EMISSION IN EUROPE

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Migration has been one of the dominant topics in European politics and public debate in the past years. However, the focus was mostly on immigration. Until now, much less attention has been paid to emigration. That has changed: According to a 2019 survey conducted by the European Council of Foreign Relations, people in economically weaker regions of Europe now feel less threatened by immigration than by emigration.

Since 1989 there has been a huge loss of population in many countries of the former “Eastern Bloc”. After the expansion of the EU to the East, an East-West migration began, which has persisted for decades. And since the financial and economic crisis many young and well-educated people in search of work have left the countries in Southern Europe. This development poses great challenges for some European countries.

MIDEM takes up this change in perspective in its 2020 annual report and examines the extent, structure, and development of emigration in the EU. Here the countries of East-Central and Southern Europe are the focus. But also in the former East Germany, due to the reunification in 1990, great social and demographic changes have taken place. What are the political consequences; how are outward migration and emigration discussed in public; is emigration a driver for right-wing populist trends?

MIDEM is breaking new empirical ground. To date there has not been a comparative investigation of the emigration dynamics and the political handling of them. The 2020 annual report therefore has an exploratory character and it will hopefully encourage discussion and further research. In any event, the study contains surprising results, which do not confirm the occasionally expressed suppositions that it is emigration that is dividing Europe and providing impetus for right-wing populist movements. As always, here too the relationships are more complex, more varied.

This annual report is the result of discussions which started following our 2019 study (“Migration and Europe”) and which were inspired not least by a talk given by Ivan Krastev at MIDEM in November last year and the East-Central European problem perspective that he consistently pursued therein. This report was written by members of the MIDEM staff with supplementary expertise provided by researchers associated with us. Many thanks go to all of them and also to the editing and production team. In this year 2020, with its pandemic-related difficulties, our work would not have been possible without the generous and trusting support of Stiftung Mercator and the infrastructural support of TU Dresden. Our sincere thanks also go to them.

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FINDINGS

While many Central and Eastern European countries have experienced a remarkable loss of population since 1989, the population in Northern and Western Europe has increased rather than decreased. An important factor in this development is the East-West migration, which has persisted for decades, it began with the collapse of the real-socialist systems and gained momentum with the EU enlargement.

Emigration has been a major contributing factor to the massive loss of population in many Central and Eastern European countries. This development is strengthened by the decline in birth rates as well as by a lack of immigration. Furthermore, this imbalance exacerbates the shortage of skilled workers in many places and poses great challenges for the health care and pension systems.

If this trend continues the population in the former Eastern Bloc countries will continue to shrink considerably in the future. According to prognoses, countries like Bulgaria are likely to lose up to 20 percent of their population by 2050. The situation looks better for countries like Poland and the Czech Republic, which have been receiving increasing numbers of immigrants for some years now.

In Southern Europe the emigration to the North of predominantly young people with higher formal education is evidence of the consequences of the financial crisis and persistent economic weakness. However, structural problems also drive people to leave their country. In particular young people are affected by precarious employment conditions and low wages.

In the public perception emigration did not play a big role for a long time. That has changed. According to a survey, people in economically weaker EU countries now feel less threatened by immigration than by emigration. Many respondents would even approve of measures that make it more difficult for their fellow citizens to emigrate.

Right-wing populist parties in Europe do profit from rising immigration from third countries, not however from higher emigration rates. On the contrary: In places increasingly affected by emigration, right-wing populists performed worse in the last EU election. It is only in economically weak regions that there is a positive correlation between a high emigration rate and the election results of right-wing populist parties.

For Germany there is a positive correlation between the overall migration balance (the difference between the inflow rate and the outflow rate) and right-wing populist voting behavior. The more strongly a region was affected by outward migration in the past three decades, the greater the tendency to vote for the AfD there. This effect can be observed independently of socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors.

The link between the migration balance and voting for the AfD in general speaking more pronounced in Western Germany than in Eastern Germany. With regard to Eastern Germany, it is evident that it was not the outward migration immediately after the reunification that had a beneficial impact for the AfD in terms of election results, but the out-migration since the turn of the millennium.

Emigration is rarely purposefully politicized. It is rather rare even for right-wing populist parties in Central, Eastern and Southern European countries to take up the topic of emigration. Unlike the topic of immigration, emigration hardly polarizes the European party landscapes.

Regardless of party boundaries emigration is mostly portrayed as a social and economic problem. Left-wing parties denounce in particular the high unemployment and precarious employment that force young people to emigrate. The explanation of right-wing parties, on the other hand, contains elements of a narrative of crisis or decline, according to which emigration can also be interpreted as proof of the erosion of the cultural foundations of society.

A much more positive tone prevails in political discourse when dealing with compatriots living abroad. Cultural frames are more important than socioeconomic ones in the portrayal of the role of ‘diaspora’. Thus, fellow countrymen living abroad are often considered to be ‘intermediaries’ or ‘ambassadors’ of one’s own traditions and culture. An issue that is politically controversial is the expansion of the right to vote for citizens who live abroad.

Parallels between the emigration experiences of one’s own population and those of today’s refugees are seldom drawn by right-wing populist parties. On the contrary: In particular in Central and Eastern European countries the image of the hard-working emigrant is set against that of the refugee taking advantage of the social system.

The temporary closure of national borders during the Corona pandemic has shown how vulnerable migration is, even in the EU. It affects emigration and immigration between individual member states and especially those workers who temporarily ‘commute’ across borders as employees. The precarious situation of many employment relationships in the EU has also become apparent in the Corona crisis.
EMIGRATION IN EUROPE: SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

In recent years migration was one of the dominant topics in European politics. Strictly speaking, however, the focus was on only one side of migration: immigration (particularly from non-European countries). The topic of emigration attracted considerably less attention. This narrowing of perspective becomes especially obvious at the European level: Emigration is not mentioned explicitly in the EU treaties nor in the EU laws and it hardly plays a role in the daily business of the EU. The center of attention is the freedom of movement of persons, which embodies an essential component of a unified Europe and is understood as an asset which promotes peace and prosperity. If emigration is explicitly mentioned then it is with a non-European dimension (in the context of the “root causes of flight” in Africa and other regions where refugees originate from).

This thematic narrowness makes it clear just how much migration policy and migration discourse in recent years reflect the perspective of Western European immigration countries. The EU accession of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe in the years 2004 and 2007 did little to change that. The accessions caused the net migration of many Central and Eastern European countries to plummet into negative territory, yet did little to change the general perception of the problem in the area of migration policy. The conflict about the allocation of refugees after 2015 may have also played a part in this: According to Eurobarometer the proportion of respondents who named immigration as the most important problem rose sharply in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’, also in Central and Eastern Europe (MIDEM 2018).

Since then the public interest has again shifted somewhat in favor of ‘home-made’ problems. A survey by the European Council of Foreign Research from 2019 shows that people in countries like Poland or Romania are more concerned about emigration than immigration (Krastev et al. 2019). These concerns are not unfounded. Although the total population of the EU has increased a little in the last decades, in Central and Eastern Europe the populations are rapidly declining in some instances (see Figure 1). Since 1989 2.5 million Poles have turned their back on their country. In the same time the population of Bulgaria went from nearly 9 million back to 7. The development in almost all Balkan and Baltic countries is similarly dramatic. In Lithuania, for example, the population sank from 3.5 to 2.9 million.

Due to emigration, but also because of low birth rates and a lack of immigration, the demographic bleeding will also probably be difficult to stop in the future in most Central and Eastern European countries. According to prognoses made by the United Nations, the population in Bulgaria will sink about 19 percent to 5 million in the coming 30 years. For the other countries in the region the prognoses – with few exceptions – are similar (see Figure 2). The profile of the emigrants also poses a problem for most countries in the region: many young and highly qualified people set off towards the West – with considerable consequences for the labor market. The health sector is particularly affected. Some Central and Eastern

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1 Historically speaking, this is a relatively new development, after all during the 19th and early 20th century European countries made enormous efforts to control or restrict the emigration of their citizens (Torpey 2000; René et al. 2012; Angel 2018).

2 In most EU Member States the fertility rate declined significantly between 1980 and 2000: by the year 2000 it had fallen under 1.30 in many Central and Eastern European states. Gradually it rose to over 1.30 again in almost all countries (Eurostat 2020).
European countries are running too short of medical professionals to maintain an adequate level of medical care across the country. Around 10 percent of the Romanian population no longer has access to adequate medical care (Paun 2016).

Like in most Central and Eastern European countries emigration is also perceived as a problem in Southern Europe. Here the high emigration rate among young (and mostly well-qualified) people is an indication of the precarious economic and social situation in the country. If many young people emigrate from countries like Greece or Italy, then this is a clear sign of an ongoing economic crisis and the associated high unemployment. Yet also structural problems (low wages, precarious employment conditions etc.) as well as the level of frustration about the lack of a career perspective lead to many people from Southern Europe trying their luck in Germany or England (Enriquez/Romera 2019). The coronavirus crisis has made the consequences of outward migration of medical specialists for the health sector glaringly apparent (Faus/Amande 2020). Especially in hospitals and retirement homes the staffing level is low.

The upheavals that emigration causes in the communities of origin vary from country to country. In many places it is almost exclusively the emigration of the young and highly qualified that is bemoaned. In the political discourse the talk is often of 'brain drain'. However, the number of low-skilled workers emigrating is also significant – primarily in countries like Romania and Bulgaria. In addition, the departure of those employed in agriculture or the building sector can have a negative impact on the labor market, especially if there is a lack of people of working age in sparsely populated regions. Thus, rural areas in Bulgaria or Romania are threatened by depopulation, which also brings with it serious consequences for the infrastructure as well as for the health, pension and education systems. The question as to whether the money sent back by emigrants is capable of offsetting the loss of human capital and workforce is also a point of controversy in migration research and the field of economics (De Haas 2012). What is certain is that remittances are a significant source of revenue in some countries. Based on a measurement as a proportion of their gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019, Croatia (6.6 percent), Bulgaria (3.4 percent) and Romania (3.3 percent of GDP) are among the largest recipients of remittances (Eurostat 2020).

The negative consequences of emigration for the labor market are not noticeable in all Central and Eastern European countries. The reason: Some countries experience not only emigration but increasingly also immigration from third countries like Ukraine. Proof of the economic upturn in Poland and the Czech Republic is that they have recently developed from emigration countries to emigration and immigration countries. Most Southern European countries already went through this transition. What stands out: many of the emigrants in these countries consist of former immigrants as well as citizens with a migrant background. If these people emigrate, this is often not reflected in the migration statistics. Furthermore, they are afforded considerably less attention in media and politics. In fact, the portrayal of emigration in most countries’ media is tied to the image of a young and highly educated native. Emigrants with a migrant background are often not viewed as nationals, but instead as returnees or ‘circular migrants’. In some instances this also applies to ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, in Romania for a long time it was endeavored to not count the Roma originating from Romania and living in Western and Southern Europe as part of one’s own emigration.
RIGHT-WING POPULISTS GENERALLY DO NOT BENEFIT FROM EMIGRATION

What demographic fears can be triggered by a high emigration rate in countries with low fertility and little immigration? Does the fear of population loss fuel an illiberal revolt, as Ivan Krastev claimed (Krastev/Holmes 2019)? Do these fears make emigration countries a fertile ground for right-wing populists? The MIDEM annual report 2019 addressed a similar question. It looked at the relationship between the rising immigration numbers and the election results of right-wing populist parties (using the example of Germany) (MIDEM 2019). In this year’s MIDEM annual report, however, the question is: Are rising numbers beneficial for right-wing populist parties? The results show that a higher emigration rate does not generally benefit right-wing populist parties. On the contrary: In places where more people emigrate, performance worsens. However, there is an exception: In economically weak regions right-wing populist parties profit from the high emigration rates of the native population.

IN GERMANY: MORE EMIGRATION MEANS MORE VOTES FOR THE AFD

For such regions, however, not only out-migration but also internal migration poses a problem. With regard to the analysis was therefore broadened and - at the level of counties and independent cities - the general relationship between migration balance and right-wing populist voting behavior was examined. Here, too, the analysis shows that the effects of emigration can be quite different in different contexts. What applies only to economically weak regions in the case of emigration abroad can be observed for overall emigration in general: The more strongly a region was affected by out-migration in the past three decades, the better the election results of the right-wing populist parties there. This link between a district’s net migration and right-wing populist voting behavior is not influenced by factors like population density, age structure or unemployment rate. In other words, socio-demographic factors are not decisive. What is also striking: The link between the migration rate and the election results of the AFD is more pronounced in Western Germany than in Eastern Germany. In Western Germany, however, more recent waves of out-migration (after 2000) have a sustainable effect. In the search for the causes of right-wing populist electoral propensity, they are much more important than, for example, the migration flows immediately after reunification.

EMISSION: HARDLY POLITICIZED

Building on these results this annual report investigated whether the topic of emigration is purposefully politicized by right-wing populist parties. The investigation was carried out on the basis of nine European countries which are comparatively strongly affected by emigration, or rather, which have a negative net migration rate. The examination of these Central, Eastern and Southern European countries shows that emigration is rarely deliberately politicized. This also applies for right-wing populist parties. Unlike the topic of immigration, emigration hardly polarizes the party landscapes. Its salience in the party programs and parliamentary speeches is thus comparatively low. It is only when the alleged inaction of the governments in socioeconomic questions is criticized that the topic becomes polemically charged. The general tenor of the criticism: The government is unable to improve the economic situation and the quality of life and thereby reduce emigration. In society, too, there are sporadic protests against the departure of qualified workers and in particular medical personnel.

EMISSION: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEM

Characteristic for the political treatment of the topic of emigration is not only the socioeconomic framing but also the negative or critical assessment of it. Regardless of party boundaries, emigration is mostly not viewed as a chance or as a valve for an overburdened labor market. Emigration is always connected with something problematic. Left-wing parties denounce in particular the high unemployment and precarious employment conditions, which motivate young people to emigrate. Right-wing parties see the causes of emigration - somewhat more generally - in the worsening living conditions in the country, with which they also mean intangible living conditions like identification with the country and its culture. A further difference: only right-wing populist parties like, for example, the Italian party Lega and the Spanish Vox occasionally link emigration with immigration. The link occurs within the framework of a dystopic narrative of a loss of one’s homeland or a loss of cultural identity. It involves on the one hand emigration and the falling birth rate and, on the other, immigration of people who are ‘culturally foreign’. Right-wing populist parties do not tend to draw parallels between the emigration experiences of the native population and that of today’s refugees. On the contrary: Above all in Central and Eastern European countries a clear distinction is made between the image of the hard-working emigrant and that of the refugee burdening the social system.

A different, much more positive tone prevails in the political discourse when dealing with compatriots living in other countries (also called ‘diaspora’). Here it becomes apparent that cultural frames are generally of greater importance than socioeconomic ones. Fellow countrymen living abroad are often portrayed as ‘ambassadors’ of one’s traditions and culture. Politicians across the political divide demand that the relationships with the emigrants are maintained and financially supported. Members of the diaspora can contribute to acquainting people abroad with the language and culture of their home. Furthermore, organized diaspora communities can deepen the economic relationships between the sending and receiving countries, by, for example, facilitating investments in their home countries.

Measures which limit the willingness to depart and thereby the mobility of the country’s own population are very rarely the subject of emigration policies. Especially in the Central and Eastern European countries the vast majority of the population considers the regained freedom of movement within Europe to be a great good which should not be infringed upon. Thus, countries attempt to counteract the loss of specialists by other means: Firstly, incentives to stay are created (for example by raising the level of remuneration for systematically relevant professions), secondly, attempts are already being made to motivate emigrants to return by means of financial support. In most cases such measures prove to be ineffective because they do not change the socioeconomic causes of emigration. What seems much more effective, on the other hand, are measures which are intended to strengthen the relationship with the citizens living abroad. These provisions cover in particular rights and obligations in the context of citizenship policy (among them in particular the right to vote) as well as instruments for a better socioeconomic integration in the country of origin or the destination country (e.g. with regard to taxation and the recognition of qualifications).

In view of the different national interests, the EU is the appropriate political level to tackle problems in the European countries of origin resulting from emigration in the context of the free movement of workers in the EU. These problems could exacerbate not only the economic but also the political differences between and within European regions. Particularly in the economically weaker regions, from which mostly young and well-educated people emigrate, right-wing populists can rise up to be the mouthpiece of those “left behind”. And yet the consequence cannot therefore be the restriction of European free movement of workers. On the contrary: dealing with the negative consequences of emigration and out-migration is of prime importance if the European freedom of movement is not to become the trigger for new divisions between the West and the East and between the North and the South of Europe.
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EMIGRATION AND VOTING FOR THE AFD IN GERMANY: SHRINKING REGIONS - FRUSTRATED CITIZENS?

Summary

For Germany, at district level, a clear link between migration rate and right-wing populist voting behavior can be observed: The more severely a region was affected by outward migration over the last three decades, the greater the tendency to vote for the AfD there today.

This correlation is independent from socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors. It is neither influenced by the population density, the type of settlement and the age structure, nor by the unemployment rate, the gross domestic product or the percentage of recipients of long-term unemployment benefits.

Moreover, two regional effects can be observed: Firstly, the link between migration rate and AfD vote is more pronounced in Western than in Eastern Germany. Secondly, when looking only at Eastern Germany, it is apparent that it was not the first wave of outward migration immediately after the reunification, but the second wave after the turn of the millennium that had a lasting effect on the politico-cultural landscape of the new Länder. In other words, in the East the tendency today to vote for the AfD is particularly strong, where since the turn of the millennium a large number of people have moved away.

The tendency to change one’s place of residence, to leave one’s own home region or to emigrate abroad is not equally prevalent in all sections of the population. Those who are considered to be particularly mobile are people who have a high level of education and an above average income. For that reason alone, it can be presumed that in regions which are strongly affected by outward migration, political attitudes and election results also change, and that, for instance, the preferences of regionally rooted sections of the population that possibly tend to vote conservatively may gain in significance. In Germany, too, there is frequent speculation about such effects on the political culture as a result of migration dynamics. After the emergence of the Alternative for Germany (German: Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) and its programmatic consolidation as a right-wing populist force it quickly became apparent that there was support for the party above all in rather sparsely populated, economically underdeveloped regions and that it appealed to a broad electoral base in particular in Eastern Germany. It also became apparent that, especially in areas which had been affected by a sharp decline in population in the past decades, perceptions of threats, fears of loss of social and economic status and concerns about the future as well as collective feelings of being personally disadvantaged are thriving. These notions are still today often successfully addressed by populist actors in most Western democracies (Bergmann/Diermeier/Niehues 2017; Herold 2018; Herold/Schäller 2020; Lengfeld/Dilger 2018; Rippl/Seipel 2018).

Accordingly, it can be assumed that emigration dynamics in Germany also have a relevant impact on political attitudes especially the tendency to vote for right-wing populist parties. Yet, can this link be proven statistically? Can local election successes of the AfD thus be described as a delayed effect of outward migration flows?
As the available data provides information about the rationality of the individ-
uals, one can also differentiate between Germans and foreign citizens. Here it
can be assumed that there would be different effects on voting behavior if there
were increased outward migration of people from one of these two groups. Inde-
dependently of each other, a high influx of people with foreign citizenship
could increase the AfD vote share, as could high outward migration of German
citizens. In the former case, this could possibly be explained by feelings of being
ovum by foreigners, in the second case by an increasing impression of being
deprieved and abandoned.

In summary, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: The lower the net migration of a district, i.e. the more out-
migration outweighed inward migration in the past three dec-
ades, the higher the share of votes for the AfD.

H2: The lower the net migration of German citizens in a district,
the higher the share of votes for the AfD there today.

H3: The higher the net migration of people with non-German
citizenship, the better the performance of the AfD.

These hypotheses will be tested below using statistical models of linear regres-

sion. Additionally, potential moderating variables that could strengthen or weak-
en a possible correlation between outward migration and AfD vote share will be
identified and their influence will be evaluated. One could assume, for instance,
that the politico-cultural effects of outward migration are particularly strong in
economically weak regions, characterized by high unemployment and an aging
population. It also seems probable that this relationship extends to rural regions
or those in the former GDR as well. Lastly, the sociode-

cographic classification of the districts could be of importance as well. It
seems obvious that the political consequences of high outward migration rates in rural
regions would be noticeable in a different way than for example in urban metro-
politan regions, where a heightened level of outward migration of Germans may
be compensated by inward migration of people with non-German citizenship.

DYNAMICS OF OUT-MIGRATION IN REUNIFIED GERMANY

In order to answer the question about whether there is a link between out-
migration and right-wing populist voting behavior, one must first first differen-
tiate between various explanatory variables. The situation in terms of out-
migration in a specific region is not identical to the general population
development. The latter looks at the total number of inhabitants, thus also
including births and deaths, whereas the net migration rate only describes
the difference between inward and outward migration in relation to the size
of the population. Both variables show a strong correlation overall, yet they
can also convey regional differences. For example, districts like Essen or Kaiserslautern
are characterized by a shrinking total population even if they are
more affected by inward than outward migration. Conversely, since 1990 cit-
ies like Leipzig, Dresden and Jena have profited not only from their positive
net migration rate, but above all from a high birth rate (Figure 2).

INFOBOX - Migration data of the Federal Statistical Office

The German Federal Statistical Office collects information from the regional Resi-
dents’ Registration Offices for all the residents who have registered their principle place of residence in
the respective region.

