Mediterranean Migration to New Central European Member States of the EU: Present and Future Trends

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Traditionally, the new Central European EU Member States[1] have not been the targets of migration in general and of Mediterranean-MENA migration in particular. The movement of people in the region has been much more related to the traditional ethnical and political realities of the region on the one hand, and to the systemic changes that occurred in 1989-1990, including the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, on the other.

The relationship of the new Central European member states with the Mediterranean in general, and with the southern and eastern shore in particular, have traditionally been scarce and sporadic, if not non-existent, and they were directed by the Soviets during the Cold War. This is reflected in the very small number of Muslim communities, among others.

In the post-Cold War era, Central European-Mediterranean relationships went back to historically low levels. While European Union membership has proven to be a driving force for the new Central European members to (re-)establish Mediterranean relations, they still have to adjust to regional EU policies and to policy-making as part of a supra-national body: the EU. While migration data clearly reflect the status of historical relations, EU membership has so far failed to prove a significant magnet for migrants.

Migration in Central Europe

The new Central European members of the European Union appeared on the migration "market" at the beginning of the 1990s not as a result of an organic development, but as a direct consequence of the collapse of authoritarian regimes (Tóth, 2002). The regime change initiated migration from Central Europe and much less—if at all—to Central Europe. However, the opening of the borders created a favourable situation for transit migration, especially from Asia to Western Europe. As a new phenomenon, which is characteristic of the region, the regime change introduced migration within Central Europe, especially following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A special case was Hungary, which is surrounded by its own ethnic groups as a result of the Trianon Treaty of 1920. (Some 1.5 million Hungarians live in Romania, 500,000 in Slovakia and 290,000 in Serbia, but there are also ethnic Hungarians in the Ukraine, Croatia and Austria. Source: HTMH.)

Migration to Central Europe has remained relatively low, basically comprising asylum-seekers, "transiters" on their way via the region toward another target country—primarily old EU members or the United States—and immigrants who arrive with a view to settling in the region. The number of asylum-seekers in the new Central European Member States has dropped after EU accession. Central Europe is still mostly a transit region, mainly because of the ongoing economic transition and transformation, although methods have been changing, with migrants increasingly applying for visas to the Central European states and trying from there to get into other EU member states. The dissolution of Yugoslavia created a special case in that many Yugoslav citizens—not just Hungarians—came to "stay the war out" and would then either leave for western Europe or go back to their homes. On the one hand, immigration to Central Europe follows

[1]New Central European members are those Central European states that joined the EU on 1st May 2004. Romania and Bulgaria are referred to separately under the term "newer members".

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previous patterns, such as marriage to Central European citizens. On the other, it originates from typically Central European history: people who fled from the Communist regimes and took refuge in Western Europe or the United States moved back in significant numbers. Immigration to Hungary following the regime change is uniquely characterised by the vast number of ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries who are not foreigners in the sense that they speak the language, belong to the same culture and their ancestors used to live in historical Hungary. Of those who received Hungarian citizenship between 1990-2000, 91.8% had formerly been ethnic Hungarian citizens of the neighbouring states, 70% of which had come from Romania (Toth, 2002).

Central Europe and the Mediterranean

While the new Central European member states are usually considered one homogenous group, they are different in many respects, one example being their relationship with the Mediterranean. However, while Slovenia, Hungary and today's Slovakia had sometimes been directly or indirectly involved in developments around the Mediterranean, mostly through the Habsburg Empire/Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Ottoman Turkey, the other Central European states did not even have that kind of relationship with the Mediterranean region and/or countries until after the Second World War.

During the Cold War, Central Europe, being part of the Soviet Bloc, pursued a foreign policy directed by Moscow. In accordance with the practice of the Soviet Union, ideologically based "socialist type" relations were established with the "friendly Arab states" on the southern shore of the Mediterranean (Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Syria), which proved an important and reliable market for Central European products and provided much needed hard currency. Most of these relationships were practically terminated after the regime change. However, this framework created the only possible source of immigration into Central Europe: many students from the "friendly" Arab states were studying in Central Europe, which resulted in a number of mixed families. Central Europe also received many who fled the "friendly" authoritarian regimes under the pretext of studying or training. However, most of these people applied for and were granted Hungarian or some other Central European citizenship.

Islam, which has been one of the main determinant civilisations of the Mediterranean, is another such element: while Muslim communities had historically lived in the present territory of Hungary even before the Hungarian tribes moved to the area, and Hungarian history was determined by the fight against Muslim Ottoman Turks for several centuries, other Central European states had had no Muslim "experience" before the Soviet relationships were established. (The Polish and Lithuanian Muslim past is connected to the Tartars and the Karaite community in Lithuania, which is in many ways distinctly different from the Islam practised around the Mediterranean.) As a consequence, the new Central European members (with the exception of the latest newcomer, Bulgaria, which has some 10-12% Turks) have no sizeable traditional Muslim communities.

