

Political transitions and migration transitions: a comparative analysis of post-socialist Europe and Latin America

Lecture proposal

Béla Soltész

European Population Conference 2014, Budapest, Hungary

From the late 1980s onwards, European countries with a state socialist system of governance and distribution, and Latin American countries with different kinds of authoritarian regimes underwent a process of democratic transition. In both regions, the enhancement of civil and political liberties went hand in hand with the implementation of a neoliberal agenda of economic reforms, a consequence of which was growing unemployment, growing pressure on social security and increasing outward migration from the majority of the countries. In some countries, however, the demand for migrant labour increased, thus these countries turned from emigrant into immigrant countries.

In my paper I present the historical trajectory of selected Eastern European and Latin American countries in a comparative way, focusing on political transition periods, implementation of new economic paradigms and – as a consequence of both – the changes in migratory flows, both inward and outward.

Comparing net migration rates to GDP, FDI, debt service and sectorial economic data on a long time horizon (1950-2010), I present country trajectories in which political and economic transitions' main turning points (decisive elections, structural adjustment measures, free trade agreements) are marked. Changes in the net migration rate are not conceptualized as direct consequences of these events, however, they mark the socioeconomic framework in which, as the cumulative causation theory states it, migratory decisions are taking place.

Comparative research on political (and economic) transitions of Eastern European and Latin American countries is scarce but existent: most notably Bohle and Greskovits (1998) and Pop-Eleches (2010) analyzed in a comparative way the political economy of structural adjustments in the two regions. However, a comparative research of the migratory consequences thereof is still waiting to be done. My paper aims to be a first step towards this enterprise.

The objectives of the analysis are the following: 1) to identify common traits in the temporal sequence of structural adjustments and subsequent changes in the net migration rate of Eastern European and Latin American countries, 2) to build a typology on migration transitions for both regions and relate these changes to the changes in the global position of these countries. A following step of this comparative exercise in the future will be the detailed analysis of country pairs (one Latin American and one Eastern European for each category) in order to contrast migratory behaviour under similar structural and macroeconomical environment but in different geographical, social and legal contexts.