As de-registrations are carried out in Germany automatically, and are
not matched with registrations in another district, this data exist only as
aggregated and anonymized quantities for individual districts. Thus, it
is not possible to draw conclusions about the destination of individual
migrations.

Because the boundaries of some districts have changed in the last 30
years, conversions were also required to retain the comparability for
the whole time period. For this purpose, the conversion key of the Federal
Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Develop-
ment (BBSR) was employed.

1 To validate the results the analysis was also repeated with the AfD vote share in the Bundestag
election 2017. The results were largely the same.

2 However, this only applies to the data from 1995 onwards.

3 An examination of the relationship between the election results of the AfD and the inward migration
of refugees or the share of non-German residents can be found in Otteni 2019.

4 Used for the back of the analysis is a classification system in accordance with the Federal Institute for
Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) which differentiates between a
total of four district types according to settlement structure on the basis of population and central local
function: sparsely populated rural districts, rural districts with some concentrations of population,
urban districts and independent large cities (cf. BBSR 2019, p. 7).
A comparison of the net migration rates of German citizens and residents with other nationalities also reveals clear regional differences, which are sometimes superimposed with an urban-rural divide (Figure 3). In the greater Berlin-Brandenburg area, for example, it can be seen that in the last three decades an increasing number of Germans have moved to the area surrounding the capital, whereas non-Germans primarily chose the capital itself as their destination. Similar phenomena can also be described in the cases of Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt and Cologne. It is only in some large cities in central and Eastern Germany that this effect has somewhat different characteristics. Cities like Dresden, Leipzig, Magdeburg or Erfurt were chosen as a destination during the same period both by Germans and non-Germans at a comparable level. Other regions, conversely, can be described as clear losers in terms of migration and were most notably affected by outward migration. As Figure 3 shows, this is especially true for rural regions in Eastern Germany, but also for parts of Upper Franconia, the Bavarian Forest, and North Hesse.

DO NEGATIVE MIGRATION BALANCES STRENGTHEN THE ELECTION RESULTS OF THE AFD?

All that being said, the question remains whether there is a direct and identifiable link between the net migration rate of a district and the AfD vote share. The graphical comparison already leads one to suspect that there is at least some interdependence (Figure 4). With regard to the general net migration rate, a clear negative correlation to the respective election results of the AfD can indeed be established mathematically as well. That is to say: In places where...
many people have moved away in the past three decades, the tendency to vote for the AfD is much more pronounced today. One percentage point decrease in the net migration rate is on average associated with a 0.06 percentage point increase in the election result of the AfD (Figure 5).

The picture is similar if one looks at German citizens only. An even stronger negative correlation can be observed between migration balances and the respective election results of the AfD. Here, one percentage point decrease in the net migration rate is on average correlated with a 0.11 increase in the AfD vote share.

However, if the analysis only includes migration of people with non-German citizenship then there is no statistically significant link to the share of the votes gained by the AfD – regardless of whether the results of the 2019 European election or those of the Bundestag election in 2017 are chosen as the basis. Hypotheses 1 and 2 formulated at the outset can thus be confirmed based on the available data, hypothesis 3, on the other hand, can be rejected.

When including further factors to investigate possible interactions, no corresponding moderating influence can be determined for most of the respective variables. Thus, the statistically demonstrable link between net migration rate and voting for AfD seems to be influenced neither by the socioeconomic nor by the sociodemographic conditions. It is not even strengthened if a region is to be characterized as ‘structurally weak’ in an economic sense, particularly affected by aging or is designated as typically ‘rural’ due to its low population density. Conversely, positive economic markers, such as high GDP or a lower proportion of recipients of ALG II, are likewise incapable of weakening the described effect of a negative migration rate. Even if some of these factors are nevertheless capable of influencing the share of votes cast for right-wing populist parties themselves, this clearly indicates that outward migration is to be treated as an independent explanatory variable when explaining right-wing populist voting behavior in Germany.

Ultimately, only the question of whether a district is located in Eastern or Western Germany makes a significant difference. The effect of the district’s net migration rate on the tendency to vote AfD is more pronounced if the affected district is located in Western Germany (Figure 7). On the one hand, this might reflect the fact that in the ‘old Länder’ only specific regions are affected by a negative migration balance, whereas in Eastern Germany this applies to a large number of highly diverse district types. On the other hand, the differing strength of the effect also indicates that there are further, possibly politico-culturally anchored differences at work in the background, still marking a significant difference between the formerly separated parts of the country. Figure 7 shows the correlation for eastern and western districts. Each dot represents the AfD vote share in the European elections 2019 and the migration rate between 1995 and 2018 of one district. While blue dots represent western, red dots indicate eastern German districts. The line in the center of the scatter plots show the linear prediction of the correlation between migration rate and AfD vote share. A one-percentage point decrease in the migration rate is on average associated with 0.16 points increase in the share of votes in Western Germany, and 0.08 points in Eastern Germany, respectively.
It is also apparent that amongst the Eastern German regions there is considerably more dispersion in both dimensions than in the rest of the country. This is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that the AfD achieved similar results in 2019 in both the city Frankfurt/Oder and the adjacent districts Dahme-Spreewald, Märkisch-Oderland and Barnim, although these regions in the past decades were affected to completely different extents by migration – with a domination of outward migration in Frankfurt/Oder (NMR = -28.1) and a prevalence of inward migration in the other counties (e.g. Barnim: NMR = +29.9). One the other hand, despite having the same slightly positive migration rates, regions like the district Sächsische Schweiz-Osterzgebirge saw an AfD almost twice as strong (32.9 percent) as Nordwestmecklenburg (15.8 percent).

Concerning Eastern Germany, the relationship between the net migration rate and the tendency to vote for the AfD can be specified even more accurately. One question that arises is what impact emigration dynamics had during certain time periods – for instance, whether districts that were most heavily affected by a shrinking of its population through emigration during the early 1990s show today a different propensity to vote for a right-wing populist party than regions which were not affected by a large number of out-migration until in recent years.

If one looks at the patterns of migration between the former territory of the Federal Republic and the new Eastern German Länder, several waves of migration can be identified. Even during the times of the Cold War it is known that among the GDR – i.e. the regions that are today’s Eastern Germany – there was a high willingness to emigrate to the West – which was only suppressed by the communist government internally closing its borders and building the Berlin Wall from the 1960s onwards. After the peaceful revolution and the German reunification, massive migration flows were soon recorded. Between 1989 and 1991 alone almost 1 million East Germans left their country.

Source: Own calculation based on data from the German Federal Statistical Office (Destatis)

Source: Own representation based on data from the German Federal Statistical Office (Destatis)
and headed to the West. The collapse of the economy, the massive loss of jobs as well as the overall better life chances and opportunities motivated many people to turn their back on their former home (Figure 8).\(^7\)

This development initially trailed off in the following years. The migration losses of the East declined considerably, especially as people from the former West Germany also increasingly moved to the new Länder. However, towards the end of the 1990s a second wave of outward migration started, the structure and causes of which were quite different from the previous one. This new wave had even more serious repercussions for the affected regions in the long term. The out-migrations from Eastern Germany between 1989 and 1995 affected mainly people who, for example, had lost their jobs and saw no real economic prospects in their old home. The new wave was comprised of broad segments of a new generation deciding to move away from their home regions and to leave Eastern Germany – especially young people with higher education qualifications, women in particular (Figure 9). They were the first cohorts that possessed a unified-German educational biography but after the end of their high-school qualification, they primarily saw the best chances for professional development in the dynamic economic, university and cultural centers of the old (Western) Federal Republic. For many Eastern German regions, the absence of these people continues to have an effect to this day. Their departure not only meant a long-term loss of innovative capacity, dynamism and future opportunities, but at the same time due to the above-average number of young women departing, it was accompanied by a further decline in the birth rates (Bangel et al. 2019; Dorn 2018, p. 99 ff.; Kröhnert 2009; Mai 2006).

Since right-wing populist actors have achieved a new level of visibility and influence on the streets and in the parliaments of Eastern Germany, the social and political consequences of these developments are increasingly becoming the subject of intense discussion. By means of the comparative analysis of migration balances and the election results of the AfD, the politico-cultural long-term effects of the outward migration can however also be examined through statistical methods. To this end in the analysis presented the time period since the re-unification was divided into smaller sections. Based on the data of the German Federal Statistical Office the net migration rates were calculated for each section and then included as independent explanatory variables. Figure 10 shows the resulting regression coefficients as point-estimates. For each period of time, it indicates the average influence of a one-point increase in the migration rate on the AfD vote share in 2019. While a reduction of one percentage point in the migration rate between 1991 and 1995 is associated with an on average 0.1 points decrease, a decrease in the period from 2006 and 2010 leads to a 0.5 percentage point increase in the electoral result of the AfD. The lines crossing the point estimates indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals.

As a result, it can be argued that the correlation between former net migration rates and present AfD vote differs widely among distinct time periods since 1990. The negative net migration rate from the first post-millennial decade evidently had a much more lasting impact and is therefore to be more strongly associated with the present tendency to vote AfD. Even more than the wave of outward migration which was directly connected with the ‘transformation shock’ of the early 1990s, the exodus of young and educated East Germans which started right before the turn of the millennium and continued in a weaker form over the next two decades had a lasting impact on the political culture in the former communist regions of Germany. In recent years, this finding also seems to cause many discussions among those former Eastern Germans who have migrated away. In the face of today’s growing tendencies towards political polarization in their former home regions, they increasingly draw attention with self-reflecting and thoughtful, sometimes even moralizing contributions: “Because I wanted to have it better somewhere else, I let my home down. Economically, culturally, most of all politically. How egoistic” (Spiller 2019).

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\(^7\) Around 80 percent of the working population of the GDR was affected by temporary or long-term unemployment between 1990 and 1995 (Wendoll 2001: 411).


REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Table 1 - Correlation between migration balance and AfD election result in the 2019 European election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.932**</td>
<td>1.016***</td>
<td>0.003**</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Results of various linear regression analyses (OLS); Robust standard error in brackets.
EMIGRATION, OUT-MIGRATION AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM

2 EMIGRATION AND THE ELECTION RESULTS OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES IN EUROPE

Summary

In many countries in Europe, people are more concerned about the negative consequences of emigration than immigration. This applies in particular to Central and Eastern European as well as Southern European countries, which in some cases have had a negative net migration rate for decades.

This study examined whether and to what extent emigration rates have an impact on the election results of far-right parties. To this end, 15 European countries were selected, the emigration numbers at municipal level were established and then possible connections to the local results in the 2019 European election were investigated.

The study also examined whether the economic performance of a region plays a role.

The results show that far-right parties generally do not profit from higher emigration rates. On the contrary: Where more people emigrate, these parties even perform worse than the general European average. They only benefit from a high emigration rate in economically weak regions.

In the wake of the movement of refugees in the past years, the topic of ‘immigration’ has increasingly become the focus of social science research. For the issue of ‘emigration’ however this could be observed much less, although, for many regions in Europe, emigration constitutes a much more significant phenomenon in terms of its sociodemographic, economic and political impact. For instance, a survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) showed that in the elections to the European Parliament in 2019 more than a quarter of the voters were equally concerned about immigration and emigration. In some countries, the concern about persistent emigration flows was even considerably greater. This applies above all to Central and Eastern European countries like Romania, Poland and Hungary, as well as Southern European countries like Italy, Spain and Greece (Zerka 2019; Dennison et al. 2019). However, it remains unclear what influence the extent of emigration has on voting behavior. Do high emigration numbers lead to political mobilization, in a way similar to the topic of immigration? Is it even possible to establish a statistical relationship between migratory movements abroad and the election success of far-right parties?

Fig. 1: How does emigration impact on the share of votes for far-right parties?

Independent variable:
Rate of emigration abroad

Dependent variable:
Share of votes for far right parties
In the following, the study examines this question in a European perspective by applying multivariate linear regression analyses (OLS). Data on emigration in 15 selected EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden) serve as the basis for the investigation. For the analysis, a cross-sectional dataset was prepared with the level of Local Administrative Units (LAU2) chosen as the unit of analysis. The 35,000 municipalities examined also represent all geographic and cultural regions of the EU (Figure 2). The corresponding data were retrieved from the national statistical offices (cf. the information in the appendix). For every municipality the total of all emigration abroad from 2009 to 2018 was calculated as a proportion of the total population in 2009.

In addition, all analyses controlled for further potential influences on the election result. In other words, various other influencing factors were included in the analysis in order to test whether, independent of them, the emigration rate has a statistically significant impact on the independent variable. Such factors include economic variables like the employment rate and the GDP per capita as well as respective changes to those numbers in the last ten years. Furthermore, demographic factors like the population density, the relative proportion of men and women as well as the proportion of the population made up of people over 65 (Data source: European Commission 2020). Additionally, in the case of the GDP per capita, the analysis includes an interaction variable. By doing so, the regression model is able to exhibit the effects of the GDP per capita in those regions that are particularly prone to emigration (Rooduijn et al. 2019).

EMIGRATION AND THE ELECTION RESULTS OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES IN EUROPE

EMIGRATION DOES NOT GENERALLY BENEFIT FAR-RIGHT PARTIES

The results of the study are remarkable, yet unambiguous: Generally speaking, emigration does not benefit far-right parties. On the contrary, the more people as a proportion of the population between 2009 and 2018 emigrated from a municipality, the worse these parties performed in the 2019 European election. A one-percentage point higher emigration rate even resulted in election results for far-right parties that were on average 0.2 percentage points worse (Figure 4).

This indicates, firstly, that on average in Europe not only those left behind – the less mobile, locally rooted, possibly less educated and rather conservative sections of the population – tend to vote for far-right parties, but also those who leave their home countries in search of work, career prospects and personal economic performance of a region could be identified. Table 1 shows the results of both regressions in the appendix.

Table 1: Results of both regressions (OLS). For every municipality the total of all emigration abroad from 2009 to 2018 was calculated as a proportion of the total population in 2009. The analysis uses municipality data. In the case of Germany, data at the district level (Landkreise).
EMISSION, OUT-MIGRATION AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM

Fig. 4: Relationship between the emigration rate and the share of votes for far-right parties depending on the economic performance

Fig. 5: Relationship between the emigration rate and the share of votes for far-right parties depending on the economic performance

However, when the analysis includes the economic efficiency of a region to see whether economic factors influence the relationship between emigration processes and voting for far-right parties, then a more varied picture emerges. With decreasing economic strength, the correlation initially weakens and ultimately even turns around, until finally in economically weak regions high emigration rates are associated with an increasing vote share of far-right parties. Figure 5 illustrates this relationship: The yellow regression line shows the relationship between emigration rate and the election results of far-right parties in those regions that have a GDP per capita in the lowest decile of all studied regions. The green line, in contrast, shows the same relationship for the economically strongest regions. The more people who emigrated from here, the lower the election result of right-wing parties. Thus, economic factors significantly moderate the relationship between emigration rates and the election success of far-right parties in Europe.

A further possible explanation is less about the ‘social’, but rather about the ‘monetary’ transfers (remittances), i.e. the money sent by emigrants to their families back in their home countries. By means of remittances, emigrants help their families in their old homelands, especially in periods when they have financial difficulties. In this way the level of satisfaction of the recipients can be increased, which can raise the tendency towards cosmopolitan values but also lead to more support for the European freedom of movement (Rapport/Docquier 2006). Since most far-right parties in Europe are at the same time characterized by EU skepticism, they will therefore tend to lose support (Vaslopolou 2018). Furthermore, remittances from citizens who have emigrated can also contribute to the overall development of a region, which should also weaken the support for right-wing parties. In fact, remittances account for above three percent of the total gross domestic product in some countries strongly affected by emigration (World Bank 2020).

The established influence of the economic strength of a region on the relationship between emigration and the election results of far-right parties however seems to confirm that high emigration rates are not only found in regions with a shrinking population. They also provide information about generally higher mobility in the population. Mobility is often greater in economically ‘dynamic’ regions, whereas the tendency to vote for parties on the far-right is lower there. However, structurally weak regions are often not only affected by emigration abroad, but also by outward migration to economically stronger regions, such as urban centers within the country. A shrinking and increasingly aging population is the result, which in turn promotes feelings of economic, societal, but also political deprivation and thereby promotes the tendency to vote for right-wing populist and extreme right parties (Manov 2018; Krastev/Holmes 2019).

In addition, it is conceivable that the individual characteristics of those willing to emigrate also influence the relationship between emigration and the election success of far-right parties. The level of formal education, the social background or the motivation of those affected, as well as their attachment to their home countries could play a role. This would have to be further investigated by drawing on individual-level data. Specific criteria of individual countries of origin – such as institutional frameworks, political attitudes or the degree of mobility of the population – could also be of significance here. A decisive factor for the impact of emigration on the success of far-right parties is also, whether, how and who addresses the topic in the political discourse. In Lithuania, for example, the party ‘Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union’ (Lietuvos valsčių ir žemės ūkio sąjunga) decided to tackle the problem and in 2016 successfully made it the key issue in the parliamentary election campaign (Day 2016). Unlike in other regions in Europe, far-right political actors were thereby left with few possibilities to benefit, not even in areas strongly affected by emigration.
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Manow, Philip 2018: Die Politische Ökonomie des Populismus; Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin.


**APPENDIX**

**OLS regression of emigration rate on the election results for right-wing populist parties in the election to the European Parliament in 2019 in municipalities in fifteen European countries controlling for various alternative explanatory factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Analysis I</th>
<th>Analysis II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emigration rate</td>
<td>-0.198*** (0.0990)</td>
<td>0.627*** (0.163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.000269*** (9.17e-05)</td>
<td>0.000499*** (0.000135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emigration rate*GDP per capita</td>
<td>-3.06e-05*** (6.9e-06)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.0452 (0.0280)</td>
<td>0.0251 (0.0266)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>0.00208* (0.00110)</td>
<td>0.00164 (0.00118)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in employment rate</td>
<td>-0.151*** (0.0363)</td>
<td>-0.165*** (0.0362)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>-0.00116*** (0.000410)</td>
<td>-0.000967*** (0.000401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender ratio</td>
<td>-0.559*** (0.167)</td>
<td>-0.503*** (0.158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion 65+</td>
<td>0.323** (0.141)</td>
<td>0.257* (0.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constants</td>
<td>59.58*** (16.38)</td>
<td>51.00*** (15.24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 35,120

R²: 0.841

Countries Fixed Effects: Ja

Robust standard error in brackets

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05

**Overview of the sources for the national statistics**

- **Austria**: [https://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/statcube/index.html](https://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/statcube/index.html)
- **Belgium**: [https://statbel.fgov.be/leTheme](https://statbel.fgov.be/leTheme)
- **Bulgaria**: [https://www.nsi.bg/en](https://www.nsi.bg/en)
- **Germany**: [https://www.destatis.de/genesis/online/](https://www.destatis.de/genesis/online/)
- **Denmark**: [https://www.statistikbank.dk](https://www.statistikbank.dk)
- **Croatia**: [https://www.dzs.hr/PXWeb/default.aspx?px_language=en&rexid=t636f1-7661-46be-977c-d43be0639e5](https://www.dzs.hr/PXWeb/default.aspx?px_language=en&rexid=t636f1-7661-46be-977c-d43be0639e5)
- **Italy**: [http://demo.stat.it/index_a.html](http://demo.stat.it/index_a.html)
- **Lithuania**: [https://mmp.stat.gov.lt/statistikinis-ruokliu-analize/](https://mmp.stat.gov.lt/statistikinis-ruokliu-analize/)
- **Sweden**: [https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/](https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/)
- **Slovakia**: [http://datacube.statistics.sk/#/lang=en](http://datacube.statistics.sk/#/lang=en)
BULGARIA

1 BULGARIA

Summary

The biggest wave of emigration from Bulgaria took place in the 1990s. The 2007 accession of Bulgaria to the EU did not lead to a serious increase in emigration but rather legalized the status of Bulgarians who had already emigrated. More and more Bulgarians engage in seasonal work and temporary mobility rather than permanent emigration.

In 2019, one in three young Bulgarians wanted to emigrate. The main reasons for emigration are economic: wages in Bulgaria have remained low. An often overlooked issue is the extent of internal migration within Bulgaria due to dramatic regional disparities.

Emigration has been acknowledged as a systemic problem with serious consequences for the demography, economy and social life. Over the years, the topic of emigration has increased in salience and has been discussed by an expanding number of actors. During the 'refugee crisis' discussions about preventing immigration were more prominent in political debates than discussions about preventing emigration despite the fact that immigration has affected the country significantly less.

While emigration has high salience in the media, it is addressed far less often in both party manifestos and parliamentary debates. Emigration has repeatedly been brought up by civil society actors as part of broader protests against the government (regardless of which particular party was currently in power).

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

Bulgaria is the poorest member of the EU with a GDP per capita of just under 8,000€. The country joined the EU in 2007. As of the January 1st, 2019, Bulgaria’s population was 7 million citizens. This is 1.7 million less than in 1990.

In fact, Bulgaria is the fastest shrinking country in the world (Mohdin 2018). The population projection for Bulgaria in 2060 is only around 5.3 million people, which is a 38.5 percent decrease of more than one third compared to the population in 1990. According to political scientist Ivan Krastev, “Bulgaria is currently experiencing the largest percentage drop in population not attributable to war or famine for a country in the modern era” (Krastev 2019).

The fertility rate in Bulgaria is 1.58 children per woman, which is close to the average for the European Union: 1.55. While low birth rates are a common problem in many EU countries, in Bulgaria this factor also combines with the highest mortality rate in the EU and high emigration rates, thereby leading to an unprecedented demographic crisis.