Present-day Muslim inhabitants have either arrived in the framework of the Socialist period relationship (which means that most of them are Arabs from the "friendly Arab states"), are generally secular and integrated into society, or are businessmen, diplomats etc. staying in the region temporarily. Although freedom of religious practice following the regime change led to the establishment of Muslim communities, among others, very few "natives" converted to Islam. Therefore, Muslim communities are very few and very small in number. For instance, in Hungary the approximately 15,000 practising Muslims belong to three different organisations (according to Muslims, the figure is higher at 25,000). However, the very small number—and in some cases the practical non-existence—of Muslim communities in new Central European EU members is increasingly in contrast with the social realities and composition of most old EU members and may cause serious trouble. The increasingly surfacing tensions among the native and Muslim communities—for instance the events in France at the end of 2005, the cartoon crisis and the campaign against Turkey's EU membership by some NGOs—are fully represented in the Central European media, inciting hatred against a community which in Central Europe is practically non-existent. At present, Central

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European societies on the whole are not unfavourably biased against Muslims in general, but Islamophobia may also spread there very quickly. The other community that has historically been present in Central Europe, but has a state of its own in the Mediterranean, is the Jewish community, which contributed significantly to the political, cultural, economic and scientific developments of the region. While in the Second World War they were persecuted and many were killed in the holocaust, the remaining Jewish communities experienced an unprecedented opening during and following the regime change. Diplomatic relations with Israel were established (with Hungary in 1989) and there has been a lively and close connection between Israel and the "native" countries, supported by the consular practice of dual citizenship. The Israelis of Central European origin, therefore, cannot be considered immigrants. In fact, in recent years there has been an increasing re-settlement from Israel into Central Europe, partly during periods when the security situation in Israel has deteriorated, and partly due to the increasing presence of Israeli companies in Central European economies.

Central European Migration Trends in the EU Context: Mediterranean-MENA Migration?

Relations between Central Europe and the Mediterranean have been (re-)established in the framework of the EU-Mediterranean Partnership. While Central Europeans were initially excluded from the process, during their accession negotiations they received an observer status, which upon their accession automatically became full membership in the EMP. It was widely expected that in the near future the new Central European member states would evolve from transit countries to migration targets. The very low figures representing Mediterranean-MENA migrants in the table below suggest that the Central European states have not yet become desirable migration targets.

While Central European economies are still in a transitory phase, there might be another very specific barrier to Central Europe becoming an inviting migration target: the new Central European states—with the exception of Poland—are small countries (each with a population of 1-1.5 million to 10 million inhabitants) and they all have their own native languages, which are barely spoken outside the country.

So far, the migration dimension of EU membership in the context of new member states has offered another perspective. On the one hand, old EU members were afraid of opening their labour markets to the new members, which led most to introduce restrictions on the free movement of labour from the new members. On the other, new members are already experiencing the exodus of some professions to the old members due not only to higher salaries, but also to better working conditions, especially for doctors. Interestingly, the new members are acting in a similar vein towards the even newer members (Romania and Bulgaria), trying to restrict the free movement of the Romanian/Bulgarian labour force (for example, by designating professions in which they do not accept workers), and in the meantime they are calling for professionals in fields in which

TABLE 38 **Migrants from Mediterranean-MENA Countries in the New Central European EU Member States**

Country	Year		Algeria	Egypt	Israel	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestine	Syria	Tunisia	Turkey	Total
Czech R.	2002	B	366	130	266	134	191	105	72	315	196	326	2101
Estonia	2000	B	1	1	16		1	1				6	26
Hungary	2001	B	216	178	516	131	90	23		487	23	450	2114
Latvia	2000	A	8	8	29	9	88	6		16		17	181
Lithuania	2001	B	2	3	103	14	119					27	268
Poland	n.a.												
Slovakia	n.a.												
Slovenia	2000	B										259	259
EU			766,966	126,126	41,580	20,978	111,261	1,634,986	3,741	69,703	358,269	265,4721	5,788,331

Source: CARIM Mediterranean Migration 2005 Report, ed. Philippe Fargues, www.carim.org/Publications/AR2005CARIM.pdf

they need extra personnel (the Czech Republic calling for Romanian/Bulgarian physicians, for instance).

A very specific migration case occurred within the EU context in November-December 2006: some 60 Hungarian Roma went to Sweden seeking social benefits and a better life, and asked for asylum there. (Some years ago a similar movement occurred, but the destination of the Hungarian Roma was Canada, rather than other EU members.) The issue became so serious, threatening with a further flow of Hungarian Roma communities, that the Swedish embassy had to visit Roma population centres and leaders to explain the impossibility of such an exodus. In the end most of the Roma returned.

Conclusions

EU membership has expanded the traditional and historical sphere of interests of the new Central European Member States, offering new possibilities and demanding new obligations. In the process of adjustment to EU policies, an increasing awareness of the Euro-Mediterranean region has started to take shape and relevant policies are being formulated.

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However, movement of labour force from the new Central European members is still restricted by some old members, while the new members themselves introduce restrictions on the movement of Romanian and Bulgarian workers. Simultaneously, the new members are also experiencing an increasing shortage of workforce, which they are trying to attract from Romania and Bulgaria. Hungary has sthe advantage of having ethnically Hungarian communities in its surroundings.

The new Central European members have no significant Muslim communities and, since most have no historical memory of confrontation or coexistence with Muslim peoples, they are as yet unaffected by Islamophobia.

The lack of strong direct relations between Central European and Mediterranean-MENA countries, the small number of Muslim communities and the as yet transitory phase of Central European economies have so far counterbalanced EU membership in the eyes of possible migrants. Language barriers may prove to be another such factor. Patterns of migration, therefore, are not expected to change in the short term, but cannot be excluded in the medium to long term.

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