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Precis

**Demographic Developments in the Balkan countries,
An overview
by R. Fakiolas**

This overview examines the Demographic Developments in the Balkan Peninsula (including Eastern Thrace belonging to Turkey, Slovenia and in some issues Moldova which was incorporated voluntarily in the Soviet Union). A third of its population of about 65 mil live in Romania and one sixth, around 11.1 mil, in Greece.

All existing countries of the Balkans before WW II were monarchies applying various kinds of feudal relations in their rural economy. After the War all of them except Greece and to some extent Yugoslavia, followed the socio-political ideology of the Soviet Union. Following fierce civil war in 1946-1949, Greece established the socio-economic regime of the free market economy with a restricted political democracy; and since 1974 it has enjoyed the benefits of a full political democracy. Soon later, it joined the EU and the Eurozone (2001 and 2001 respectively).

Yugoslavia controlled by Tito had ethnic tensions on a temporary hold. It fell out of the Soviet sphere of influence after 1948, establishing reasonable contacts with democratic EU and the rest of the world. After 1961 Albania fell into strict isolation from all EUR countries including the Soviet Union and it cherished ties with the Mao's China. Only around 2000 the Balkans adopted a friendly cooperative link with the Western Europe and USA.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1990 and soon later that of Yugoslavia removed the totalitarian regime in all Balkan countries, which now apply the free market economy and democratic policies. Gradually four other countries joined the EU (Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria) and practically all the rest negotiate their accession to it. Each country uses a different national currency, except Kosovo and Montenegro which use the euro (without Eurozone authorization).

Over the past two decades the Western Balkans have experienced ethnic wars, protracted destabilization and fragmented relations. Bosnia–Herzegovina and Kosovo face ethnic division and are partly under international administration. Serbia has political and socio-economic problems, challenging Kosovo's international recognition and struggling for EU integration. FYROM is in the middle of turbulent debates on ethnic identity, as local grievances concerning the implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Agreement increase. Among others, the "name dispute" with Greece has slowed the country's Euro-Atlantic perspective. Surrounded by many thousands Albanians living outside its borders and hosting an active Greek minority, Albania finds itself protecting the rights of its co-nationals and facing demands from that minority for better treatment and more rights. In the aftermath of its 2006 independence, Montenegro, the state with the smallest population (625,000 persons, Census 2011) is experiencing substantial changes concerning political orientation and problems of identity.

While the region has been gradually normalizing, fragile relations continue to obstruct cooperation, economic prosperity and European integration. In the communist Yugoslavia and Albania ethnic problems were muted under the slogans of 'fraternity-unity' and 'international proletarianism'. The new borders caused inter-ethnic bargaining, fierce conflicts and hundreds of thousands IDPs-Internally Displaced Persons.

Most of those countries are in the upper-middle income range (around \$10,000 p.c. annually) but Greece belongs to the high income economies. Turkey and the states from the former Eastern Bloc that formerly applied a planned economy system mark satisfactory economic growth. Only the economy of Greece drops since 2009, having lost about 5-6% of its per capita income of over \$25,000. It has also accumulated a public debt over twice its current GDP owed to foreign lenders.-mostly public corporations. It is followed by Slovenia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, Serbia, FYROM, Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo. Despite their recent growth, the last three countries have still about half the Greek per capita income.

Once minority rights and representation schemes evolved with the establishment of democracy, measuring group size, identifying ethnicity and mapping ethnic geography became one of the most important and delicate processes. The region's recent past and the stalled return of refugees made obvious the need for a well prepared census, which actually took place in 2011. It was organized, supervised and considerably funded by four public International Organizations, cooperating also with the official statistical service of every country under survey.

The censuses under communism were either unreliable or did not count several sensitive issues. In Albania, for example, religion was not counted because the country was officially atheist. Yet, countries like Albania and others with large minorities had often faced religion as a proxy for the presence in them of nationals from other countries. When democracy was established, counting religious affiliation was a 'dangerous' process that reawakened memories of the past. Those identified as Yugoslav in past censuses had to choose a new identity. The new ethnic questions coupled with the memory of past injustices, claims of unfair border drawings, and folklore immortalizing ethnic-based massacres between Croats, Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, reawakened old fears and prejudices. They also shaped the nature of citizenship in the region, by regulating criteria for double citizenship, the 'ethnizenship'; and linking citizenry with territoriality, ethnic loyalties and cross-ethnic representation.

For all their geographic proximity and for many countries the long time periods under the same rule, the Balkan state entities and separate territories have a very perplexed demographic profile. Population structures with their multiple constituents vary widely among countries and even among regions within the same country, differentiating the demographic patterns.