The combination of these three factors (fertility, mortality and emigration) has also led to a substantial change in the age structure of the population: the number of persons aged 65 and over by the end of 2019 was around 1.5 million or more than one fifth (21.6 percent) of the country’s population. Compared to 2018, the share of population aged 65 and over increased by 0.3 percentage points. As of the end of 2019, there were only around
1 million children up to 15 years of age in Bulgaria, corresponding to 14.4 percent of the total population (NSI 2019: 2).

The number of people at working age in Bulgaria as of the end of 2019 was 4.15 million people i.e. around 60 percent of the total population. The age-dependency ratio of Bulgaria was 56.4 in 2019. Finally, the number of foreigners residing in Bulgaria is only slightly less than 100,000, which is approximately 1.4 percent of the whole population.

In both the interwar authoritarian regime and the following communist regime, Bulgaria saw low levels of emigration, mainly political emigration, with some famous political emigrants such as Georgi Dimitrov (leader of the Communist International from 1934 to 1943) and Georgi Markov (Bulgarian dissident writer, killed in London in 1978, most probably by the Bulgarian secret services) (Rone/Junes 2020).

The Revival Process – the policy of forced assimilation of Turkish citizens and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria that were forced to change their Turkish and Arabic names to Bulgarian ones. This assimilation policy was enforced at the threat of imprisonment and expulsion for those refusing to collaborate. After ethnic violence in early 1989, in the summer of the same year more than 360,000 Turkish Bulgarian citizens were encouraged to leave to Turkey. 2) After the fall of the Berlin wall and the opening of borders towards the West, a high number of Bulgarian citizens emigrated to the US for economic reasons but also to other western countries such as Canada and Germany. The net migration for this early period has been estimated to be -217,809. In the following period, between 2001 and 2009: 128,179 people changed their place of residence within Bulgaria in 2009 alone (NSI 2019: 15). Within the country there is a dramatic disparity in economic development between the centre and the periphery, both within the country as a whole and at regional and local levels: “The Northwestern region is the most scarcely populated, which is mostly affected by outflow migration flows, with the poorest economic development, high unemployment and serious social problems. The Southwestern region is the most densely populated region due to better living and employment opportunities, offered by the capital city” (AER 2017). In big cities in Bulgaria, 48 percent of the population lives in overcrowded accommodations (Nikolov 2018). At the same time, small villages there are 560,000 accommodations in which no one lives (this amounts to almost half of all accommodations in villages). In Bulgaria as a whole, there are 1.2 million accommodations in which no one lives permanently – which corresponds to 31 percent of all accommodations in the country.
There are seven countries in the world with between 1.1 and 2.4 million Bulgarian citizens – however, there is no official data. These are Turkey, Germany, Spain, the UK, Greece, the US and Italy (Anguelov 2019). In general, emigration to other EU countries is increasing in comparison to migration to third countries such as the US or Canada. Currently, Germany is the most popular destination for Bulgarian emigrants (Anguelov 2019). While the UK was becoming an increasingly popular destination, it is expected that Brexit will slow this trend. Research on attitudes to migration among Bulgarian youth (14-29 years old) confirms that Germany and the UK are the leading choice for youth emigration, having replaced the US and Canada (FES 2019: 46).

Expanding the focus beyond the youth and observing emigration trends in general, the profile of the typical Bulgarian emigrant is a man of 40 from a regional metropolis with secondary education or lower who is looking for a job for around 5 years (Boyadjeva 2018). At the same time, this "average profile" hides specific clusters of female emigration, especially in the field of care work.1

The main reason why Bulgarians emigrate is obvious: wages in Bulgaria are particularly low compared to other European countries. The minimum wage in Bulgaria is 286 euros, and the average income is 690 euros. The average wage is thus a fraction of the European average (Davidescu 2017).

While mass emigration has mainly been discussed in relation to the severe demographic crisis in the country, it has had both positive and negative consequences. The most researched consequences are the economic ones. In the first nine months of 2019, Bulgarian emigrants abroad sent back 922 million euro, which surpassed the amount of foreign investment in the country during the same period – 715 million euro (Drevenik 2019). In 2018, Bulgarians had sent back more than 1 billion euro. These personal remittances account for more than 3 percent of the national GDP of Bulgaria.

At the same time, labour shortages are a problem for the Bulgarian economy. Recently published research revealed that 62 percent of Bulgarian employers had encountered difficulties finding suitable candidates for care work.

The dramatic consequences of emigration have gone beyond the economic sphere and can be felt in the field of healthcare, where many professionals have emigrated and doctors are increasingly ageing (Rangelova/ Bogdanov 2012). The effects are also strongly felt in society in general, although often hardly measurable: emigration tears families apart – a development that contrasts with the traditional strong intergenerational solidarity in Bulgaria.

**EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE**

Emigration has been politicized in Bulgaria mainly in the sense that the issue has become increasingly salient and there has been an expansion of actors discussing it. There has hardly been any polarization in the discussion of emigration per se, which has been almost universally perceived as a negative phenomenon with negative consequences for society. Nevertheless, there have been controversies around particular policies related to the consequences of emigration: first of all, in 2015-2016, the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria has systematically insisted on importing workers from third countries (such as Ukraine, Moldova, Vietnam, Kirgizstan, Armenia, Georgia), especially for seasonal work (Shushkov 2020).

1 The famous documentary “The Town of Sadante Women” provided a fascinating insight into the life of the former spa resort Vurshets from 2009, where most women have gone to Italy and have assumed the breadwinning role, while men and children were left behind with all the domestic tasks.
there were massive protests and debates in relation to the new electoral law and its provisions for Bulgarians voting from abroad. Second, the far-left and the Bulgarian Socialist Party have contested the 2018 laws enacted by the ruling right-wing coalition allowing Bulgarian employers and industrialists to import workers from third countries.

To begin with, the salience of emigration in the political debate has steadily increased over time. For the whole period between 2001 and 2020, there were 524 mentions of the words “emigration” and “workers abroad” in the Factiva database, the majority of which are concentrated in the period 2016-2020.

There were 169 mentions of the word “emigration” in National Assembly debates for the whole period 1990 - 2019. Many of those were irrelevant (for example, discussions from the 1990s on who owns migratory birds). Furthermore, the peak in 2015-2016 is driven above all by the use of the term “illegal emigrant” for refugees from the Middle East (which is not the case for the Factiva media data). Nevertheless, even if we exclude the non-relevant data, there is still also a slight increase in the salience of debates about emigration in the parliamentary field.

Not only is emigration not salient but it is in fact almost absent in party manifestos – the word “emigration” only appears in five party manifestos 2009 - 2014. All in all, while “emigration” has high public salience in the media it remains less often addressed in both party manifestos and debates at the National Assembly.

The newspaper data reveals a wide diversity of actors engaging with the topic of emigration – from the usual statisticians, to politicians from both ruling parties and the opposition, to heads of medical and education authorities, artists, including film and theatre directors and students of arts. Media also often give a voice to Bulgarian emigrants themselves to tell their stories: for instance, in the 2000s, the right-wing liberal magazine Capital Weekly had a section with the life stories of emigrants, mainly those from the educated middle class. But recent scandals around working conditions in Germany during the COVID-19 crisis also allowed many manual workers to share their experiences. Almost absent from the discussion are NGOs and social movements. Emigration as a topic for civil society is usually part of broader protests against the government (regardless of which particular party is in power) and rarely attracts attention as a stand-alone issue. While over the years there has also been increasing involvement of state agencies and ministries trying to combat the effects of emigration, they have remained less vocal in the public debate.

The analysis of both media articles and parliamentary debates reveals that there have been clear changes in the discourse related to migration in the period between 1990 and 2019. Parliamentary debates in the beginning of the 21st century often dealt with Bulgarian political emigrants during communism. Their departure was designated as “enemy emigration” by the Bulgarian Secret Services and these emigrants were closely observed. For example, in the 2000s, a number of investigations into the murder of writer Georgi Markov (1929-1978) appeared. Furthermore, notions such as “internal emigration” describing the withdrawal of intellectuals from public life and within their own personal sphere were also very prominent in debates about the communist period in the 2000s.

Another dominant frame in the early 2000s, both in media and in parliamentary debates, was the rising number of illegal immigrants from Bulgaria in other European countries, especially the Netherlands, and potential police measures against it. On the eve of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007, there was a prominent discussion on measures taken by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the major partner in a triple coalition at the time) to bring emigrants back home and tackle the demographic crisis.

In 2015-2016, there was a major discussion with regard to proposed changes in the electoral law that aimed to make it logistically more difficult for emigrants to vote. The proposals were put forward by the ruling Bulgarian center-right party GERB and its coalition partners – the nationalist United Patriots – with the implicit goal to reduce the influence in Bulgarian political life of the ethnic Turkish Liberal Party DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) that had become the king maker in Bulgarian politics thanks to a dedicated voter base abroad. The proposals were accused of being unconstitutional by DPS but also by right-wing liberal parties in Bulgaria that have traditionally perceived themselves as representatives of the most educated emigrants. It was mainly the latter group that organized protests in front of Bulgarian embassies in a number of foreign countries and wide media coverage of the issue. While public attitudes to emigrants have been favorable in general, the debates around the electoral law revealed the hostile attitude of the United Patriots against not only Turkish-origin Bulgarian citizens but also against ethnic Bulgarian emigrants.

Throughout 2015-2016, at the height of the ‘refugee crisis’, Bulgarian MPs and political parties fervently discussed the usual statistics, to politicians from both ruling parties and the opposition, to heads of medical and education authorities, artists, including film and theatre directors and students of arts. Media also often give a voice to Bulgarian emigrants themselves to tell their stories: for instance, the right-wing liberal magazine Capital Weekly had a section with the life stories of emigrants, mainly those from the educated middle class. But recent scandals around working conditions in Germany during the COVID-19 crisis also allowed many manual workers to share their experiences. Almost absent from the discussion are NGOs and social movements. Emigration as a topic for civil society is usually part of broader protests against the government (regardless of which particular party is in power) and rarely attracts attention as a stand-alone issue. While over the years there has also been increasing involvement of state agencies and ministries trying to combat the effects of emigration, they have remained less vocal in the public debate.

The analysis of both media articles and parliamentary debates reveals that there have been clear changes in the discourse related to migration in the period between 1990 and 2019. Parliamentary debates in the beginning of the 21st century often dealt with Bulgarian political emigrants during communism. Their departure was designated as “enemy emigration” by the Bulgarian Secret Services and these emigrants were closely observed. For example, in the 2000s, a number of investigations into the murder of writer Georgi Markov (1929-1978) appeared. Furthermore, notions such as “internal emigration” describing the withdrawal of intellectuals from public life and within their own personal sphere were also very prominent in debates about the communist period in the 2000s.

Another dominant frame in the early 2000s, both in media and in parliamentary debates, was the rising number of illegal immigrants from Bulgaria in other European countries, especially the Netherlands, and potential police measures against it. On the eve of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007, there was a prominent discussion on measures taken by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the major partner in a triple coalition at the time) to bring emigrants back home and tackle the demographic crisis.

In 2015-2016, there was a major discussion with regard to proposed changes in the electoral law that aimed to make it logistically more difficult for emigrants to vote. The proposals were put forward by the ruling Bulgarian center-right party GERB and its coalition partners – the nationalist United Patriots – with the implicit goal to reduce the influence in Bulgarian political life of the ethnic Turkish Liberal Party DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) that had become the king maker in Bulgarian politics thanks to a dedicated voter base abroad. The proposals were accused of being unconstitutional by DPS but also by right-wing liberal parties in Bulgaria that have traditionally perceived themselves as representatives of the most educated emigrants. It was mainly the latter group that organized protests in front of Bulgarian embassies in a number of foreign countries and wide media coverage of the issue. While public attitudes to emigrants have been favorable in general, the debates around the electoral law revealed the hostile attitude of the United Patriots against not only Turkish-origin Bulgarian citizens but also against ethnic Bulgarian emigrants.
The causes of emigration as discussed in the media are most often low salaries and a low standard of living but also general dissatisfaction with the (non-)functioning of the state, corruption and the feeling of a lack of perspective at home. Big anti-government protests in the country, regardless of the party in government, often have slogans mentioning emigration as a consequence of bad government. During the 2020 anti-government protests, for example, people protested with slogans such as “Your own children escaped from the misery you left! Resignation!” or “I want to want to live in Bulgaria”.

Nevertheless, the most often discussed topic in the media by far is the consequences of emigration. The main focus is on the demographic crisis, accompanied by a dramatic loss of population, an increasingly ageing population and a changing ethnic profile of the population – many commentators note as a negative phenomenon the rising shares of Roma and Turkish Bulgarian citizens as compared to ethnic Bulgarians. There is also ample reporting on other socio-economic consequences such as the lack of workers, particularly the lack of medical specialists, increased pressure on the pension system, decreasing contributions to the social and health security systems, the closure of schools and problems with educational attainment.

Considering the scale of the emigration problem and its consequences, it is not a surprise that over the years there have been multiple initiatives and government bodies that have aimed to support emigrants abroad and to bring Bulgarian citizens back to Bulgaria. The Agency for Bulgarians abroad was already created back in 1992 and in 2000 it received the status of a state agency. Among its main missions have been “protecting the Bulgarian ethno-cultural space”, the “spiritual union of all Bulgarians around the world” and “creating Bulgarian lobbies abroad” (ABA 2020).

The agency is also responsible for issuing certificates certifying “Bulgarian origin”, which can be used for naturalisation so that non-Bulgarian citizens can obtain Bulgarian citizenship. In 2018, both the head of the agency and its chief secretary were arrested due to charges of corruption – they had traded certificates of “Bulgarian origin” for money and influence (Paunova 2019). What is more, the Agency has produced a number of new EU citizens that do not enter the statistics as they never changed their address to one in an EU country – for example, the Agency has given citizenship to more than 6,000 Macedonians who do not live in Bulgaria but in Macedonia and use, when needed, the Bulgarian citizenship as a “visa” for the EU (Paunova 2019). At the same time, Bulgarian emigrants insisted that the Agency should be closed since it is completely irrelevant for Bulgarians abroad and most of its functions are in fact performed by existing Ministries (OffNews 2018).

In the mid-2000s, Bulgaria also sent labour attaches to the UK, Germany, Greece and Spain. Their tasks have included giving consultations to Bulgarian workers abroad, providing support when it comes to concrete labour disputes and providing information and assistance to Bulgarians who would like to return to the country. In 2013, three of the four labour attaches refused to return to Bulgaria after the end of their mandates claiming they had irreplaceable expertise. (OffNews 2013). Such examples show that the emigration of the qualified work force is a problem even in the very institutions designed to deal with it and its consequences.

As of 2019, Bulgaria has a Deputy Prime Minister responsible for economic and demographic policy who also oversees the State Agency of Bulgarians Abroad, a Parliamentary Committee on the policies for Bulgarians abroad, and finally, a Council for Working with Bulgarians Abroad. In 2019, Vice President Iliyana Yotova started an initiative for the creation of a Bulgarian Cultural Institute Abroad.
MEASURES TO FOSTER RETURN MIGRATION

While NGOs have been largely absent from wider societal debates on emigration, they have been very pro-active in encouraging Bulgarians abroad to come back through the organization of career forums. In 2019, the Association Tuk-Tam organized a career forum under the patronage of Bulgarian President Radev which also allowed for online meetings and presentations, including online job interviews for Bulgarians abroad who are interested in returning (CarrerBG 2020). Finally, at the end of 2019, the Social Ministry started an initiative to attract Bulgarians who had emigrated back to Bulgaria using 5 million euro allocated from the EU program for labour mobility EURES (Vasilev 2020). The proposed measures include paying up to 1,200 leva per month (approximately 600 euro) for childcare, covering returnees’ rent and providing them with a scholarship, as well as paying half a minimum wage per month if the returning family moves into one of the less developed regions in the country (Vasilev 2020).

However, despite the high number of government bodies trying to attract back Bulgarian emigrants, most of the measures so far have only had limited success. The career forums tend to mainly target the well-educated middle class, while the problem of emigration of manual workers, less educated ethnic Bulgarian, Roma and Turkish-Bulgarian citizens remains unaddressed. What is more, the measures proposed are mainly ‘soft measures’ that fail to encourage emigrants to return since they cannot address systemic problems such as corruption and the lack of proper social security related to the pervasive underfunding of kindergartens, healthcare and education.

INFOBOX – Migration in times of the Corona pandemic

The question of emigration once again came to the fore with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite restrictive lockdowns across the EU, many Bulgarian workers headed to Western Europe at the peak of the crisis to pick strawberries, asparagus and work in factories and warehouses (Weiskircher et al. 2020). The Prime minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borisov commented in April “Off the record, I consider it unfair that Bulgarians are going to Austria as care workers and once their contracts are over, they will come back, will bring back the contagion, we’ll quarantine them and all of us will have to pay because of them” (Maritsa 2020). The discussion about the threat from the virus was also often racialized in public debates, with Roma and other migrants stigmatized as vectors of the disease back in Bulgaria. Yet, the Bulgarian government did not exchange diplomatic notes with any receiving country and did not prevent Bulgarian workers from leaving. It remains to be seen whether the COVID-19 crisis has led to any considerable change in the largely positive attitude towards free movement of people among Bulgarians – according to Eurobarometer data from 2015 - 2017, 87 percent of Bulgarians were in favor of free movement of labour in the EU (Vasiliopoulou/Talving 2020).

Despite the high health risks and problematic labour conditions, many seasonal workers still preferred to go abroad rather than stay at home during the COVID-19 crisis. The reasons for this were, first of all, situational – in the first months of the crisis, the quick and adequate lockdown measures in Bulgaria were not combined with adequate economic measures to effectively help the population and unemployment rose sharply. Second, and more importantly, there were systemic reasons for this choice – even the minimal wage in Western European countries is usually several times higher than wages in Bulgaria. So even though Bulgarian agricultural producers experienced a dire lack of workers during the COVID-19 crisis, Bulgarian workers still preferred to take the plane and go abroad. These migrant workers often had to sleep in caravans or share apartments, especially bathrooms and kitchen space, with multiple other workers, in the hope that they could send back money to their family and save for their retirement years (Nikolova/Balhorn 2020). Yet, even if workers knew what they were signing up for, the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated existing problems in terms of labour conditions. The case of thousands of workers getting sick in the German meat factory Tönnies was highly salient and discussed in all Bulgarian media with first-hand accounts of labour exploitation, overcrowded accommodations and working in cold temperatures with no protective measures against the virus. Despite these problems, emigration from Bulgaria is unlikely to decline. For individuals, the decision to emigrate remains rational as long as there is no increase in wages and investment in economic structural changes.

OUTLOOK

Ultimately, emigration is a symptom as much as a problem in itself, revealing the systemic problems of Bulgarian economic and political life. The extent of emigration reflects the uneven development of the EU, with Western countries using Eastern ones as a labour reserve, while Eastern EU members recruit workers from third countries. Similar patterns of inequality can also be seen within Bulgaria, where regional disparities cause high levels of internal migration.

Provided that salaries in Bulgaria remain low and there is no substantial investment in regional development, we can expect the high levels of both internal migration and seasonal and temporary work emigration to continue in the coming years, even in the unprecedented times of the global pandemic. At the same time, many Bulgarian students returning from abroad due to COVID-19 took active part in the mass protests against the Borisov government, demanding systemic change in the country, more rule of law and an end to corruption and the mafia capture of the state. Former Deputy Prime Minister and nationalist leader Valery Simeonov infamously claimed that some of the protesters were “students who have come to Bulgaria because Western universities are closed. They want to show some political activity, take a few selfies and send them to their colleagues” (Sega 2020). Yet, it was not only the returning emigrants but also local youth – the children of the so-called “transition period” – who stood by the claim that they want to live in Bulgaria. In a country in which emigration has affected both the educated and uneducated, young and old, men and women, intertwined in a self-enforcing demographic crisis, and in which everyone either is, has been or knows an emigrant, emigration is unlikely to become a polarized topic in the coming years. Yet, it remains a silent threat, an impending reality and a long-term challenge for Bulgarian politics.
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Summary

Currently almost 9 percent of Czechs live abroad. Before 1989 people emigrated for political reasons. But since the Czech Republic's increasing integration in the West, economic motives have been the deciding factor.

The public significance ('salience') of emigration is very low in the Czech Republic. When emigration plays a role in political discourse, it is usually with reference to people who turned their backs on the communist-ruled country before 1989. This politically motivated emigration fits into the anti-communist, sometimes also anti-left rhetoric used by members of center-right parties in particular.

In connection with current emigration flows, the loss of medical professionals to Western countries is discussed as a problem in the political and media discourse irrespective of the political affiliation. Policy measures have not been far-reaching enough so far.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

The territory of today's Czech Republic was marked predominantly by emigration from the second half of the 19th century until the early 1990s. Under the Habsburg monarchy most Czechs emigrated for socioeconomic reasons. By the end of the First World War around 350,000 people had gone to the United States of America, which was the most attractive destination at the time. It came to a second, far greater loss of population in the former Czechoslovakia as a result of the Second World War: Over three million Germans were resettled (Kittel/Möller 2006: 568), this emigration was forced in the vast majority of cases.

