldovan high officials on grounds that they ‘undermined the power of the Republic of Moldova’.18

Most Moldovan citizens see Romanian citizenship as a tool that allows them to bypass EU’s visa restrictions. Sometimes the clash between peoples’ strategic behaviours and the official patriotic significance ascribed to the policy generates public outcry. In 2014, the Romanian media expressed outrage after a Moldovan-Romanian pop singer spoke frankly about her purely pragmatic reasons for obtaining the Romanian citizenship (Dumbrava 2014b).

Ukraine also accused Romania of hidden revisionism and of using citizenship regulations in order to restore the ‘Greater Romania’ (Iwański 2011). The citizenship law of Ukraine does not allow dual citizenship. The Ukrainian parliament discussed on several occasions amendments to the citizenship law seeking to reinforce the ban on dual citizenship with hefty penalties for concealing dual citizenship. Although, this was mainly in response to Russia’s policies towards Russian co-ethnics, the Romanian policy came also under scrutiny (Shevel 2013, 21). According to censuses, the number of
self-declared ethnic Romanians in the Ukrainian censuses has decreased only slightly in the last decade.

According to census data, the number of self-declared ethnic Serbs in CEE countries has declined by more than a million (38%) between the 1990s and the 2000s. This includes a decline by 675,000 (35%) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by 400,000 (67%) in Croatia and by 170,000 (86%) in Kosovo. This trend is a result of forced migrations during the Yugoslav wars, more recent economic emigration as well as of ethnic re-identification by certain groups.

The strongest impact of the Serbian co-ethnic citizenship policy was felt in Montenegro, the last former Yugoslav Republic to part ways with Serbia. Montenegro has been divided politically between a pro-Montenegrin and a pro-Serb camp ever since the independence referendum of 2006, which was won by the pro-Montenegrin camp by a fraction of 2095 votes (Džankić 2012, 338). The new state was built on a strictly ‘civic’ basis in order to counteract ethno-nationalist drives. Montenegro banned dual citizenship for fear that it would increase the political power of pro-unionists Serbs. The dispute between Montenegro and Serbia is aggravated by the fact that about one-third of Montenegrin citizens can qualify for Serbian co-ethnic citizenship (Rava 2013, 22).

The Serbian citizenship policy generated little problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Serbs enjoy the status of constituent people. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro at the time) signed an agreement on dual citizenship in 2002. The relationship between Croatia and Serbia also improved substantially after 2000 and, although the co-ethnic citizenship policies of the two countries partially overlap, no significant conflict over dual citizenship occurred.

**Conclusion**

Despite their huge ethno-demographic potential, co-ethnic citizenship policies have contributed little to projects of ethno-demographic consolidations in CEE. These policies are often used strategically by kin-states, which often redefine co-ethnicity to fit shifting demographic and political goals. They are also used pragmatically by individuals, who may decide to switch identification and formal allegiance in order to secure certain benefits (Harpaz 2018). This strategic behaviour of applicants and dual citizens produces unintended consequences that should be examined within the context of the rise of strategic citizenship (Harpaz and Mateos 2018).

The failure of co-ethnic citizenship policies to deliver ethno-demographic results has to do not only with difficulties related to defining ethnicity and meaningfully targeting co-ethnics or with poor implementation and circumstantial hurdles. It also has to do with an inherent conflict at the heart of strategies to pursue ethno-demographic goals through external citizenship entitlements.

Despite common claims to the contrary, extending citizenship to co-ethnics living outside borders is unlikely to secure both goals of strengthening demographically the kin-state and supporting the communities of co-ethnics living outside countries. As evidence from five CEE countries shows, co-ethnic citizenship policies also rarely achieve any these goals separately.

When coupled with extensive political rights, co-ethnic citizenship seems to unify the nation and to empower co-ethnics, by offering them political and other benefits in the
kin-state. However, these policies may seriously disturb the political competition in the kin-state and make co-ethics worse off by prompting their host states to diminish their status and privileges. In cases where the host states struggle with unfinished projects of state and national building, co-ethnic citizenship may undermine efforts to reach a democratic inter-ethnic settlement, to the detriment and sometimes against the will of many of the claimed co-ethnics.

Notes

2. It must me noted that ethnic rules of citizenship are not an exclusive feature of citizenship in the CEE. There are other countries in and outside Europe that grant preferential access to citizenship to certain categories of co-ethnics, including Denmark, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Portugal and Spain (Dumbрова 2014a; Tsuda 2009; Harpaz 2015; Mateos 2013). I focus on CEE countries because in this region co-ethnic citizenship policies overlap greatly and are highly contested.
10. There is also a significant number of Croatian emigrants in Western Europe and United States, amounting to 3–3.5 million.
13. I take into account the number of self-declared ethnics living (outside their kin state) in the following countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.


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