By bringing together statisticians and other producers of demographic and socioeconomic data, the present seminar offers opportunities to students, teachers, scholars, decision -makers and members of the civil society to learn from one another's work on the various communities; to become more familiar with the human and overall environment in their region and the Eastern Europe; to increase also their ability for helping decision makers on more sections of the society. The region has never itself encouraged such interaction, hampered, among others, by linguistic and political barriers. All communities of the Western Balkans aspire to join the European Union which is willing to integrate them, as it did with the five other Balkan 1 countries, mentioned above.

The process of demographic data-gathering in established democracies is to a certain degree a common fact of life. It counts people and in emerging democracies with a multi-ethnic population things appear to be different. Group entitlements and citizenship often spring from 'official' statistics, making demographic data gathering a politicized act with serious implications.

Most of the statistics coming from the last census is difficult to compare directly with previous years because no data from similar censuses is available. Even for countries following the world rules for regular ten-year counts (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, recently Slovenia and Croatia) it is difficult to keep these registers up-to-date, due to the volatility of displacement. In many

countries the borders of the national entity have changed and the many and continuously changing unregistered persons can neither be counted nor assessed with any degree of accuracy. Greece experienced an increase in population, largely as a result of a positive migration balance caused by the thousands of Albanians immigrating to Greece. The main cause of the large decline in the population growth rates after the 1980s and the process of depopulation after the 1990s was the unexpected drop in the total fertility rate (TFR). The pace of the natality shift was not even, provoking the heterogeneity of demographic dynamics and different paces of ageing in the Balkans to go on for decades. Over the past fifty years, the TFR in the Balkans halved (from around 3 children per woman to 1.45 children per woman), and the decline was the most severe in the last decade of the 20th century. Up until the 1980s the TFR in all countries was around or above the level of fertility necessary to ensure a generational replacement.

Population health in the Balkans in the past fifty years provides a marked example for the influence of political and socioeconomic factors. The World Health Organization published in 2011 a database titled *European Health For All*, summarizing the most recent data on European health. It considers population older than 64 a separate health statistical category. Since the 1970s there has been substantial improvement in older women LE (Life Expectancy) in Greece and Slovenia at the age of 65 they can hope for yet another twenty years of life. For aging Romanian and Bulgarian women, the chance to live has markedly improved after late 1990s and it presently adds a hope for another 16-17 years after the age of 65. The main reason for improved LE in aging women has been a sharp decline in female CVD (cardiovascular disease) mortality.

Male LE in Greece and Slovenia exhibits a vigorous steady improvement since 1970, reflecting similar trends observed in EU. Slovenia benefits from its proximity to central EU. Territories of former Yugoslavia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia follow Slovenia and Greece. The lower LE in Bulgaria and Romania may relate to the inadequate health measures of the previous regime, but their socioeconomic consolidation resulted in improving it after the mid 1990s. In Moldova, a territory that became integrated with the Soviet Union, LE is even lower.

Infant mortality in 2008 (deaths in the first year of life) is somewhat better in the countries of former Yugoslavia and lowest in Greece and Slovenia; it is high both in Romania and Bulgaria (countries with a significant Roma minority) and highest in Moldova).

In **child mortality** (deaths before the age of five) Romania has to be commended for an intensive decline in it after 1990.

Premature mortality, that which occurs within the range of 0 – 64 years of life, reflecting the suffering, health disability and health expenses in that age group. Data is expressed in the standardized death rate (SDR), i.e. what the crude rate would have been if the population had the same age distribution as the standard European population.

The brief review of recent Balkan history referred to in the **Introduction** above gives an important insight for understanding the shifts in population health in the Balkans.

In the late 1980s the post-Soviet vacuum was gradually filled, implementing an open democratic society, privatization and the free market economy. In Albania, Bulgaria and Romania these socioeconomic changes were accompanied by a period of social upheaval with political and economic instability, sometimes with adverse consequences. Yugoslavia erupted into episodes of tragic ethnic war.

Unfortunately, high CVD (Cardiovascular Disease) mortality after age 65 in Bulgarian and Romanian men keeps them at marked disadvantage compared with the Greeks the Slovenians and the EU average.

An ugly mark on the totalitarian health system in the communist Balkan was the low stagnant or even declining LE compared with that in free EU and the dramatic rise in CVD mortality at the time when it had started to decline in democratic EU. The only positive component was a decrease in neonatal mortality and of childhood mortality up to the age of five.

An improvement in general health occurred in the Balkan countries only after the fall of communism, albeit with some delay during the 1990s. The LE began to improve in Romania and Bulgaria, even in Moldova, still integrated with Russia.