Under the communist system the country, similar to Poland and Hungary, registered mainly politically motivated emigration to the West (Čulík 2017). According to estimates, between 1948 and 1989 more than 550,000 people left the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR): “The two main emigration waves occurred in 1948, when the communists came to power, and in 1968, when the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies invaded the country.” (Drbohlav-Janurová 2019) In both cases those concerned were particularly well educated.

The most recent outflow of emigrants took place after the end of communism. In 1990 the Czech part of the country of Czechoslovakia had 10.4 million inhabitants. Of those 2.7 percent lived abroad. Although the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on January 1st, 1993 did not influence the emigration numbers in any significant way, the increasing integration with Western countries, not least manifested by the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004, most certainly did.

Today the percentage of Czechs living abroad is more than three times as high as it was in 1990. In 2019, the most recent year of data collection, the
EMISSION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

CZECH REPUBLIC

Country Factsheet

- GDP per capita: 19,400€
- EU accession: 2004
- Population in 2019: 10.7 million
- Population in 1990: 10.4 million
- Population projection for 2060: 10.4 million
- Share of foreign citizens: 10.3%
- Young population (2018): 15.9% (EU-Durchschnitt: 17.7%)
- Working age population (2018): 64.5%
- Elderly population (2018): 19.6% (EU-Durchschnitt: 20.2%)
- Fertility rate (2018): 1.7 (EU-Durchschnitt: 1.5)

The Czech net migration has been positive every year since 2004 with the exception of three years as a consequence of the global economic and financial crisis. Although the Czech Republic, with a birth rate of 1.7 children per woman, ranks near the top when compared to other EU-member countries, it is a different factor that has been decisive for the population growth since 1990: immigration from abroad. In 2019 there were 595,881 foreigners living in the Czech Republic. Compared to other East-Central European countries their 6.4 percent proportion of the total population is remarkably high. In Slovakia and Hungary the proportion of foreigners is under two percent, in Poland it is even under one percent. Between 2013 and 2015 most of the immigrants were still from another EU country, since then the greatest influx has been from outside of the EU. In 2018, the most recent year for which data is available, around 17,800 EU-citizens moved to the Czech Republic. In the same year there were around 43,500 immigrants from non-EU countries (Eurostat 2020a). The Czech labor market already became the number one pull factor soon after the political change. Of the Visegrád countries today it is the Czech Republic that is the most attractive destination for labor migration – not least from the eastern part of Europe. The typical immigrant is male, about 30 years old and is from Ukraine or Slovakia (ČSÚ 2019a).

In contrast, the largest communities of the Czech diaspora are to be found not in the East, but primarily in the West. The distribution in Figure 3 shows two things: To date most Czech nationals left the country heading towards the West, i.e. they moved either to a

Western European country or to a Western country outside of Europe. In addition, approx. 700,000 of all Czechs abroad live in one of the neighboring countries Germany, Slovakia or Austria. They often remain strongly oriented towards their country of origin, also in part due to the geographical proximity. Apart from regular stays this is also expressed in the form of money transfers.

The remittances do not play a major role in the Czech Republic. In 2018 Czechs employed abroad sent about 3.3 billion euro home. As a proportion of GDP this was merely 1.6 percent.

Since accession to the EU the annual number of emigrants leaving the Czech Republic has fluctuated greatly at times (Figure 2). The country registered its highest emigration figures not directly after accession, but be

![Fig. 2: Distribution of Czechs living abroad according to country](chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Czechs living abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>545,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>92,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>74,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>60,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>51,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>23,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>15,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>14,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>11,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>9,244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN 2017 / own representation

1 The last time so many people lived in the Republic was 1945, in other words after the Second World War and before the resettlement of the large German minority (ČSÚ 2019a).
2 Thus there are about a third more Czechs living abroad than foreigners living in the Czech Republic.
3 Data on the country of origin of immigrants has only been collected since 2011.
4 The labor migration hardly intensifies the competition between locals and foreigners. In the labor market immigrants are complementary to the native population. In other words, they work in jobs for which there is no qualified personnel in the country or which tend to be unattractive for Czechs.
5 Only Czech citizens are included here. Over two million people worldwide claim that they are of Czech origin, although many of them are not or no longer proficient in the Czech language. (Valášek 2015).
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between 2008 and 2012 in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis. In all the other years since 2004 the number of emigrants was between 20,000 and 39,000. In 2018 only 26,742 people left the country (Eurostat 2020b), making the Czech Republic currently one of the states with the fewest emigrants, not only among the more recent EU members, but EU-wide. Within East-Central those even more reluctant to emigrate are the Slovaks; in 2019 only 6.3 percent of Slovakian citizens lived abroad. In Slovakia from 2004 to 2018 the number of emigrants annually was between just 1,586 and 3,870 people (Eurostat 2020b).

Based on those who have left the Czech Republic in recent years, three types of emigrants can be identified: Czech nationals, other EU citizens and citizens of non-EU countries. In 2018, the most recent year of data collection, 19 percent of all emigrants had Czech citizenship, 11.6 percent were citizens of other EU countries and 69.4 percent were from non-EU countries (Eurostat 2020b).

In the case of the Czech nationals leaving the country since the end of communism it is regularly a form of labor migration. Most of them have found a job in Western countries or seek work once they are there. Although there is no exact information on the number of Czechs employed abroad, according to a qualified estimate almost 490,000 Czechs were working abroad in 2018. In comparison with 2008 this number has thus risen by about a third. Most of them (over 307,000 people) work in another EU country and thus take advantage of the freedom of movement of persons (ihned.cz 2019). The number of Czechs employed abroad does not match the numbers for the Czech popu-

6 A glance at the extreme value from 2009 shows that, for the most part, the emigrants were not Czech nationals, but foreigners who had been living in the Czech Republic until that point. Of the 61,069 people who emigrated from the Czech Republic, only 24,284 had a Czech passport (Eurostat 2020b).

7 The top three destination countries for the Slovak emigrants were the Czech Republic (35.5 percent), Austria (22.5 percent) and Great Britain (8.9 percent) (Eurostat 2020b). There has also been no significant immigration to Slovakia since 2004. The annual figures fluctuate between 4,460 and 8,624 (Eurostat 2020b). Net migration has consistently been a positive four-digit figure since 2004 (Eurostat 2020a, 2020b).

8 Data on the citizenship of the emigrants has only been collected since 2013.

9 There is a less significant, yet also noteworthy, number of emigrants due to family reunification.

ONLY 19 PERCENT OF EMIGRANTS ARE CZECH NATIONALS

Fig. 3: Population development and annual migration rates

Fig. 4: Remittances to the Czech Republic 2018 (in million EUR)

Fig. 5: Number of emigrants from the Czech Republic according to type

Source: World Bank 2019 / own representation

Source: Eurostat 2020b / own representation

Source: Eurostat 2020a, 2020b, 2020c / own representation

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The rising number of commuters employed abroad (cf. Figure 6) corresponds to the number of Czech nationals who have emigrated in recent years (cf. Figure 5).

The smallest group of emigrants is almost always EU-citizens. They are often people who have a short-term job in the Czech Republic, usually one requiring a higher qualification, especially in the capital Prague, and who then return to their home country after a few years. The largest group of emigrants by far is made up of people who come from outside the EU. These are primarily Ukrainians, who also came to the Czech Republic for work purposes. Mostly they work in the low-wage sector for a few years before then returning home.

The main three types of emigrants – Czech nationals, other EU citizens and non-EU citizens – and their respective numbers also determine the destination countries. 53.3 percent, and thus more than half of the emigrants, left the Czech Republic in 2018 headed to a country outside of the EU and 46.7 percent emigrated to another EU country (Eurostat 2020b).

As far as the socioeconomic profile of the emigrants is concerned, the Czech Republic is no exception: it is primarily young people who are emigrating. The most represented are those between 15 and 34 years old, who address this form of emigration by ever the age cohort of 35 to 49 year-olds is also not negligible (ČSÚ 2019a). Between 2004 and 2013 considerably more men than women emigrated but gender has played an increasingly minor role since; in 2018 there were 13,872 male emigrants and 12,870 female (Eurostat 2020b). Exactly half of the emigrants had completed intermediate-level education; over a third had a higher education qualification. At 14 percent those with a low level of formal education constitute the smallest group (Eurostat 2020b). Thus, the typical emigrant from the Czech Republic is male, in his mid-thirties, with intermediate-level education and is emigrating towards the West.

Since primarily young people are leaving the country, emigration exacerbates the demographic change in the Czech Republic. Currently almost seven million people, thus two thirds of the population, are of working age and only a fifth is 65 years old or older but the prognoses look similar to those for Germany; in 2060 already every third person will be a senior citizen. As long as the economic situation stays good – in 2018 only 2.2 percent of the population were unemployed (ČSÚ 2019b) – and young people from abroad continue to come to the Czech Republic for temporary work, this will largely compensate for the out-migration of native Czechs in any case.

EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Similar to other post-communist states emigration plays a role first of all in various policy and policy areas: among them in particular the citizenship policy, the electoral legislation and the health care system. The Law on Acquisition and Loss of the Citizenship of the Czech Republic of December 29th, 1992 (Sb. z. č. 40/1993) formed the basis for the regulations regarding citizenship for many years. Among other things it enabled people who had lost their citizenship in connection with the communist regime to regain it comparatively easily - however on the condition that they were not nationals of another state or that they renounced the relevant citizenship, which, for many who importantly had gained a foothold in the West at that time, was an unattractive prospect. With the current Law on the Citizenship of the Czech Republic from June 11th, 2013 (Sb. z. č. 186/2013), the citizenship policy has fundamentally changed in this regard: Since it came into force Czech citizens have also been able to have other nationalities. At the same time the acquisition of Czech citizenship for foreigners has been made tougher: Henceforth higher standards apply with regard to knowledge of the Czech language (MZV n.d.).

All Czech nationals, and thereby also those whose center of interest is abroad, are allowed to participate in two types of elections: since 2002, elections for the Chamber of Deputies which is the first and most important chamber of the Czech parliament and, since 2013, the direct election of the president. One can vote in more than 130 locations worldwide, however a postal vote is not possible. Most of the voters in question live in Europe. A look at the statistics indicates that their influence on the election result is minimal; in January 2018, in the second and decisive round of voting of the presidential election 17,507 Czech expatriates exercised their voting rights. This corresponds to a 0.3 percent share of all votes cast (Kučera 2018).

The policy area that plays the greatest role in connection with emigration is health policy. Similarly to the other East-Central European EU member states, the Czech Republic is also losing medical professionals to (Western) foreign countries because of the better working conditions and higher remuneration. Currently approximately every fifth doctor trained in the Czech Republic leaves. Since this means that the Czech state not only has shortages in its own health care system but also incurs a large monetary loss because the training costs of those in question are not ‘repaid’ in any way, attempts are being made to address this form of emigration by means of various policy measures. The most recent initiative of the Czech Ministry of Health is from last year and is incentive-oriented: What is under discussion is considerably better pay for medical graduates during their specialist training. In return they should give a commitment to stay in the Czech Republic for a few years (idnes.cz 2019). In addition, the higher education institutions that teach medicine are to receive hundreds of millions of Czech crowns more in the eleven years to train a larger number of doctors. In addition, attempts are being made to improve working conditions (Berger 2019). Immigration also helps remedy the shortage of specialists in the health care system – especially immigration from Ukraine. In 2015 the Project Ukraine started, by means of which over 400 Ukrainian nurses and just under 300 doctors came to the Czech Republic by 2019 (ČT24.cz 2019).

Aside from policy and policy, emigration also plays a role in the field of politics. Basically, with respect to the Czech Republic, migration in general was not a particularly controversial topic for many years. This was until the ref-
The protocols of the parliamentary discourse show that since statehood (January 1st, 1993) until today (status on August 29th, 2020) the topic of emigration was talked about in only 177 of the debates that took place in the Chamber of Deputies.11 The term emigration is thematically most frequently used to refer to the politically motivated emigration from the former ČSSR. In this context, especially in the 1990s, there were discussions about citizenship questions and how they were closely related to restitution and pension entitlements, yet emigration rapidly evolved into an inflammatory term which is used in anti-communist, at times also anti-left arguments. Representatives of center-right parties like the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana, ODS) or the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová, KDU-ČSL) regularly use it. By emphasizing the regressive side of the communist regime it is possible to this day to consistently score points with the voters:

“It is simply not possible to forget the system, the regime and its ideology, which in our countries alone caused the deaths of several thousand people, put the citizens in jail, probably for a combined total of millions of years, forced hundreds and thousands of citizens to emigrate, which broke not only our economy, our school system, our culture, our ecology, our interpersonal relationships and everything that you could break, and which have the values that individuals and a society should be guided by completely wrong.” (Pavela 1993)

Comparatively striking in the anti-communist framing of emigration is the reference to the fact that the emigrants between 1948 and 1989 were people who were particularly important for Czech society and culture: “It was people who mostly made up the elite of this nation.” (Mejstřík 2006, cf. similar also Bartošek 2018 or Stanjura 2020) In particular the representatives of center-right parties acknowledge that the Czechs living abroad contributed “to the preservation and flourishing of the national cultural heritage” (Karas 2005) and as emigrants carried out “substantial intellectual, political and cultural activity dedicated to the propagation of freedom and democracy in their homeland” (ibid.). Yet at the same time they look with regret at the loss due to emigration: “[T]o this day we must miss them, because we have lost outstanding talents, brains and people that are simply irreplaceable.” (Němcová 2019)

Socioeconomic issues are seldom explicitly linked to emigration in the parliamentary discourse. A systematic search was conducted on the website of the Chamber of Deputies looking for protocols which contained emig*.

In the context of the refugee crisis it seems remarkable that the Czech deputies regularly refer to refugees as emigrants. The attitude towards refugees is clearly negative across the party spectrum. Here in the words of a Civic Democratic parliamentarian:

“I think that what Germany did in the context of the opening to the emigrants was a fundamental mistake. I call it European suicide and we have to do everything so that we don’t repeat this mistake not only of Germany’s but also of other Western states.” (Skopeňek 2018)

Time and time again there are attempts to culturally refute the argumentation referring to the former – in contrast to the current refugees – positively connoted emigrants from the communist-governed Czechoslovakia being grateful at the time that they were received in the West. The following statement by Tomio Okamura, the leader of the movement Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD), which at times using right-wing radical argumentation, is paradigmatic:

“The parallel drawn that Europeans have also migrated and that it was positive for the host countries, is not valid. When our emigrants headed to Austria, the Netherlands or the USA, it was a movement of people with the same European culture, who did not take a parallel to the rest of the world anywhere, a parallel and hostile ideology.” (Okamura 2018; cf. similar also Klaus jr. 2018)

A search for emigration and related topics12 in the party programs of 2017, when the election for the Chamber of Deputies in the Czech Republic was most recently held, and those from 2019 when the European elections took place, reveals results similar to in the parliamentary discourse: a low relevance and an even lower degree of politicization. In 2017 the parties that referred to emigration at all13 framed emigration in the broadest sense in two different ways. First, relating to the health care system, it is emphasized by the populist Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Akce nespokojených občanů, ČSSD) heavily criticized the planned cuts because they would affect not least many highly qualified workers like doctors, employees in the school system and higher education etc.:

“Today the government comes and says that, for the first time in history, as a directive for next year it wants to reduce their wages [those employed in various sectors of public service]. Yet we know that in a number of these sectors the workers are primarily people with higher education [...] Competent, educated, talented and experienced people are something no country has too many of. Not one. I would even say that the Czech Republic is even worse off because of its past than for example Austria, Germany, Switzerland. Because in our case it was more emigration of the educated and competent people that took place, and it wasn’t only emigration before the war, emigration after 1948, emigration after 1968 [following the crushing of the Prague Spring], but, ladies and gentlemen, this emigration has also continued after 1989. Naturally it has a different scale, it often has no political dimension, but an economic dimension. [...] The only way we can lead this country to long-term prosperity and make a rich country out of the Czech Republic, [... o], if we not only keep our competent, educated, talented people here, but if we are also capable of attracting some such people here from abroad.” (Rath 2016)

10 In the case of the Czech Republic the fact that public opinion research only sporadically addresses the topic of immigration can also be seen as an indicator of its low salience.

11 A systematic search was conducted on the website of the Chamber of Deputies https://fulltext.psp.cz/ for emigration using protocols which contained emig*.

12 A search was performed not only for emig*, but also for vystěh*, odchod, zahrani*, pohyb* and schen*.

13 Not even one of the terms searched for could be found in the programs of the KDU-ČSL, KČM and ODS.
ANO), the strongest power in the country, and by the Social Democrats, that the departure of medical personnel needs to be counteracted:14

“By means of fair remuneration, improvements in quality, well-organized postgraduate training, a thoroughly motivating system and helpful communication we will reduce the unwanted departure abroad of in particular young medical professionals and maintain the international competitiveness of the Czech health care system.” (ANO 2017; cf. similar also ČSSD 2017)

Second, in the run-up to the national election a number of parties, among them for example the civic-liberal and pro-European Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (Tradice, odpovědnost, prosperita 09, TOP 09), stressed how profitable the freedoms associated with the EU are and in particular the freedom of movement of persons:

“What we will not allow; [...] The restriction of the personal freedom of movement for work purposes and other restrictions of the fundamental freedoms of the Union.” (TOP 09 2017)

The freedom of movement of persons within Europe is regularly linked with effective protection of the EU’s external borders:

“The preservation of the Schengen area is fundamental for the Czech Republic. The prerequisite is the common management of the external borders with the help of joint border protection and the coast guard and the expansion of the Schengen Information System, so that the illegal economic migration to Europe is stopped.” (TOP 09 2017; cf. similar also ČSSD 2017 and Piráti 2017)

The programs of the Czech parties for the European election 2019 yield similar findings: Once again, most of the parties which were victorious in the end primarily stressed the advantages of the freedom of movement of persons and at the same time not only to protect the competition of the EU’s external borders, but also to defend the national interests in Europe:

“The EU may not restrict the free movement of labor and services in any way, on the contrary, it must promote it. We will therefore resolutely assert the existing rights of our citizens who are working in other countries of the EU. We will see to it that the European Commission demands the elimination of the protectionist measures that some member states have taken. [...] We are aware that complete and reliable protection of the external border is an indispensable prerequisite for the preservation of an area without borders inside the EU.” (ANO 2019; cf. similar also ČSSD 2019, GDS 2019, Piráti 2019 or STAN 2019)

The communists explicitly emphasize “that workers sent abroad receive the usual local wage. It is necessary to stop every kind of social dumping.” The goal of the ČSSD is, with regard to a high quality health care system, to catch up to Western Europe. In the Czech Republic we have great results but we want to eliminate the differences between the wages in the West and our wages.” (ČSSD 2019)

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In the media discourse in the last years, emigration also only plays a sporadic role. The state’s dealings with emigrants of Czech descent became virulent for example in 2014 – with the outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine. There, living in Volhynia, are a few thousand people with a Czech migrant background, the so-called Volhynia Czechs. In view of the threat to the country posed by Russia, the community sent several requests for help to the Czech President and the government, which were ultimately also discussed in the media (for an example see idnes.cz 2014). In December 2014 the government finally reacted with a declaration which enshrined “that every foreigner of verifiable Czech origin (krajnám) would be able to receive a visa or a residence permit for the Czech Republic” under facilitated conditions (Václav ČR 2014).

When emigration was the topic in recent times, it was mostly concerning the already mentioned out-migration of medical professionals. The media also often put up for discussion whether the emigrants should be made to pay for their studies retroactively (for an example see rozhlas.cz 2020 or Kolman 2020).15

INFOBOX – Migration in times of the corona pandemic

During the first wave of the coronavirus the Czech Republic was amongst the countries with the strictest anti-coronavirus measures (Guasti 2020a). Only a few days after the government had declared a state of emergency on the March 13th, 2020, an entry ban was imposed for all foreigners without a permanent or more than 90-day residence permit as well as a ban on travel abroad for all Czech citizens and foreigners with a longer-term residence permit. As the infection numbers in Germany and Austria were particularly high in spring, additionally, from the March 26th, a compulsory 14 day quarantine period applied for everyone returning from both neighboring states – regardless of nationality and residence status. The Czech emigration discourse was affected by the first wave of Covid-19 in so far as that it triggered renewed discussions about the health care personnel of Czech descent employed abroad. However, the Czech government’s strict regulations affected Czech emigrants less than it affected cross-border commuters. Of the 17 Czech doctors, who, for example are employed in the hospital in Bavarian Cham, about half live in the Czech Republic. In that particular case the solution reached for the problem was that the Czech measures that some at a week at a time and then returned home for the 14 day quarantine called for by the government due to a stay abroad (novinky.cz 2020). The success of the measures proved the government right: The Republic reported one of the lowest rates of infection in Central Europe in the first half of the year. Consequently the government relaxed the measures enormously in the summer months. From June to August in the Czech Republic masks were only compulsory in medical facilities and retirement homes. With the exception of the Prague Metro not even the passengers using public transport were required to wear one. That the loosening of restrictions was not accompanied by increased testing, an expansion of contact tracing and a strengthening of the trust between the population and the government proved in the end to be a fatal error.

14 It would seem important to point out here that not all people who work abroad actually also emigrate. Alternatively it can also be a form of labor migration (for a differentiation see Wagner/Hassel Kolman 2020).

15 As a nurse completes a higher education course in the Czech Republic a lot of money is indeed involved here. Survey data from 2019 at least puts this problem in perspective somewhat: Increasing numbers of medical students would like to remain in the Czech Republic after completing their studies. In 2018, 75 percent expressed this intention; three years later that number was over 81 percent. In Slovakia this trend is in the opposite direction. In 2017, 80 percent of the surveyed medical students indicated that they wanted to stay in Slovakia after completing their studies, but in 2019 that figure was 75 percent (Berger 2019).
Although 8.5 percent of the Czech population lives abroad, which is slightly more than the EU average, emigration plays a marginal role in the societal, political and media discourse in the Czech Republic. The fact that the native population is aging or that there is a shortage or lack of specialists in some areas, is concealed by the immigration numbers which are high when compared to other East-Central European countries. The sole topic that is regularly discussed is the departure of medical professionals, whose training cost the country a lot of money and, in addition, whose departure results in shortages in the Czech health care system. Apart from this problem, which other East-Central European states like Poland or Slovakia are battling to a much greater extent, the Czech Republic can nevertheless calmly face the emigration of some of its population: Czechs are not particularly keen to depart. The standard of living is relatively high and the economy is flourishing – the country offers not only so-called high achievers from the native population enough incentives to stay. In addition it presents itself as an alternative to Western Europe for other Eastern Europeans who wish to emigrate. Thus it counts – although to a much lesser extent than Germany, yet nevertheless – as one of the beneficiaries of the brain drain from the East.

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3 GREECE

Summary

The patterns of Greek emigration have shifted several times: High volumes of labor-related emigration persisted until the 1970s, followed by a precipitous fall, which lasted until the early 2010s, when, in the context of the economic crisis, emigration rates picked up again.

The ‘new emigration’ has become a salient topic in public discourse. Greek media generally present emigration as a negative phenomenon. The issue of emigration is rarely framed in explicitly demographic terms, but mainly as a socio-economic issue.

In the 2019 general election campaign emigration was widely discussed, though the salience attached to it by the left-wing Syriza, as an incumbent, was lower than beforehand. All major political parties view emigration as a problem, but they differ in the level of salience they attribute to it, as well as offering different interpretations of its drivers and solutions.

In terms of policies, a major development has been the extension of the right to vote to expatriate Greeks in 2019. Proposed by the center-right Nea Dimokratia government, it passed with an overwhelming majority in the parliament. Beyond the issue of expatriate voting, both Syriza and Nea Dimokratia have introduced targeted measures to fight emigration and incentivize return.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

The Greek experience of geographic dispersion spans centuries, stretching through antiquity, the Middle Ages, modernity, and our current times, making the Greek one of the three ‘classical’ diasporas, along with the Jewish and the Armenian one (Brubaker 2005: 3). Various migratory movements, that of people over borders and borders over people, have created an expatriate community that is currently estimated to be 4-5 million strong, scattered in dozens of countries around the world (Greek City Times 2018). This long and intricate history of expatriation informs the understanding of present-day mobility, as well as conceptions of the Greek ‘nation’ as such.

Even if one limits the discussion to recent history, a complex picture emerges. In the post-war period, Greece became a net exporter of migrant labor to richer European countries, but also to the United States, Canada and Australia. Between 1955 and 1977 about 1.2 million people emigrated from Greece, making it the European country with the highest emigration rate relative to its population at the time (Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 38). Also noteworthy is that in the aftermath of the Civil War (1946-1949) between 75,000 and 100,000 people, many of which were supporters of the Greek Communist party, left the country as political refugees, settling in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Marantzidis 2015: 8).

From the 1970s onwards, the trend started to reverse, and Greece’s net migration rate turned positive due to, in part, the return of earlier waves of emigrants and other co-ethnics to Greece, and, in part,
because of the first arrivals of foreign laborers. Even though emigration from Greece never ceased, the country’s EU-accession in 1981 was not accompanied by significant outflows and the share of population living abroad continuously decreased from the 2000s (Figure 1), and Greeks remained, for many years, among the least mobile European citizens. Like other South-European countries, by the 1990s Greece had become a destination country for international migrants, attracted by relative economic prosperity and geographic proximity.

Outflows began to outnumber inflows again staring in 2008, and emigration grew rapidly in the wake of the economic crisis and the austerity measures introduced as part of the bailout conditions. A large portion of this mobility took place for work within the EU single market (more than two thirds of Greek emigrants are employed), with the major destination countries being the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands. Significant numbers have also been recorded in Switzerland, Sweden and Belgium, as well as in countries outside of Europe with traditionally large Greek communities (US, Australia, Canada), but also new destinations, such as the United Arab Emirates.

Estimates of the magnitude of emigration from Greece vary, and the numbers are sometimes inflated in Greek media and political discourse.

An oft-cited statistic was provided by the Bank of Greece in 2015, putting the number of Greek emigrants from the onset of the crisis until that point in time at half a million people (Bank of Greece 2016). Other credible sources, however, estimate these numbers to be lower: e.g. Labrianidis and Pratsinakis (2016) talk about 280 000 to 350 000 emigrants between 2010 and 2015. Moreover, a large share of those who left in the context of the new emigration wave were foreign citizens, many of them migrants of Albanian origin, who were particularly vulnerable to the deteriorating economic conditions in Greece (Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 39). 40 percent of emigrants did not hold EU citizenship.

Return migration is also significant: Approximately 200,000 Greeks came back between 2008 and 2015 (Efsyn 2017). At the same time, it should be noted that official statistics may underestimate the number of emigrants, since not all EU countries require registration of EU citizens upon arrival, making it impossible to accurately trace their return.

In previous emigration waves the protagonists were typically unskilled workers and farmers, and the students who left Greece for tertiary education also tended to return. The new emigration, however, has a component of human capital flight to it, although not quite as pronounced as public discourse would have it. The economic crisis induced a steep decline in disposable income and mass unemployment, especially among the young. Indicatively, in 2013, nearly 4 out of 10 unemployed persons were tertiary education graduates, most of them 25-44 years of age (Lazaretou 2017: 41). This exacerbated the preexisting weaknesses of the Greek labor market, and in particular its inability to absorb the highly skilled (Lazaretou 2017: 47). In fact, emigration of the highly skilled had started to pick up even before the crisis years (Lambrianidis 2011).

It is quite striking that in Greece, the labor market position of primary education graduates has been persistently better than that of other education categories (Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 36). This calls into question the extent to which the new emigration phenomenon in Greece is solely a crisis effect, which is the dominant political narrative. Not only do labor-market inefficiencies pre-date the crisis, but focusing solely on economic aspects alone also obscures the complex set of non-economic motivations that underlie emigration from Greece. Social and political factors, such as a perceived lack of meritocracy, the prevalence of nepotism and corruption and disillusionment with Greece’s political system seem to have played an equally important role (Grountis et al. 2019: 5).
In terms of age composition the new emigrants are relatively young, though older than previous generations of emigrants: In the 1990s, the average age of emigrants was 24.8 years as opposed to 30.5 years post-2010 (Pratsinakis et al. 2017: 81). Emigration occurs within and exacerbates the circumstances of population decline. The current fertility rate is 1.35 births per woman, which is among the lowest in Europe. The share of older people in the total population in Greece is, inversely, one of the highest in Europe. They greatly outnumber the young: there are 1.5 times as many people 65 years or older than young people in Greece. The population is projected to have fallen by more than 1.5 million people by 2060.

Depopulation of rural areas is also a factor in emigration, as the European regions that have registered demographic decline are disproportionately located in the south, including Greece, but also Bulgaria, parts of Spain, Italy and Portugal (van Herwijnen et al. 2018). Within Greece, however, demographic shrinkage has mostly affected large cities, with Athens and Thessaloniki registering the highest rate of population decline, and thus emigration has actually contributed to slowing down the divergence between urban and rural areas in terms of population density (Salvati 2019).

A positive aspect of emigration is the money sent home by emigrants. Remittances currently amount to a little more than 0.3 percent of Greece’s GDP, which is in line with other South-European countries (lower than Italy, a little higher than Portugal and Spain), but still much lower than for Eastern European countries. Even during the worst years of the deep economic crisis, when the number of Greek emigrants soared, the increase registered in this rate is not particularly noteworthy. That being said, remittances may have mitigated the liquidity problems experienced by the country in the context of the economic crisis (Correia/Martins 2016).

Immigration, more than emigration, has been a salient topic of public debate and academic research throughout the 1990s and 2000s in Greece. More recently, emigration emerged as an important theme in public discourse, viewed, like so many other political, social and economic phenomena, through the prism of the economic crisis (Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 43).

While the discourse related to emigration is heterogenous, some general features also emerge. First and foremost, emigration is seen as a predominantly negative phenomenon, something to be stopped or reversed. Emigrants are often presented as having been forced to migrate due to adversity and there is a strong desire for these individuals to return. The typical image of an emigrant that is constructed is of a young and educated person who is advancing abroad, yet constantly longs for the homeland.

In the quality press, there are two main types of articles looking at the topic of emigration. On the one hand, many pieces report on statistics, such as emigration rates and/or intentions, taken from opinion polls, official reports or academic research findings. The focus on numbers, however, the thousands conveys the impression of a constant stream of people leaving. Emigration is framed as a result of failure and the deficiency of the Greek state and its political class, exacerbated by the crisis (To Vima 2019; In.gr 2017). In this category we find reports on various events related to emigration, such as roundtables and debates, often with the involvement of politicians, bureaucrats, academics and private entrepreneurs. And, finally, there are also articles reporting on the content and progression of emigration related policies proposed by parties or the government (Neakriti 2020; In.gr 2018a).

The other main type is feature articles covering the personal stories of people who either emigrated or decided to stay (To Vima 2016). Often these stories contain first person accounts of migrant trajectories and motivations. Many portray the adverse circumstances that lead people away from Greece, such as unemployment, exploitation by employers or failing businesses. These articles present the lives of Greek emigrants in their new countries of residence, many of whom are working in low-skilled occupations (hospitality or retail). The articles illustrate the difficulties the emigrants face adjusting to the new country, including their inability to get a job which matches their qualifications and the increased costs of living. Furthermore, these articles show emigrants who wish to return but are unable to do so (In.gr 2018b; To Vima 2012).

There is a special emphasis on Greeks in the UK and Germany, two countries with a history of Greek immigration, where new emigrant communities are forming. In this context, Germany is not only the preferred destination of Greek emigrants, but it is also seen in Greece as the architect and main proponent of austerity policies, which are blamed for the sharp increase in emigration in the first place. The strong focus on Germany accordingly suggests that emigration primarily serves the interests of rich and powerful countries, which deprive Greece of its labor force and at the same time simultaneously exploited migrant labor (see also Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 43). Headlines like “Greeks and other immigrants boosted German GDP” (To Vima 2018a) drive home the point.

By far the most salient theme reported by the press during the last two decades has been the process that lead to granting the expatriate vote in December 2019, which has enabled recent emigrants to participate in Greek elections, without having to travel back to Greece to cast their ballot. Despite its large diaspora, both recent and historic, Greece was one of the last EU member states to introduce expatriate voting as attempts to do so in the past, have repeatedly failed.
Greek media present the issue of emigration in a highly selective way (Mavrodi/Moutselos 2017: 44; Pratsinakis et al. 2017: 83), focusing on some types of migration and migrants while concealing others. This includes the lack of acknowledgment of how the new wave of emigration has affected a large proportion of non-Greek citizens. In addition, emigration and immigration are treated as almost completely separate issues, especially in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’. As will be shown, public policy interventions, too, are geared towards a very specific type of migrant: young, active, qualified.

Another aspect, which is indicative of the resonance of the issue of emigration in Greek public life, is the increased artistic interest in the topic, with a number of plays and artworks examining the theme of migrant identity and agency during times of hardship (In.gr 2013). It is, however, difficult to precisely determine to what extent people are worried about emigration because public opinion surveys rarely, if ever, ask about it. A recent opinion poll that was widely discussed shows that, when asked separately about emigration and immigration, Greek respondents tend to be more concerned about the former than the latter (28 percent as opposed to 7 percent) (The Guardian 2019). Strikingly, the largest share of respondents are concerned about both (54 percent). This mirrors a generalized unease with which people view geographic mobility in its various forms.

The issue of the ‘new emigration’ gained political significance starting in 2015 (Pratsinakis et al. 2017: 86). Even though outflows peaked prior to that, in 2012, emigration was crowded out by other considerations related to the most immediate threats posed by the economic crisis. In other words, emigration was not a political priority before 2015. It became more visible belatedly, as part of a broader reckoning with the adverse social effects of protracted economic hardship and austerity policies: from rising unemployment to poverty to soaring suicide rates.

Emigration was seen as a symptom of this social malaise by the newly elected Syriza government, a left-wing party with a young voter base, which had signaled an interest in taking action to diminish the exodus. It is striking that Syriza's programmatic documents from that time focus on emigration and immigration, Greek respondents tend to be more concerned about the former than the latter (28 percent as opposed to 7 percent) (The Guardian 2019). Strikingly, the largest share of respondents are concerned about both (54 percent). This mirrors a generalized unease with which people view geographic mobility in its various forms.

The fight against black and undeclared work, the fight against unemployment, especially of young women reaching 65 percent, the return of young scientists from abroad, the defense and expansion of public and free education and the prevention of any attempts to privatize higher education, as well as the safeguarding of the political and social rights of young people should be key political priorities for both the party and the government.” (Syriza 2016)

Notable policy developments during the Tsipras government included the establishment of the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation, followed by a program against unemployment and ‘brain drain’ that was launched in 2018 and that focused on vocational training and education (To Vima 2018b). The measures included 2 billion euro funding for research and development, job creation for young researchers and actions supporting innovative entrepreneurship, among others (Ethnos 2019). It is difficult to judge whether these targeted policies have had any effect, as the rate of emigration during this time remained stable.

By 2018, the expatriate vote had also become an issue of big symbolic relevance. As the positions of the governing Syriza and the largest opposition party, Nea Dimokratia, converged on the necessity to finally pass legislation allowing it, they nonetheless sought to differentiate themselves from each other, which manifested in little more than reciprocal accusations and a public brawl (Free Sunday 2018). In the same year, the Syriza-led government appointed an expert committee to devise a draft law on expatriate voting (Efsyn 2018), but did not come up with a plan in time for the 2019 general elections. This meant that Greek emigrants were not going to be able to vote in yet another general election from their place of residence abroad, for which Tsipras was harshly criticized (Kathimerini 2019).

The aim of the Government […] is […] to draw up a long-term plan for the return of thousands of young men and women, this important part of the Greek society, the most dynamic part, the young researchers, the young people with the many degrees, who left the country and today are employed in universities and research centers abroad.” (Tsipras 2015)

The Syriza party congress of 2016 also mentioned emigration, setting the following goals:

“Our plan for equitable development and productive reconstruction cannot move forward if it does not include the new generation. Young men and women should be one of its central pillars. In the years of economic crisis and neoliberal barbarism, young people are experiencing with particular cruelty the effects of capitalist aggression. In this light, the fight against black and undeclared work, the fight against unemployment, especially of young women reaching 65...
The issue of the political representation of emigrants and the broader topic of emigration became salient in the electoral campaign. Zooming in on the programmatic documents (manifestos or other programmatic or ideological material) of the major parties in the 2019 elections, i.e. those that managed to pass the parliamentary threshold, enables a more detailed breakdown of the way parties define the “problem” of emigration, how they frame it and what proposals they make to address it.

All major contenders in the 2019 general elections referred to the issue of emigration in some form except the incumbent Syriza and the Greek Communist Party. That being said, the issues emphasized, the framing and proposed policy solutions vary greatly. It seems that whether, how and how much a party speaks about emigration is influenced by political ideology. While left-wing parties focus comparatively more on socio-economic interpretations and offer rights-based solutions, right-wing parties tend to frame emigration not only as a socio-economic problem but also as a demographic one. Right-wing parties devote more attention to the issue overall (apart from a brief mention of emigration in its manifesto, Nea Dimokratia also produced a campaign video on the subject of emigration, see: In.gr 2019).

Furthermore, emigration is used as a vehicle to express a given party’s general ideological outlook, linking it with other issues the party already ‘owns’. The euro-critical MeRA25 interpreted emigration as the result of a failure of Europe, the mainstream KINAL as a concomitant of increased intra-EU mobility that needs to be managed but cannot be undone. The radical right Elliniki Lysis emphasized emigration more than any other party, while also using more alarmist language, depicting it as an inter-

**EMIGRATION THROUGH THE IDEOLOGICAL LENS**

![Figure 5: Frequency of migration-related keywords in parliamentary debates](image)

Emigration, Diaspora, Migrant, Refugee, Expatriate

<table>
<thead>
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2 The keyword search was conducted in the online repository containing the minutes of the plenary sessions of the Greek national assembly (available online at https://www.hellenicparliament.gr). The unit of observation was the parliamentary debate. This is a crude measure of salience, since such a method does not allow us to count the incidence of relevant keywords within a single debate, i.e. we do not know if members of parliament mentioned it only once or on several occasions. Note that the search functionality identifies not only the stems but also the conjugated forms of words, but it is not possible to search for more than one keyword at a time.

3 However, note that in Greek several terms are used to convey the meaning of ‘emigrant’ and ‘immigration’: Sometimes the word ‘expatriate’ (απόδημος) is used, other times the expression ‘Greeks abroad’ (Ελλήνες του εξωτερικού), or the word ‘migrant’ (μετανάστης) along with the adjective ‘Greek’ (Ελληνικός). Hence, this complexity, in combination with the limited search functionality of the parliamentary minutes available online, the results in Figure 5 should be interpreted with caution.

Finally, programmatic documents placed comparatively less emphasis on the historic Greek diaspora as a target of public policy intervention in its own right: only the center-left KINAL and the far-right Elliniki Lysis mentioned it explicitly. The focus as far as this population group was concerned was on cultural policy and the cultivation of bonds between the diaspora and the ancestral homeland, while more extensive political and economic proposals targeted the new emigrants. Emigration and diaspora have been recurring topics in the deliberations of the Greek parliament, even though they are typically mentioned in passing, rather than constituting the focus of a specific policy proposal.

Figure 5 presents the incidence of keywords capturing various (overlapping) forms of human mobility: ‘expatriate (απόδημος), ‘diaspora’ (ομογένεια), ‘migrant’ (μετανάστης) and ‘refugee’ (ιατρικός). It shows that throughout the last two decades the salience of outgoing migration has been considerably lower than it has been for incoming migration, especially in 2015 and 2016, a spike clearly linked to the ‘refugee crisis’.

In December 2019, Greece reached a momentous milestone when a parliamentary supermajority passed a law on expatriate voting proposed by the Nea Dimokratia government. This also required a constitutional amendment, which tied the external vote to certain preconditions, including a “real bond with the State”, “personal presence at the polling station” or “time of absence from the country or presence in the country for a certain period in the past” (Christopoulos 2019). In fact, drawing the dividing line between the old diaspora and the new emigrants was one of the most contentious parts of the proposal.

Recall that Syriza had already been working on a plan to expand the expatriate vote. Nea Dimokratia prepared its own proposal in parallel, having separately pledged to enfranchise external citizens when it announced its government program (Mitsotakis 2019). As the debate minutes reveal (Greek Parliament 2019), all parliamentary parties agreed with the general intention of the law, i.e. to enable political participation of Greek emigrants. The parties therefore differentiated themselves regarding the policy details: how exactly this right should be realized and what kind of preconditions to link it to.

MPs also used the debate on the issue to attack political opponents, praise their own record and take credit for highlighting the issue. Syriza’s keynote speaker, for example, accused previous Nea Dimokratia and state conflict about resources (emigration being “exploited by countries like Germany, while we all paid for it”, Greek Solution undated: 155). All of the parties tended to cast emigration in a negative light, i.e. as a loss for the community and the individual. At best, emigration was framed as an inevitable process that needs to be pragmatically managed via EU-based cooperation (the center-left KINAL represented this viewpoint).

**RELEVANCE OF MIGRATION IN THE GREEK PARLIAMENT**

**VOTING RIGHTS FOR FOREIGN GREEKS**
PASOK governments of disenfranchising expatriate citizens for decades, claiming: “We brought it up, not you”. The representative from KINAL (the heir of PASOK) argued that they were the “faction that did the most” for the diaspora, evoking actions undertaken back in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Communist Party and the far-right Elliniki Lysi took diametrically opposed positions, with the former advocating for a restrictive conception of the expatriate electorate (those with genuine involvement in the country's politics and society), and the latter advocating for an expansive one, accusing the Communist Party of excluding “more than 85 percent [...] of real Greeks” (it is unclear where this number comes from).

The MPs of MeRA25 were the only ones who voted against the proposal on grounds that it was not going far enough, i.e. because according to them it barred large numbers of prospective voters from participation, hence rendering expatriate Greeks “second-class citizens”. Unlike Elliniki Lysi, however, the objections of MeRA25 were focused on the administrative and socio-economic exclusion of potential voters (e.g. the requirement of having submitted a tax declaration in Greece in order to be able to register).

After a lengthy debate about these particulars, the law was passed in a historic vote, which was exceptional in its unanimity: 288 of the 296 MPs voted in favor, seven against and one abstained.

Beyond the expatriate vote, the Nea Dimokratia government also devised a targeted repatriation program for emigrants. The project, branded ‘Rebrain Greece’, was introduced in 2019 by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The flagship action of the program is “Again Greece”, that aims to repatriate Greeks with high specialization and scientific experience, aged 28-40 years. These individuals are to be hired by private companies with a minimum monthly salary of 3,000€, 70 percent of which would be financed by the state, but the employees would commit to work for another 12 months in the company. Beyond this, ‘Rebrain Greece’ includes three other components: development of online platforms where prospective returnees and employers could register, setting up an advisory organization tasked with research and policy planning and a package of ‘smart actions’ of targeted public policies for the labor market, utilizing modern data visualization technologies and the principles of artificial intelligence (Nafthemboriki 2019).