A troubling dilemma remains: why the delay in the health outcome in the post-communist Balkans, even twenty years after the fall of the iron curtain? This delayed trend becomes even more pronounced when it is reflected on the rapid population health improvement in former post-communist central Europe. Of all Balkan countries, Romania with neighboring Moldova and Bulgaria present the shortest LE, highest infant mortality, highest premature mortality from CVD, ischemic heart disease and cerebrovascular accidents. Even worse, in these countries premature cancer mortality continues to rise. WHO data presented here are sending a strong signal to the responsible health authorities to deal with a situation, in the context of the EU considered alarming. There is a need to identify the root causes of these unfavorable health profiles.

While the causes of slow improvement in Balkan population health are multifactorial, undoubtedly adversely contributes an unhealthy life style: inconsistent control of blood pressure and increase in obesity in women, tobacco and alcohol in men.

The extent of financial support for health care is also decisive. Economic strain and slow recovery of free market mechanisms with uneasy implementation of principles of an open society, have drastically hindered adequate funding for health care. Undoubtedly, there are other variables than a nation's wealth that determine the outcome of health care. Notwithstanding, in the Balkans there is a very close correlation between the per capita health expenditure (expressed as dollar purchasing power parity, PPP\$) and the LE.

The male LE in 2008 was highest in Greece and Slovenia (PPP\$ 2900 and 2200, respectively) and lower in Bulgaria and Romania (PPP\$ 910 and 665, respectively). Moldova with the lowest LE had the PPP\$ only 318.

Migrants differ by where they have moved, whether it is one of the Western Balkan countries, or some outside it.

In the 1990s, the majority of emigrants from the Western Balkan countries left their homes because of political and societal disintegration and its consequences. Information about migrations, which started in the time of disintegration of Yugoslavia can be found in numerous literature sources. Positive natural increase could not replace negative migration rates during the 1990s which continued, although with less intensity, into the present decade as a result of the opening of frontiers after the fall of the communist regime. The main destinations were Greece, Italy, Germany, Turkey, France and Belgium. Between the two censuses men were more likely to migrate, changing the gender structure.

Up to December 2007, about 2.141 mil. were estimated to be refugees. Some have returned. Others moved into the neighbor countries as well as in the countries of the Western Europe, Canada, United States, Australia and others. Between 1996 and 2005, according UNHCR Annual Statistics (2006), millions left Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the first decade of 21st century only Bosnia and Herzegovina have positive net migration rates. From 1996 to 2005, according to the UNHCR (2006), 6.216.142 people left the Western Balkan countries.

Situation Overview

In recent months, Serbia and FYROM have both witnessed a sharp surge in the numbers of people arriving at and transiting through their borders. During the first 9 months of 2015, approximately 120,000 people arrived in Serbia, with nearly 70% of the arrivals coming from Syria, while others are from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia. While the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Serbia continues to soar with an average of 3,500 daily arrivals, the government's capacity to carry out registration and fingerprinting remains limited. On 20 August 2015 the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared a state of emergency due to the increased migration flows into its southern border with Greece. According to the Ministry of Interior, between 19 June and 7 September 2015, a total of 64,522 migrants were registered, out of which 43,671 male; 8,857 female; 10,386 children (accompanied by a family member) and 1,608 unaccompanied minors. The current average arrival rate at the southern border is estimated at more than 3,000 per day and the government is faced with difficulties in addressing the basic needs of those arriving. The authorities and local communities are finding it difficult to cope with the high numbers of migrant and refugee arrivals. An urgent response from the humanitarian community is needed before the situation further deteriorates. Turkey announces that it hosts over 2 mil refugees from Syria.

IOM staff have been deployed to the most affected locations at the border between Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in order to provide assistance, including advice and transport assistance to new arrivals, specifically for unaccompanied minors, women with children and migrants with specific needs. CONTACTS prd@iom.int*Preparedness and Response Division drd@iom.int*Donor Relations Division +41.22.7179.271 <http://www.iom.int>

Conclusions

Because of the differences in history, religion, language, culture and level of economic development of the numerous counties in the Balkan Peninsula, it is difficult to generalize on the basis of one or a few of them. In many cases in the same country live both Muslims who are the minority in the peninsula, and Christians of various denominations who form the majority. At present, the common feeling among them seems to be the urge to fight for a better future for themselves and their offspring.

In various parts of this article the benefits from the 2011 census have been emphasized. Without them we could not have comparable data with the rest of Europe, our first trading partner hosting many millions of our compatriots for work and study, and being prepared and capable financially to lend us large sums. They employ also advanced technologies which they transfer to our countries through their capital investments. Despite the problems created, analyzed fully above, the census has provided precious demographic information and opened up a broad road facilitating a closer collaboration with both our neighbors in the north and worldwide.