A separate framework composed of governmental, legislative and administrative bodies is tasked with the engagement of the historic Greek diaspora. These include the World Council of Greeks Abroad, the World Hellenic Inter-Parliamentary Association and the General Secretariat of Hellenes Abroad within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Parliament has set up a Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad, whose stated aim is to identify the problems of Greeks abroad, to preserve the Greek language and disseminate philhellenism (Hellenic Parliament undated). This is indicative of the broader focus of such institutions; they are predominantly geared towards the preservation and promotion of Greek cultural identity through funding, organization of cultural events, conferences and scientific research in collaboration with the numerous organizations of Greeks abroad. Some attention has also been paid to the provision of economic support for return as well as the expansion of expatriate voting rights, but this has been much less emphasized than in the case of the new emigrants.

INFOBOX – Migration in times of the Corona pandemic
Like many countries around the world, Greece, too, imposed lockdown measures and travel restrictions aimed to prevent COVID-19 infections. Even though Greece avoided an uncontrolled spread of the virus and an overburdening of its medical system during spring 2020 due to early preventive action, the easing of travel restrictions in the holiday season led to a considerable increase in the number of detected cases.

The mobility of Greek citizens to and from Greece has also been dramatically reduced, especially in March and April of 2020, but limitations were progressively relaxed starting in May. As Europe became the epicenter of the global pandemic, the Greek government suspended travel from several countries, within and outside the EU. A small number of repatriation flights from the UK, Italy, Spain and other countries were organized, but repatriations were limited to cases deemed urgent, e.g. citizens with health problems or terminated apartment leases. These operations and the sporadic discontent expressed by emigrants wishing to return to Greece but unable to do so gained considerable visibility in Greek media.

There has always been a significant risk that the virus would spread in Greece’s refugee camps, exacerbated by the prevalence of unsanitary conditions, overcrowding and lack of medical resources. In early September 2020, several cases of COVID-19 were detected in Moria, the largest refugee camp in the country at the time. A few days later the camp was completely destroyed in a fire, reportedly set by residents protesting strict isolation measures imposed by the Greek government to contain the virus. After the fire, refugees were stranded on the island of Lesbos, because of the government’s fear that, if transferred to mainland Greece, they could “end up infecting others” (Al Jazeera 2020).

Even prior to this incident, the Greek government’s approach was to limit physical movement as much as possible, quarantining thousands of people in the camps and taking the incidence of COVID-19 cases as a pretext to revive older plans to further isolate refugees. The government also applied stricter external border checks of new arrivals from Turkey with assistance from FRONTEX.

OUTLOOK
While Greece’s old diaspora has always been a background issue in Greek politics, the more recent exodus that accompanied the economic crisis became politicized starting in 2015. Indicative of the increased importance of the issue of emigration was the passage of a historic law in December 2019 which allowed expatriate Greeks to vote from abroad. The law has opened a new chapter in Greek electoral politics, as contenders will have to devise new strategies to capture the expatriate vote in the next general election campaign.

Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether targeted return policies, such as the one instituted recently by the Nea Dimokratia government, will have any substantive effects. It seems unlikely that such measures can effectively tackle the deeper drivers of emigration, such as persisting social and political ills as well as imbalances within the EU Single Market. As Greece’s already fragile economy is expected to deteriorate in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, emigration is likely to persist.
4 HUNGARY

Summary

Emigration from Hungary has grown rapidly from 2011 onwards. The socio-economic factors that motivate labor-related emigration persist, while migration networks are continuously strengthening, and a culture of emigration is taking hold.

Emigration has become an important political issue and an area of public policy intervention. It is frequently discussed in parliament, and it is also part of the broader public discourse. The Fidesz-led government is the primary target of criticism for persistently high emigration rates.

Emigration is typically viewed as a negative phenomenon, affecting mainly the young and the economically active. The focus is on the dire circumstances in which people find themselves and which push them away in search of better living and employment conditions.

Fidesz-led governments have made some attempts to stem the tide of emigration and/or incentivize return with the introduction of targeted policies, but with little notable success. The main strategy has been to de-emphasize the issue as much as possible, while drawing attention to the alleged “danger” of incoming migration instead.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

The estimated number of recent Hungarian emigrants is half a million. The bulk of this movement has taken place for work purposes within the EU single market. The major destination countries of Hungarian movers are Germany, Austria and the UK. Other destinations attracting a significant share are Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy.

During state socialism, international migration from and to Hungary was strictly controlled and limited in number. A wave of politically motivated emigration followed the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 against the Communist puppet government and the USSR, when approximately 200,000 refugees fled to the West. Emigration from the country was continuous after that, though its volume was small, with an average annual migration loss of less than 3,000 people. After the regime change in 1989, the heavy political control over mobility was lifted. Nonetheless, there was only a small increase in the rate of emigration in the 1990s, while many of those who had gone abroad returned. The still relatively high levels of social expenditure, lack of foreign language skills, and low desire to relocate even within state borders, delayed large-scale emigration until the 2010s, when the trend belatedly picked up. A crucial juncture was that in 2011 the 7-year restrictions on labor mobility imposed by the majority of old EU member states on new EU countries’ citizens were lifted. While beforehand only the UK, Ireland and Sweden had opened their labor markets to Eastern European citizens, freedom of movement within the EU was now unlimited.1

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1 This section is based on Gódi et al. 2013.
THE EFFECTS OF EMIGRATION

EMIGRANT PROFILES

After 2011 emigration from Hungary picked up, even though the country still ranks relatively low compared to its neighbors regarding the net rate of emigration in the economically active age brackets (Hárs 2018). This was approximately 5 percent in 2017, while, by way of comparison, it was more than 17 percent in Romania (Hárs 2018: 84). However, Hungary has one of the highest emigration growth rates in the EU, which suggests that the country is quickly catching up (Báldi). Hungarian emigrants tend to be relatively young and skilled, with the majority holding secondary-level qualifications. After 2011, the emigration rate of people with a low level of education increased, but only slightly (Hárs 2018: 84-85). Human capital flight from Hungary is particularly pronounced: a larger proportion of tertiary graduates emigrate compared to all other educational categories, and the rate is also among the highest recorded in the region (Hárs 2018: 86).

A closer look at the profiles of labor migrants in the period of accelerated emigration from Hungary (2011-2016) reveals a number of patterns: the emigration rate is the highest among employed people under the age of 30, those holding a high school diploma, and those who had still been studying in the year prior to emigration (Hárs/Simony 2017: 96). While the proportions are similar, the profiles of emigrants differ according to the destination country: those who had experienced unemployment in the year prior to emigration and had lower educational qualifications chose Germany in larger numbers; those who were still in school a year prior to emigration and possessed higher educational qualifications chose the UK in larger numbers (Hárs 2018: 91). Emigration, especially if it takes place within the EU’s single market, is not necessarily one-way or permanent: some emigrants return and/or go abroad again in a circular fashion. Return rates are higher from Germany than from the UK and Austria, where, due to geographic proximity, commuting is also prominent; women return less than men and so do younger people (Hárs 2018: 91-92).

The Effects of Emigration

Emigration is linked to labor shortages and this impact is strongest in low value chain sectors, including hospitality, construction and the processing industry (Hárs 2018: 93). Also particularly affected is the health sector, where emigration exacerbates acute labor shortages (Hárs 2018: 93). Modest wage increases have been ineffective in reversing these trends (Hárs 2018: 94). Remittances partly compensate for some of the adverse effects related to emigration. Recent data put the share of remittances at 2.6 percent of the GDP, which is quite high and on a par with the broader regional trend.

Willingness to emigrate from Hungary has followed an upward trend that predates EU accession (Bláskó et al. 2014: 352). In the 1990s only 5–6 percent of the population planned to emigrate, but this proportion had doubled by 2001, and tripled by 2011 (Mikó 2019: 252). Migration intentions are high among men, secondary school graduates, the unemployed and especially students under 18 (Mikó 2019: 252). A recent survey found a large proportion of secondary and tertiary students intend to go abroad for study and/or work, citing a variety of reasons, such as a lack of job opportunities and precarious jobs in Hungary, the intention to learn a language, but also a desire for adventure (Mikó 2019).

Emigration occurs and is evaluated in the broader demographic context of Hungary. It is seen as exacerbating already low rates of natural reproduction among the majority Hungarian population. The World Bank currently records a fertility rate of 1.5 births per woman, which is, in fact, a relative improvement since 2011, when fertility reached a historic low point at 1.23 births per woman. In addition to the numerical decline, the population is also aging with the elderly (over 65) outnumbering the young. The share of economically active people is declining, while the old-age dependency ratio is increasing, a trend that foreshadows economic, social and fiscal difficulties for the longer term.

Regarding its ethnic composition, Hungary is a fairly homogenous state, with a small share of autochthonous national minorities (mainly German) and a relatively large Roma population. The 2011 census recorded 316,000 Roma, even though estimates put their actual number as high as 800,000 (Minority Rights Group International 2018). Not only is the Roma minority subjected to racist exclusion and violence, but also higher natural reproduction rates among this population group are routinely cast as a cause for alarm, especially (but not only) by the Hungarian far right. It should be noted, however, that migration intentions among the Roma are slightly lower than among the non-Roma population, which goes contrary to the regional trend (Duval/Wolff 2016). Hungary’s EU accession has made it more difficult for the Roma to apply for refugee status, which was quite frequent before-hand; there have also been some instances of forced repatriation of Roma from more affluent EU countries back to Hungary (Hárs 2009).

Another phenomenon meriting attention in the Hungarian context is the migration undertaken by ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring states. The so-called “transborder Hungarians” constitute one of the largest national minorities in Europe (approximately 2 million people), whose origin goes back to the First World War, when Hungary lost about two thirds of its territory along with an estimated 3 million ethnic Hungarians, who found themselves outside of the redrawn state borders (The Columbia Encyclopedia 2020).

EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Keyword-based analysis of parliamentary debates reveals that the political salience of emigration has grown considerably from 2010 onwards, while prior to Hungary’s EU accession emigration was rarely mentioned (Figure 1). This rise coincided with two developments: on the one hand, an increase in emigration rates, and on the other hand, the entry of the far-right party, Jobbik, into the Hungarian parliament. Jobbik MPs made the most references to emigration in their speeches, blaming the government for the soaring numbers and warning of the dire socio-economic and demographic “danger” posed by emigration. Prior to 2010, emigration was often mentioned in relation to in-
EMIGRATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

HUNGARY

Fig. 1: Relevance of emigration in the Hungarian parliamentary debates / number of mentions (2000-2019)

Source: Hungarian National Assembly, Minutes of the Plenary Sessions / own representation

EMIGRANT IMAGE: YOUNG, SKILLED, HARD-WORKING

Internal movement (i.e. relocation from the countryside to the cities) and the transborder Hungarian communities. The latter became particularly salient in 2004 due to a referendum that took place in the same year. Fidesz, which was the largest opposition party at the time, initiated the referendum, asking voters whether ethnic Hungarians residing in neighboring countries should be granted dual citizenship. Even though the "yes" option won, the referendum failed because of low turnout. One point of disagreement between the Socialist-led government and the opposition was the extent to which dual citizenship would incentivize the relocation of members of the Hungarian diaspora communities towards their homeland or other EU member states, eventually leading to the disappearance of these ethnic communities. The precondition with the survival of the Hungarian transborder minority continues to be a dominant dimension of diaspora-policy and discourse to this day.

The concern about the endurance of the diasporic communities reveals a general tendency to depict emigration as an overwhelmingly negative phenomenon. This evaluation reflects a sedentary bias; i.e. the reification of the link between people and their place of origin, which renders emigration as a deviation from the natural (and desirable) state of affairs.

Accordingly, parliamentary speeches tend to emphasize the negative socio-economic causes and consequences of emigration, also linking it to ad hoc events. This de-emphasizing strategy on the part of Fidesz and vocal criticism on the part of the opposition parties often refer to the issue of emigration to articulate a broader anti-government critique. Emigration stands as the epitome of the failure of Fidesz-led governments to ensure adequate living and working conditions for their citizens, pushing them away from their homeland in a process that is painful for both those who go and those who stay, and which is especially deleterious for a national-populist government like Fidesz-KDNP. As the opposition MP Tímea Szabó (Párbeszéd) explains:

"You know, fellow Members of Parliament, [...] children are born in countries where it is good to live. Where it is not good to live, no children are born [...] The declining birth rate shows this, and so do the embarrassing emigration figures. 600,000 people, 600,000 adults of childbearing age went abroad from Hungary because they do not see the possibilities of having children or making a living at home." (Hungarian National Assembly, Plenary Session, June 4th, 2018)

The government’s response has been to dispute the statistics, or to downplay the adverse effects of emigration, arguing for example that many of the emigrants later return or pointing out that Hungary still ranks lower in emigration rates than other neighboring countries. The overall tactic is to simply de-emphasize the issue of emigration altogether, which is why Fidesz politicians rarely mention it unprompted.

This de-emphasizing strategy on the part of Fidesz and vocal criticism on the part of the opposition in relation to emigration also prevailed in the context of the two most recent elections held in Hungary, the 2018 general elections and the 2019 European Parliament elections. All of the major opposition parties stood a realistic chance of winning mandates in at least one of these polls, which grants later return or pointing out that Hungary still ranks lower in emigration rates than other neighboring countries the overall tactic is to simply de-emphasize the issue of emigration altogether, which is why Fidesz politicians rarely mention it unprompted.

The last electoral manifesto published by Fidesz, which runs in permanent alliance with the Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP, Christian Democratic People’s Party), was in 2010 and since then the party has virtually stopped publishing programmatic documents. As a substitute, it is worthwhile to look at the content published on the official website of the Hungarian government in 2018 and 2019 retrieved via a keyword search (www.kormany.hu). Among other things, the website contains reports of events in which government officials participate, press conferences and transcripts of speeches.

A simple search of the keywords “emigration” and “immigration” turns up ten times more content for the latter than for the former: 1 106 entries related to “immigration” as opposed to 102 for “emigration.” Looking closer at the arti-

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2 In Hungarian two slightly different words are used interchangeably to convey the meaning of “emigration”: kivándorlás, which literally translates to “outmigration,” i.e. exiting the country, and eldöntés, which means moving away from one’s place of residence to a destination located both within and beyond the national borders.

3 The keyword search was conducted in the online repository containing the minutes of the plenary sessions of the Hungarian national assembly (available online at https://www.parlament.hu/). The unit of observation was the parliamentary debate. This is a crude measure of salience, since such counting only considers mention, i.e. we do not know if an MP mentioned it only once or on several occasions. Note that the search functionality identifies not only the stems but also the conjugated forms of words.

4 This concept originates in the work of Lisa Malkki, see, e.g. Malkki 1993.
cles that contain the word “emigration” few of them actually address current Hungarian emigration. Many refer to emigration in the past, e.g. after 1956, or emigration affecting other countries. One of the most dominant topics is emigration from African or Middle Eastern countries towards Europe, that is, from the perspective of Hungary, incoming migration. Most of the entries that come up are related to the Hungarian government’s policy intended to “help” people who otherwise would emigrate from these less developed countries to instead stay put. The government devised this “alternative” approach to migration policy as a response to the European migration crisis and has advocated for it at the European level as well as establishing its own aid program. It is difficult to overlook the xenophobic principles underlying this policy: a fear of inundation and a claim of inherent incompatibility between ethnicities.

A second theme running through these entries is the emigration of trans-border Hungarians from their traditional places of residence and the government’s efforts to prevent it. Yet another theme is internal migration, i.e. movement from the countryside toward urban centers, which is also deemed undesirable and is tackled by policies such as the Hungarian Village Program. In fact, the emigration of Hungarians from Hungary is rarely ever mentioned, and if it is, this is only to declare that the government’s efforts to reverse the trend “are working.”

All major Hungarian parties provide very detailed policy proposals about emigration in their 2018 and 2019 programs; though they do so in different ways. Doubtlessly, the far-right Jobbik is the most fervent critic of the emigration of Hungarians, often using alarmist language and the tropes of organic nationalism. For example, the 2018 Jobbik party program describes the problem of emigration as follows:

“The astonishing erosion has begun in the deep tissues of society, culminating in a spike in emigration, a demographic catastrophe, and a sense of almost complete hopelessness.” (Jobbik 2018: 11)

Our Homeland, a splinter from Jobbik, uses almost identical language in its description of the problem: “This phenomenon is causing the Hungarian economy to lose billions and is preparing a demographic catastrophe.” The party program contains virulently Islamophobic and anti-Roma segments, which are part of an all-encompassing “demographic panic.” The idea that Western European economies are luring in and exploiting Eastern Europe workers, i.e. an intra-EU fight for human resources between the various nations, also features prominently.

Further to the left, LMP, DK and MSZP define emigration as a socio-economic problem which can be solved with wage increases and/or social policy measures, both national and pan-European. Momentum’s program stands out in that it is the only one that mentions the potential positive aspects of emigration:

“Emigration is not the problem; returnees with knowledge gained abroad could make a major contribution to boosting the country. The problem is that Hungarians studying or working abroad never come back. If they or their children lose contact with Hungary, they lose their Hungarian self-consciousness. The Hungarians must adapt to the situation: we must become a World nation. We need to lay the foundations for a diaspora strategy that meets the requirements of the 21st century.”

5 The programmatic documents analyzed in this section were retrieved from the parties’ official websites.

6 This term originates from the work of Ivan Krastev (2016).

Accordingly, the party proposes not only measures for preventing or reversing emigration but also ways in which the links between emigrants (as well as the historic diaspora living in Hungary’s neighborhood) and the Hungarian state can be preserved and strengthened, putting forth the ideal of a new type of national identity, that is not eradicaded but rather transformed by the experience of mobility.

Beyond the sphere of politics, emigration has become a major issue in the Hungarian media, too, reaching its peak in 2016. A separate keyword search in Magyar Narancs (“Hungarian Orange”), a liberal political and cultural weekly, reveals that the number of articles mentioning emigration steadily rose, also after 2016 (Figure 4).
What are these articles about? Many of them present emigration-related facts and statistics, including the results of public opinion polls and academic research. Others seek to capture the human face of emigration in social interest stories examining the experience of migration. These stories present a more complex picture of emigration than the political discourse does, bringing the element of individual choices and motivations into the discussion. A recurring theme is that of the loss experienced in the families of emigrants, such as the article titled “The hug is gone,” the stories of mothers left behind” (Nők Lapja 2020) which broaches the issue of the complex feelings of parents of emigrants, such as guilt and worry, but also pride because of their children’s success abroad. Another typical theme is the migration intentions and/or experiences of young Hungarians (Magyar Narancs 2016).

The media also report on various public opinion surveys conducted among Hungarians related to the issue of emigration. A widely-cited survey has shown that the Hungarian public is more preoccupied with emigration than with immigration: 39 percent of Hungarians worry about emigration, 20 percent about immigration and 34 percent about both (Krastev/Leonard/Dennison 2019). Moreover, the perception that the political leadership should be blamed for emigration is widespread among the majority of the Hungarian public. An opinion poll conducted in 2018 shows that nobody receives more blame for the exodus than the Hungarian government, and/or Prime Minister Viktor Orbán personally (blamed by 24 percent of all respondents, with multiple choices allowed) (Publicus Research 2018). It is notable that 9 percent blame the previous Socialist government, even though the latter hasn’t governed for more than a decade. On the whole, people blame emigration on political factors (government record, bad political mood, corruption) and economic factors (low wages, not enough jobs) to an equal extent. The survey did not explicitly ask about the role the EU may play as a pull-factor. On average, Hungarians have been among the “cheerleaders” of freedom of movement within the Single Market, but the tide may now be turning. Indicatively, when explicitly asked about it, every second person is in favor of emigration controls, i.e. measures introduced in order to inhibit the outward movement of fellow citizens for extended periods of time (Krastev/Leonard/Dennison 2019).

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Hungarian government has sought to downplay the phenomenon of Hungarian emigration focusing instead on anti-immigrant fearmongering. The Hungarian government also strictly differentiates between the outward migration of Hungarians and the inward migration of third country nationals. An example of this separate treatment was the insistence of the Fidesz government that Hungarian movers working in the EU single market did not constitute and should not be labeled as “immigrants.” This was in response to increasing opposition to intra-EU free movement in pre-Brexit Britain, which had a particularly anti-East-Central European edge. In July 2015 the Hungarian Secretary of State for EU Affairs expressed his satisfaction that due to the Hungarian government’s insistence “a Romanian or Hungarian citizen working in England will no longer be mentioned on the same page as African immigrants” (Hungarian Government 2015a). This discourse is part of a broader strategy to sideline the fact of Hungarian emigration and to frame migration “as something that comes only outside of Europe” (Waterbury 2020: 1).

Conversely, among the Hungarian progressive opposition and civil society circles, it has become customary to link the critique of the government’s virulently anti-immigrant stance to the emigration of Hungarians from the country. This usually takes the following form: the government launches an attack against immigrants, immigrant rights organizations or the supposedly “pro-migrant” EU to which the opposition responds by pointing out that plenty of Hungarians also live as migrants, calling out what they see as an arbitrary distinction between various forms of mobility, and/or calling out the government for fearmongering and setting the wrong priorities.

For example, in the summer of 2018, the spokesperson and the youth organization of the KDNP (Fidesz’s satellite), undertook a smear campaign against

**Fig. 3: Frequency of articles mentioning various migration-related keywords. Economic news service of the Hungarian News Agency, 2001-2019**

- emigrants
- cross-border Hungary
- immigrants
- refugee

**Fig. 4: Frequency of articles mentioning emigration, Magyar Narancs, 2010-2019**
Amnesty International and another organization assisting migrants, marking their entrances with stickers that read “Immigration Support Organization” meant as an insult. Critics reacted with gluing their own sticker on a Fidesz office in the capital reading “Emigration Support Organization.” In another instance, a centrist party advocating for political renewal and a regular organizer of anti-government protests, launched a so-called “reality campaign” as a response to the government’s “information campaign,” which attacked European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Hungarian-American businessman George Soros, accusing “Brussels” of allegedly imposing migrants on the member states. Momentum prepared large stickers that would partly cover the government ads, including one that read: “Every sixth Hungarian child is born abroad. We shouldn’t give up our future!” On its Instagram page, the party argued that “in our opinion, the biggest threat is not the European Union or Soros, but low wages, labor shortages, emigration or even corruption!” (Momentum Mozgalom 2019). The issue of emigration has become a potent tool for creating a counter-narrative to the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee panic spread by the Fidesz-led government while also calling attention to the lack of regard for social justice and solidarity.

Tackling the issue of emigration is a complex task given that it is influenced by a large set of factors, including the socio-economic context in both the sending and the receiving states, as well as individual predispositions and agency. Accordingly, it is hard to tell what constitutes emigration policy as such: a host of economic and social policies can also be considered emigration policies, since improving people’s circumstances is thought to disincentivize emigration. Furthermore, emigration, despite being depicted as a negative phenomenon in political discourse, can in reality have macro-economic and political outcomes that probably work to the benefit of the government. Not only do remittances sent back home by emigrants increase the national income, but also some of the government’s challengers and critics go away too. This is particularly worrying in the context of Hungary’s steady democratic backsliding since 2010.

That being said, the Hungarian government has made some attempts to stem the tide of emigration, even though it is hard to judge whether these policies have had the intended effects. One long-standing but controversial policy which seeks to prevent emigration is the student contract, introduced in 2012. In a nutshell, in exchange for state-funded higher education, students commit to work in Hungary for at least twice their training period. If students fail to do so, they are obliged to pay back the full costs of their training. The policy is problematic in several respects: Conceptually, it is difficult to define what constitutes “state-funded” education given that, for instance, the EU also contributes to the costs of Hungarian higher education. From a practical perspective, the costs of administration and monitoring are high (Golovics 2015). More profoundly, however, the policy clearly undermines broad access to higher education while also hindering people’s freedom to seek employment in the EU (Szabó 2018).

A different program targeted those already abroad: Gyere haza fiatal (“Young, come home”) was introduced in 2015 with the stated aim to help Hungarian young people working in the UK in selected sectors to return home by providing housing and settlement support and a suitable job (Hungarian Government 2015b). Given its narrow focus, the program led to the return of a little more than 100 people and was discontinued in 2017 (Heti Világgazdáság 2016).

Sometimes it is suggested that the effects of outgoing migration (as well as declining fertility and aging population) can be compensated for by incoming migration. In the Hungarian context, the transborder diaspora has served as a reserve of migrant labor, despite the government’s stated aim of preserving these communities in their historic place of residence. Starting in 2017 the Hungarian government has encouraged the employment of foreigners from neighboring non-EU countries in predetermined occupations by applying simplified administrative procedures for the issuance of short-term work permits. However, the policy has only increased the employment of foreigners by a few thousand people (Putnoki 2017, cited in Hárs 2018: 98).

In Hungary such policies do not seem viable for two reasons. On the one hand, a country that successfully attracts workers from abroad is also able to keep its own, and one that is unable to keep its own, finds it difficult to attract foreigners too (Hárs 2018: 98). On the other hand, the Hungarian government has also made it clear that such “substitution” of Hungarians with migrants is not a desirable option. The idea that immigration would compensate population loss is completely rejected, and the intent of some Western European member states to stop population decline in this way is seen as a symptom of cultural and moral decline. As Orbán explains:

“We are living in times when fewer and fewer children are being born throughout Europe. People in the West are responding to this with immigration: they say that the shortfall should be made up by immigrants, and then the numbers will be in order. Hungarians see this in a different light. We do not need numbers, but Hungarian children. In our minds, immigration means surrender.” (Orbán 2019).

Proneatalism is a central pillar of the government’s population politics and has received much more attention than emigration. In the past few years, a comprehensive set of family policies was introduced, accompanied by a discourse that exalts the traditional family as the foundation of a well-ordered society.

The Hungarian government’s targeted emigration policies pale in comparison to the extensive diaspora policies that it has consistently advocated for post-2010. The political leadership has devised a wide-ranging strategy aiming to fortify the bonds between the diaspora and the homeland. Paramount among these has been the extension of political rights, including preferential naturalization of non-resident ethnic Hungarians. The policy tool-kit also includes a cultural revitalization program, projects aimed at the preservation of folk heritage, as well as funding Hungarian-language education, offering scholarship and exchange programs, among others (Herner-Kovács 2014).

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Hungary was reported on March 4th, 2020. The Hungarian government introduced social distancing measures analogous to the ones taken around the world, which were gradually lifted or reimposed as the epidemic situation improved or deteriorated. However, in a highly controversial move, the Hungarian government also declared a national emergency which lasted from March until June, 2020. The move was widely interpreted as an attempt to use the pandemic as a pretext to augment the government’s authoritarian tendencies.

Another peculiar feature of the Hungarian COVID-19 response was its explicitly anti-immigrant and especially anti-Iranian edge, which led to a minor diplomatic incident between the two countries (Radio Farda 2020). As early as March 1st, 2020 the Hungarian government indefinite-
Emigration rates from Hungary have trended upwards for the last decade. Despite some efforts to stem emigration, there is still a high number of Hungarians with the intention to emigrate, migration networks are strengthening and expanding, while the political and economic conditions in Hungary still leave much to be desired. The structural drivers of emigration remain, including the gaping inequality between the EU’s new and old member states. The COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating the vulnerability of Hungary’s economy. In this context, there is little chance that the rate of emigration from Hungary will significantly subside. In this context, there is little chance that the rate of emigration from Hungary will significantly subside.

OUTLOOK

Emigration rates from Hungary have trended upwards for the last decade. Despite some efforts to stem emigration, there is still a high number of Hungarians with the intention to emigrate, migration networks are strengthening and expanding, while the political and economic conditions in Hungary still leave much to be desired. The structural drivers of emigration remain, including the gaping inequality between the EU’s new and old member states. The COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating the vulnerability of Hungary’s economy. In this context, there is little chance that the rate of emigration from Hungary will significantly subside.

Large-scale emigration poses a particularly strong challenge to the legitimacy of Hungary’s national-populist government. This is duly exploited by opposition forces casting it as a glaring failure of the political leadership to provide even the most basic living and working conditions for ordinary Hungarians. The government, for its part, seeks to deemphasize Hungarian emigration focusing instead on the vilification of incoming migrants.

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Summary

Emigration from Italy has increased in recent years – in particular from northern Italy and the big cities. A similar development can also be observed with regard to internal migration: More and more people are migrating from southern to northern Italy. It is predominantly young and well-qualified people who are leaving the country. Over the long term the emigration of young Italians is contributing to the aging of the population.

The population is increasingly concerned about the high emigration rates: In a survey the respondents considered emigration to be an even bigger problem than immigration. In the media, however, the topic of immigration receives more coverage. The situation is similar in terms of political discourse: While emigration is mostly mentioned as an aside in party programs and parliamentary debates, immigration plays a more important role.

The topic of emigration is linked above all to socioeconomic problems in the political discourse. All parties have in common an emphasis on the positive role of the Italian communities abroad. Party political differences become visible above all with reference to the relationship between immigration and emigration: Right-wing populist parties link the problem of emigration with their criticism of immigration.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

The history of Italian emigration is closely linked with the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In this period (in particular between 1875 and 1928) emigration was at its peak and there were approximately 17 million emigrants. Around half of them moved to a Western or Northern European country, the other half emigrated to North and South America (Del Boca/Venturini 2003). A new wave of emigration began after the end of the Second World War, whereby the main destinations were first and foremost Northern and Western European countries. In the 1970s and 1980s the number of Italian emigrants decreased sharply as a result of the positive economic development in Italy (Bonifazi et al. 2009). At the same time there was strong growth in immigration to Italy, so that it gradually went from being an emigration country to an immigration country.

This development is evident in the net migration numbers which have been constantly positive since 2004 (see Figure 1). In spite of this, the number of registered emigrants has again risen somewhat since 2004: In 2004 that number was around 49,900, whereas ten years later already approximately 136,000 people left the country. The year 2016 marked the peak for the time being with 157,000 emigrants (Eurostat 2020a).  

As is the case in many other countries, in Italy the extent of emigration is calculated by means of the de-registrations of people in local registry offices (anagrafi). For the analysis of migration flows these data are essential; however, they also inevitably remain incomplete. They do not provide any information about non-registered emigration (Bonifazi et al. 2009). It is to be assumed that the actual emigration numbers are probably considerably higher.  

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The balance is negative when looking at the immigration and emigration of people with Italian citizenship: According to government data, from 1999 to 2008 around 428,000 people emigrated, while only 380,000 people newly registered their place of residence in Italy (ISTAT 2019: 2). Between 2009 and 2018 even as many as 816,000 Italians emigrated – and only 333,000 moved back to Italy in that time (Figure 2). The sinking willingness to return can be interpreted as an indication of Italy’s persistent economic weakness.

Not all people who turn their back on Italy possess Italian citizenship. Among them are also many people who once came to Italy as immigrants and who are returning to their home countries. In 2018, according to official statistics they accounted for a share of 26 percent (of a total 157,000). In addition, there are Italian citizens who were born abroad. They make up approximately 30 percent of the total emigration flow. A third of them were born in Brazil, 10 percent in Morocco and 6 percent in Germany (ISTAT 2019: 3). Thus, more than half of those who emigrated from Italy either had a migrant background or did not have Italian citizenship.

Italian men are a little more likely to emigrate than women: The proportion of men is 56 percent (ISTAT 2019: 4) which is roughly the same as for other Mediterranean countries. Young people in particular are increasingly leaving the country: As Figure 3 illustrates, in 2018 those who emigrated were above all people from the age groups 25 to 34 (just under 50,000) and 35 to 44 (approximately 30,500). In contrast to earlier phases of emigration, today most people who leave the country are well- or very well-educated. In 2018 half of them had a school-leaving qualification (33,000) or university degree (29,000). The proportion of qualified emigration has risen by a further 45 percent in the last five years (ISTAT 2019: 4). For Italy the consequence of this development is that investments in education are increasingly being lost to countries abroad.

There is no precise definition of ‘qualified emigration’ in Italy. In general it is used to mean both those persons who have a university degree and also other workers with professional expertise.

EMIGRATION IS OFTEN RETURN MIGRATION

Country Factsheet

GDP per capita: 26,860 €

EU accession year: 1957

Population in 2019: 60,360,000
Population in 1990: 56,690,000
Population projection for 2060: 55,989,561

Share of foreign citizens: 8.7%
Population born abroad: 10.4%
Young population: 15% (EU average: 15.2%)
Working age population: 64%
Elderly population: 22.8% (EU average: 20.7%)
Fertility rate: 1.29 (EU average: 1.58)

Fig. 1: Population development and annual migration rates

Fig. 2: Population development and annual migration rates for Italian citizens

Fig. 3: Emigration from Italy according to age (2018)
In 2018 Great Britain was the most important destination country (Figure 4). From 2009 to 2018 the Italian emigration to the United Kingdom quadrupled (from 5,000 to 21,000 per year). The peak was reached in 2016, when 25,000 Italian citizens living in Great Britain registered their place of residence there as a result of Brexit. The country ranked second is Germany (18,000) ahead of France (14,000), Switzerland (10,000) and Spain (7,000). These five countries account for around 60 percent of all emigrants. Among the non-European countries, the most frequent destinations are Brazil, the USA, Australia and Canada (ISTAT 2019: 3).

Unlike in earlier emigration waves, the majority of Italian emigration no longer comes from the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy), but from the north. A look at the official statistics from 2018 shows Lombardy (22,000) and Veneto (11,000) at the top of the list. The most striking geographical features below the level of regions are related to the difference between areas with urban or rural character: Especially the large cities exhibit a high volume of out-migration. Besides Rome (8,000) and Milan (6,500) these include in particular also Turin (4,000) and Naples (3,500) (ISTAT 2019).

A central reason for the emigration is the poor employment and career prospects in Italy. This is also confirmed by surveys. In 2018 44 percent of respondents explained that they had left Italy in order to “find better employment opportunities”, while 38 percent justified their emigration by declaring that they saw “no future” in Italy. A central role, however, is also played by educational opportunities: In the same year 44 percent of respondents explained that they had left Italy “in order to get a better education” (Enriquez/Romera 2019).

The emigration of young people contributes to the aging of the population: According to a forecast the average age in Italy will climb from 44.9 to over 50 by 2065 (ISTAT 2018a). Emigration also causes negative impacts due to the significant loss of highly qualified personnel to foreign countries (‘brain drain’). In the last ten years almost 182,000 people with university degrees have left Italy (ISTAT 2019). In terms of demographics there is however a positive side to the migration situation: According to a projection, in the coming years the anticipated negative birth rate in the country (-200,000) will be offset by the positive net migration rate. In concrete terms, this means that immigration will compensate for the population decline.4

Until the 1990s the domestic migration flow from southern Italy to the industrial regions in the North of the country was the dominant topic in Italian migration discourse. The topic never completely disappeared from public consciousness however it was overshadowed by the topics of emigration and, above all, immigration. Now there are again signs of a trend reversal. Recent confirmation of this is the once again high number of changes of place of residence from southern to northern Italy (Figure 5): In 2017, for example, almost 110,000 people migrated to northern and central Italy, yet only 60,000 to southern Italy (ISTAT 2018b).

Based on current projections the population in southern Italy will shrink by about 5 million people in the next fifty years (whereas for the rest of the country an absolute decline in the population of only 1.5 million is expected; Svilmez 2019). A consequence of this is the aging of the southern regions, whose populations will be one of the oldest in Europe in the coming decades.5

INFOBOX – The ‘Italian diaspora’

‘Italian diaspora’ is a term mostly used in reference to two large waves of emigration in the last two centuries. The first diaspora began after the unification of Italy in 1861 and continued until the rise of fascism in the 1920s. Particularly relevant was the period from 1861 until the First World War (also called the ‘Great Emigration’), when approximately 14 million people left the country. However, only 5 million remained abroad long term. A look at the regional distribution of the regions of origin reveals a clearly discernable pattern: Emigrants from northern Italy primarily headed to Central

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4 The Italians living abroad transfer comparatively little money to Italy. In 2019 they transferred considerably less (0.5 billion euro) than the foreigners living in Italy (6.1 billion) (Corallo/De Pilo 2020).

5 The migration from southern Italy to northern Italy is mainly linked to socioeconomic issues. The most industrialized and richest parts of the country are still to be found in northern Italy to this day, whereas the most underdeveloped areas are to be found in the south. This also results in the high youth unemployment rate in the southern regions. In 2019 it reached 22 percent (ISTAT 2020).

6 Although the term ‘Italian diaspora’ was coined in reference to this time period, today it is colloquially used in a more general way to denote the large share of (groups of) people with Italian migrant background abroad.
European countries. 90 percent of the emigrants from southern Italy, on the other hand, emigrated to the USA, Argentina or Brazil (Nobile 2005).

The second diaspora took place between 1945 and the 1970s. In the 1950s in particular the net migration was clearly negative, -163,000. Many Italians moved to Germany as 'guest workers' after the conclusion of a labor recruitment agreement. However, many Italians also settled in other European countries (like Belgium, Switzerland and France). At the same time the emigration overseas also rose. Particularly South American countries like Argentina and Venezuela were the main destinations.

Today the highest numbers of emigrants registered in the A.I.R.E. 7 are to be found in Argentina (842,000), Germany (764,000) and Switzerland (623,000) (Fondazione Migrantes 2019). However, the USA remains highly significant: In 2019 there were approximately 272,000 people officially registered there as Italian citizens; however, in addition, approximately 17 million people who have Italian roots or ancestry live in the country.

EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

In the Italian population emigration is largely perceived as a problem: According to a survey, in 2019, 50 percent of the respondents were in favor of introducing measures which reduce emigration. It is only in Spain (63 percent) and Greece (60 percent) that an even larger segment of the population shares this view. In addition, the respondents considered emigration to be an even bigger problem than immigration (Figure 6). In response to the question "Are you more worried about people who are immigrating to your country, or about your fellow citizens who are leaving the country?" 32 percent of the respondents answered with the latter option. In contrast, only 24 percent were more concerned about immigration. However, nearly every third respondent considered emigration and immigration to be equally concerning (Krstev et al. 2019; cf. also Fubini 2019).

The topic of emigration is present in the media, yet, in comparison to the topic of immigration (Figure 7) it is of much less relevance. Between 2010 and 2019 there were approximately 2,500 news articles related to emigration in the daily newspaper ‘La Repubblica’, whereas the number related to the topic of immigration was about 17,300 (Factiva 2020). This discrepancy is also apparent in the evening television news broadcasts in Italy: Between January and December 2019 emigration was the focus in only 0.02 percent of the contributions (Osservatorio di Pavia i.e.) 8

In parliamentary debates the topic of emigration ranks far behind the topic of immigration. A frequency analysis of the stenographic protocols of the Italian Chamber of Deputies shows that the relevance of the topic of emigration has remained at a stable low level over time. This is in contrast to the topic of immigration, which was frequently the focus of parliamentary debates particularly in the course of the ‘refugee crisis’. In 2018 and 2019 there were only just under 160 stenographic protocols related to the topic of emigration. Immigration, on the other hand, was referred to much more frequently (Figure 8).

A similar pattern is also recognizable in the Italian party programs. Sentences related to emigration were, for example, rare in the election program of the right-wing populist Lega in the year 2018 (0.8 percent). The topic of immigration, on the other hand, appeared much more often (Figure 9). In the other party programs, too, emigration is virtually absent. Solely the right-wing populist Fratelli d’Italia (1.9 percent of the words) paid somewhat more attention to emigration. Only the Partito Democratico paid a similar amount of attention to both topics (0.9 percent and 1.3 percent). 9

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7 The A.I.R.E. (Anagrafo Italiani residenti all’estero) is the residential register for Italian citizens who have their place of residence abroad.
8 Many thanks go to Stelle Paola Barretta, Associazione Carta di Roma and Osservatorio di Pavia.
9 Even in past Italian elections emigration barely played any role in the election programs of the different parties. Only the Partito Democratico devoted some space to the topic of ‘Italians abroad’ in its election programs in 2005 and 2008.
The Five Star Movement expressed itself similarly in a flyer for the 2019 European elections: “Stop brain drain. Let us keep our youth in Italy and let those who have left return” (Five Star Movement 2019a). Similarly to the Lega, the Five Star Movement sees emigration as “bleeding dry of resources” and as a loss of “social capital”.

However, a close look reveals some important differences between the parties: Whereas the Lega rather emphasizes the emigration of highly qualified people, the Five Star Movement focuses very strongly on the low-wage sector and acts primarily as a defender of the weaker sections of society.

Two of three young people decide to go abroad because they can even find low-skilled employment there more easily than in Italy. What’s more, this employment is also better paid. It applies to a large number of waiters, cooks, employees [. . .], who in their home country neither receive minimal welfare benefits nor an opportunity to pursue a career (Five Star Movement 2019b).

In addition, in the case of the Five Star Movement there is a clear link made between the topic of emigration and the populist narrative of the battle against corruption or the demand for ‘meritocracy’ (meritocracy). For example, Marco Fumagalli, a prominent representative of the movement in Lombardy, claimed that “people leave our country because a principle of merit does not exist [. . .and] you can only find a job by having some kind of connections” (Fumagalli 2019).

The biggest difference between the Italian parties becomes apparent in particular with respect to the connection made between emigration and immigration. The center-left parties and the Five Star Movement generally handle the topics of emigration and immigration separately, whereas a connection between the two is frequently made by the right-wing populist parties: In 2017, for example, the head of Lega, Matteo Salvini, declared that “the only immigration” that the Lega wants to promote is that of the “Italians, who were forced to flee abroad to secure their future” (Salvini 2017).

The history of Italian emigration after the Second World War is also used by right-wing parties in order to mark the difference between emigration and immigration: Since the Italian emigrants in the past had adapted to the rules of their host countries, today a stricter policy should be called for towards new arrivals in Italy, who have supposedly been treated too leniently in the past. The demand is connected with the typically right-wing populist attack on the ‘center-left elites’, with links made to the social democratic Partito Democratico in particular. For instance, in 2019, a Lega representative declared:

“Our emigrants had to adapt to their host countries in the post-war period. They had no demands, they were obedient and kept their heads down. In contrast, the immigrants were allowed everything when the Partito Democratico governed this country. (Bisa 2019)

Cultural frames – and in particular the portrayal of emigration as a cultural loss or as a crisis of the nation-state – play a lesser role in comparison to (socio-)economic aspects, yet not an insignificant one. All parties have in common that they emphasize the positive role of emigrants as ambassadors of Italian culture and traditions. An example of this is provided by the Partito Democratico, which described the Italian communities abroad as a "resource" in its 2008 election program and called for greater promotion of the Italian language and culture (Partito Democratico 2008). In 2013 it went further, describing the Italian communities as a “fundamental and essential part of the Partito Democratico”, that has contributed to the
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"economic and productive revival of Italy" (Partito Democratico 2018). A further example can be found in the election program of the Fratelli d’Italia, which emphasizes the important role of the Italian communities:

We demand more regard for the Italian communities abroad, the protection of Italianness in the world, which is also a valuable instrument that simplifies the diplomatic, economic and commercial relationships with other states (Fratelli d’Italia 2018).

The right-wing populist party Fratelli d’Italia also uses arguments which are recognizably ethno-nationalistic: In 2016, for example, the chairperson Giorgia Meloni linked emigration and immigration with reference to the conspiracist narrative of ‘replacement’.

The Italian governments have clearly shown that they do not care that Italians are leaving their country. They can replace Italians with immigrants anyway (Meloni 2016).

INFOBOX - The political rights of Italians living abroad

The right to vote for Italians living abroad is guaranteed in the Italian constitution. However, for a long time severe restrictions existed for Italian citizens abroad. Particularly problematic, for example, was that they had to return to their Italian municipalities of origin for the election. Electoral districts abroad were not introduced until the year 2000. Shortly thereafter the neo-fascist member of parliament Mirko Tremaglia published a new law (Legge Tremaglia), which provided for postal voting. In 2001 this law was passed. It also stipulates the amount of seats in parliament that are to be elected abroad: 12 out of 630 for the Chamber of Deputies and 6 of 315 for the senate. The new electoral law was first applied in the 2006 parliamentary elections. The votes from abroad provided the center-right alliance with a slim majority in the senate.

There were also attempts made at the regional level to 'lure' highly qualified emigrants to Italy. A prime example is the region of Umbria, which pursued the project ‘Brain Back Umbria’ in 2017 and 2018: This project, too, used tax relief as an incentive. In addition, returning researchers were promised a one-off financial support payment of 5,000 euro. Local governments also invested in order to get people to return: Milan, for example, made $10,000 euro available for the program "Welcome Talent", the goal of which was to promote economic projects.

INFOBOX - Migration in times of the Corona pandemic

Like in many other countries the Covid-19 crisis also temporarily led to a significant restriction of mobility in Italy. On January 31st, 2020 the Italian government declared a state of emergency. However, the most severe restrictions were not introduced until the beginning of March, when some northern Italian provinces – and above all Lombardy –, which had the highest registered number of infections, were isolated. Later a ban on leaving one's home was put in place for the whole of Italy, which forbade unnecessary travel in the entire territory, as well as public gatherings.

The possibility to travel abroad was also restricted. The first restrictive measure came at the end of January, when the government introduced a ban on flights to and from China. Shortly thereafter all air traffic nearly came to a standstill: Only a few airports remained open during the lockdown, in particular in order to enable the transport of medical goods. Checks were conducted at the borders to the neighboring countries.

From March until May 2020 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs carried out a large number of ‘return operations’: Around 78,000 Italians were brought back to Italy from 172 countries in this period. The majority of them were in Great Britain (33,000) and Spain (14,000). However, a significant number of people were also brought back from Australia (2,000), Albania (1,700), Romania (1,500) or Malta (1,200) (Pelosi 2020).

Aside from the points mentioned above, there was hardly any connection made between Covid-19 and the topic of emigration in the public debate. At the center of public attention in the Covid-19 crisis was immigration – once again and in particular the irregular migration via the Mediterranean route. The topic was instrumentalized primarily by the right-wing populists. In August 2020 Salvini criticized the arrival of approximately 250 people, who tested positive for Covid-19, and accused the government of endangering Italy with its migration policy.

OUTLOOK

Despite the predominantly negative consequences of emigration for the demographic development in the country the topic does not currently play a central role in the political discourse. This is certainly surprising, however it reflects the fact that the parties are largely in agreement in terms of their interpretation of the causes and consequences of emigration. Thus there can be no talk of polarization. There is also consensus about the positive role played by the Italian communities abroad. Hardly any party disputes that the diaspora performs the important function of imparting Italian culture.

However, the topic also contains potential for future conflict. It can be assumed, for instance, that in the future emigration will increasingly

For example, in 2012, the Monti government founded the online platform ‘Convergita’. The goal was to ‘optimize the effects of the Italian human capital abroad’ and to strengthen the ‘partnership’ of the Italians with their homeland. In addition, with the so-called ‘Decreto Salute’ in 2013 the Italian government made 3.5 million euro available for the strengthening of diplomatic structures in Great Britain and for the support of the Italians living there.

However, the project had little success: Of 50,000 researchers who were abroad only 466 returned.

A similar attempt was made in 2017: At that time a tax break was established for all persons with a university qualification who had worked or studied abroad for at least two years.

Like in many other countries the movement restrictions also had negative effects on seasonal work in Italy. Comprehensive measures were taken, however, in August 2020 some regulations were introduced to protect seasonal workers (key elements were, for example, a one-off financial ‘bonus’ of approximately 1,500 euro as well as tax relief for those employed in the tourism sector).
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be exploited by the Italian parties for the purpose of criticizing political opponents. In this context, for example, one can expect populist narratives to be spread, according to which emigration is interpreted as a consequence of ‘corrupt politics’ or a supposed lack of merit of the merit. The talk of ‘brain drain’ also provides opportunities to make a connection to criticism of the EU. Particularly right-wing populist parties could accuse the EU and individual EU member states like Germany of engaging in a form of plundering of human resources from the Italian labor market. In addition, emigration is likely to have a greater demographic impact in the coming years with a decrease in immigration from third countries. This could cause the salience and significance of the topic to increase once again - as recently in many Eastern European countries.
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ITALY


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Summary

Over the last two centuries the history of Poland has been intertwined with the topic of emigration. Particularly the accession to the EU led to a considerable acceleration of emigration, although this trend did slow down in recent years. Nevertheless, the number of people leaving the country remains high up to this day.

Polish emigrants are typically young but otherwise represent a cross-section of society. The main reason for emigration is their search for work, particularly amongst those whose destination is Western Europe.

To this day the topic of emigration has retained higher salience than immigration. Despite this the stances of the political parties only differ in nuances. Center and far-left primarily stress the importance of the individual right to free movement. On the other hand, right-wing parties frame emigration mostly in a negative way. To them, especially economic emigration is at odds with the citizens’ right to live and work in their own country.

Both maintaining good relations to the diaspora as well as improving the domestic living conditions in order to motivate return immigration are seen as the most important tasks of the state.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

Of the countries that joined the EU as part of the eastern expansion in 2004, Poland is the largest, with a population of 38 million. Over the last decade between 190,000 and 275,000 people left the country each year (Figure 1), which corresponds to an annual emigration of between 0.5 percent and 0.72 percent of the total population. However, it can be assumed that the actual numbers are even higher, as the Eurostat data only refer to permanent migration (i.e. for 12 months or longer) and thus do not take into account other, more short-term, forms of emigration.

Similar problems occur when estimating the number of immigrants. According to the data from Eurostat the figure for annual migration to Poland ranges between 155,000 and 222,000 (Figure 1). After adjusting for short-term and circular migration – the majority of the immigration to Poland – and making use of the data on registered employment of foreigners (Figure 2) the number of immigrants is probably around 4 percent of the current Polish population (and thus considerably higher than the figure of 0.76 percent determined by Eurostat). These numbers paint a peculiar image: On the one hand, the country has one of the largest emigrant populations in Europe and, at least from 1945 to 2000, one of the lowest shares of foreigners in the country (under 1 percent) – yet on the other hand, in recent years Poland has had one of the highest immigration rates among EU member states.

In the public discourse emigration is a topic of great importance to this day. The sheer number of emigrants alone makes this topic so explosive: it is estimated that today about 18 to 20 million people with Polish roots live
POLANDEMIGRATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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abroad (MSZ 2015). The Polish diaspora, called ‘Polonia’, is one of the largest in the world and its composition is rather diverse. It includes, inter alia, economic migrants and political refugees from the time of communism and their descendants. The ‘Polonia’ also includes those people who decided to stay in the former Eastern territories after the borders were adjusted in 1945 (i.e. in present-day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). Maintaining the relationships to the diaspora is one of the statutory tasks of the Senat (Dz. U. 2016 poz. 395).

A further reason for the great importance of the topic to this day is the lasting cultural and political impact of emigration. In particular, the so-called “Great Emigration” (wielka emigracja) from 1831 until the 1870s should be mentioned here. After the suppression of the November Uprising in 1831 this exodus included among others the composer Frederic Chopin and the national poets of Poland, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. It also heavily influenced the Polish era of Romanticism, considered to be the most important period for Polish literature and a significant part of the school curriculum to this day.

1

2

3

Since 1800 emigration has shaped Polish history and culture. The time of the communist regime from 1946 to 1989 produced several larger waves of emigration, which totaled 1.5 million people. After the fall of the Iron Curtain the migration only slowed down slightly, however it was mostly more short-term and predominantly seasonal work (cf. Stachowiak 2004: 216; all data from the statistical yearbooks). With Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 a veritable ‘migration fever’ broke out: approximately 1.5 to 2 million people left Poland within a year, most of them to Great Britain.

Today the vast majority of Polish migrants live in the European Union (about 2 million) whereby the largest populations are to be found in Germany, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Although there was no significant increase in immigration from Poland in the countries that brought in a transition period, many of the Polish migrants already living in these countries took the opportunity to change their legal status to that of an EU citizen, thereby securing a more stable residence permit.

Country Factsheet

GDP per capita: 28,516€
EU accession year: 2004
Population in 2019: 37,972,812
Population in 1990: 38,038,403
Population projection for 2060: 32,518,968
Share of foreign citizens: 0.76%
Young population: 15.2% (EU average: 15.2%)
Working age population: 67.6%
65 and older: 17.22% (EU average: 20.2%)
Fertility rate: 1.4 (EU average: 1.55)

A KEY TOPIC IN POLISH LITERATURE AND HISTORY

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SEVERAL WAVES OF EMIGRATION

1 This exodus included among others the composer Frederic Chopin and the national poets of Poland, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. It also heavily influenced the Polish era of Romanticism, considered to be the most important period for Polish literature and a significant part of the school curriculum to this day.

2 As a result, a large share of Poland’s most important cultural artefacts were created outside of the country’s borders. Even the national anthem of Poland was written in Italy, originally as a song of the Napoleonic Polish legions, and includes a passage about hopes of returning to Poland to re-join the nation.

3 Most EU countries decided to have a transition period and did not immediately open up their labor markets – with the exception of three countries: Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Although there was no significant increase in immigration from Poland in the countries that brought in a transition period, many of the Polish migrants already living in these countries took the opportunity to change their legal status to that of an EU citizen, thereby securing a more stable residence permit.

**Fig. 1: Yearly net migration rate and total population (2009-2018)**

**Fig. 2: Official declarations of the employment of foreigners (2009-2019)**

**Fig. 3: Largest populations of Polish citizens aboard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Size</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>706,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>695,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>123,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>113,000</td>
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Source: GUS (2019: 4) / own representation
the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Ireland (Figure 3). The Poles constitute the largest foreign population groups in Iceland, Ireland and Norway, and the second largest in Germany and the United Kingdom (Statistics Iceland 2020; Central Statistical Office of Ireland 2020: 50; Statistics Norway 2020: United Nations 2015; Statistisches Bundesamt 2017; Skandinavias Info 2016).

At present the typical Polish emigrant is rather young, is emigrating for economic reasons so for a relatively short period (i.e. for a couple of months or years). The young age of the emigrants is characteristic for the emigration wave after 2004. According to a survey, 74 percent of respondents answered in the negative when asked about an intention to emigrate - among the 18-24-year-old, in contrast, that figure was only 36 percent (CBOS 2018: 3). There are no significant differences with regard to occupation and gender, however it is noteworthy that most are childless at the time of emigrating (Bobrowska 2013: 55) – a pattern which can also be found among those who are at the very least considering emigration (Randstad 2019: 45). Furthermore, emigrants tend to be relatively well educated (according to Eurostat 49.8 percent of them possess a secondary school qualification and 29.1 percent have higher education). Not least there also seems to be a geographical component: Those most likely to emigrate are people from the structurally weak regions in the East of Poland, followed by the south- and northwest of the country. The prosperous central regions, in contrast, are the least impacted by emigration (CBOS 2013: 12).

In 2013 14 percent of Polish citizens worked abroad (CBOS 2013: 7). This figure rose to 20 percent by 2018 (CBOS 2018: 3). The Polish labor market seems to be one of the main reasons for emigration (GUS 2019: 1). According to a study by the Polish National Bank in 2018 (NBP 2019), although only 19 percent of the emigrants surveyed named unemployment as the reason for their departure, 46 percent said the salary was too low and 9 percent mentioned other kinds of work-related dissatisfaction.

In the year 2009 Poland had a positive net migration rate for the first time (taking into account short-term migration, which is not considered in Figure 1; GUS 2019) – which can be seen as the result of the combined effect of an overall slowdown in Polish emigration and an increase in immigration from Ukraine. However, the economic crisis and the euro crisis of the following years caused that number to slip back into negative territory; it was not until 2018 that it again became positive, once again due to the influx of Ukrainian workers. In 2018, in addition, the total number of Polish citizens living abroad fell for the first time – by 85,000, i.e. by 3 percent compared to 2017 (GUS 2019: 1). This could indicate a trend reversal with regard to return migration.

The society is divided with regard to the persistent emigration. On the one hand emigration is perceived as one of the country’s biggest problems: According to a survey 30 percent of the Polish respondents are more concerned about emigration than immigration, 27 percent are however more concerned about immigration and 30 percent considered both to be equally bad (Kraszewski et al. 2019). On the other hand, emigration is seen as an expression of personal freedom and as a legitimate means to improve one’s own standard of living (Work Service 2018: 16). The Poles value this freedom highly: The possibility to leave the country is at the top of the list of basic rights, which can probably also be attributed to the trauma of the restrictive travel policy of the communist regime.5

It is therefore not surprising that open borders within the Schengen area are viewed by the Poles as one of most important advantages of accession to the EU (CBOS 2019: 7) and it would be considered the most painful loss if the EU were to fall apart (Kraszewski/Ledniczer/Dennison 2019). Many actively use this freedom, among other things because it greatly simplifies settling abroad and reduces the administrative hurdles. This is also reflected in the preferred destinations of Polish migrants: 80 percent choose destinations in the EU and EEA (i.e. Norway, Iceland or Switzerland) over other countries.

Last but not least, both the population and the government seem to regard emigration as a kind of “safety valve” (wentyj bezpieczni\\u015b\\u0107), helping to reduce social tensions. In simply allowing the dissatisfied to leave, the government has found an easy way to avoid conflict. This effect became clearly visible in the context of the recent anti-LGBT rhetoric of the governing party: Many people belonging to sexual minorities decided to leave the country, attracting the attention of domestic and foreign media (z.B. Karpieszuk 2020; NBC News 2020).

EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Emigration is not a polarizing topic in the public discourse in Poland. Most social and political actors share a negative perception of the consequences of emigration. Moreover, they are in agreement that the economic causes need to be addressed. The need to slow emigration and promote return migration belong to the so-called ‘valence issues’ (Stokes 1963) in Poland, i.e. issues that all political parties largely agree on without differing in their general assessment of the problem. As a rule, emigration is a cutting issue because it worsens the social problems in other areas, e.g. the emigration of medical staff intensifies the crisis in the health system, and the emigration of people of reproductive age deepens Poland’s demographic crisis. The last time emigration was at the center of political debate was during the parliamentary elections in 2007, when as many as two million people emigrated after Poland joined the EU (Lesińska 2015: 19). After this tendency later slowed down, the issue lost its perceived urgency and instead once again became more of a latent problem. Nonetheless it has remained present in the media to a certain extent – in recent years it even seems to be more salient than in 2007 (Figure 4).

Although there is broad consensus regarding the nature of the problem as well its causes and consequences, the question as to what should be the political response, however, causes considerable conflict at times: The opposition often instrumentalizes emigration in order to criticize the government and its – actual or alleged – inability to eliminate the causes. In the meantime, the governing parties portray themselves as dealing with the problem with due care and attention. For example, when the party “Law and Justice” (PiS) was in the opposition, it questioned the effectiveness of the political suggestions made by the Civic Platform-led government:

5 Back then, Polish citizens were not allowed to emigrate or to travel freely. Nor were they allowed to even keep their passports at home; passports had to be applied for before every journey and it was at the state’s discretion as to whether travelling documents would be granted to the citizen in question, which, unsurprisingly, was used to harass dissidents. For this reason, any policy proposals curbing the ease of emigration today would be condemned as a brutal attack on personal freedoms. Polish citizens expect to be allowed to move across borders freely. Thus, the closing of borders due to the outbreak of the coronavirus in spring 2020 was the only measure to lead to loud protests on both the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders (PrasaRozle 2020).
“No less than 75 percent of those who wish to leave are young, under 35 years of age. Our countrymen who go abroad are even better educated, it is no longer emigration to then work as a dishwasher. Now, nurses, engineers and builders are declaring their willingness to leave Poland. I have the impression that the government does not notice this problem: the government does not notice that the mass emigration of young people causes a rapid aging of the population, and thus threatens to slow down the already poor economic growth, and cause a collapse of the pension system” (Małgorzata Sadowska, a PiS MP, during a parliamentary debate on May 14th, 2015).

Since the PiS party took power, however, it in turn has been criticized by its political opponents of undermining the underlying causes of emigration quickly or comprehensively enough, for example, when the Left held the PiS government responsible for failing to solve the issue of the precarious employment conditions of young people:

“Research shows that young people decide to emigrate due to the lack of housing, lack of stable work and a lack of a sense of security. (...) In 2015, PiS announced the liquidation of junk contracts. When is the government going to deliver on this promise?” (Marcellina Zawisza, MP, during a parliamentary debate on January 8th, 2020)

Interestingly, the right to emigrate as such is not questioned by the political actors. The possibility to emigrate is unanimously recognized as legitimate and as an important cornerstone of the democratic transformation of 1989 and the accession to the European Union in 2004. President Bronisław Komorowski clarified this ambivalence in a radio interview in 2015, when he said it was important

“That people do not leave because they have no opportunities in Poland. The fact that they are leaving and looking for better conditions somewhere is a gain of freedom. So no one should forbid anyone from leaving, but it would be good for young Poles (...) to have opportunities in Poland.” (Website of the President of Poland 2015)

Here certain differences between the political blocs in terms of argumentation are also becoming visible. For the political center and the Left, emigration is not only something negative. They also recognize a positive dimension, as it can be a decision to emigrate for something, such as another culture, a more open and modern society, a more progressive legal order. They thereby underline the demand that nobody should feel as another culture, a more open and modern society, a more progressive legal order. They thereby underline the demand that nobody should feel the need to emigrate due to discrimination or social pressure (cf. Karpieszuk 2020). The transformation of Poland into a modern, European country where people want to live is seen to be just as important as the development of the economy. For the political right, on the other hand, the task with regard to emigration is first and foremost combating the negative consequences of limited economic opportunities so that people are not “forced” to leave their country and their culture in search of financial stability. Even in the context of the most urgent problem at present, the shortage of skilled labor in medical professions – which could cause a collapse of the health system within a few years – not one of the parties has seriously considered preventing the medical personnel from leaving the country.

Remarkably, a link is seldom made between emigration and immigration in debates. The most recent influx of approximately 1.5 million predominantly Ukrainian workers is regarded as beneficial for the Polish labor market, as it can fill gaps. Although both groups – Polish nationals abroad and foreign workers in Poland – are similar in size, the latter is not seen as a “replacement” for the emigrants. The public perception is that the jobs performed by the Ukrainians mean that they are in competition with the native population, rather than are seen as engaging in employment for which there were not enough people available.

A result of the constant emigration of the Polish workforce to Western Europe is that there is quite widespread resentment towards the main receiving countries – primarily, but not only, on the part of the right-wing parties. Although these countries are not directly held responsible for attracting immigrants, many still see it as unjust that the poorer countries in the East have to bear the cost of educating the labor force, which is then “snatched away” from the eastern countries without adequate compensation. This frustration was expressed, for instance, in the expose of the Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki from November 19th, 2015:

“According to data from the IMF, between 1990 and 2016 almost 20 million people moved from Central Europe to rich, Western European countries. This trend accelerated after our countries joined the EU. According to the fund, this change caused Central European countries, including Poland, to lose income. Our per capita income is at least 5 percent lower because of this migration. This is a great tribute that Poland has paid to the countries of the West. Such a tribute from the poor to the rich is not normal. A state with high standards must stop this.”

In 2015, in the context of the European ‘refugee crisis’, the existing resentment towards Western Europe mixed with the rejection of non-European refugees. Two quotes from a debate on September 16th, 2015, one month before the election, which brought the PiS to power, are particularly noteworthy. First, the President of the European Commission at the time, Jean-Claude Juncker, attracted criticism for his remark that Poland was obliged to return the favor of the opening of the internal European borders and had to accept Syrian refugees, also because 20 million people of Polish origin lived abroad. The leader of PiS Jaroslaw Kaczyński replied:

“Yes, indeed, many Poles have emigrated in recent years, in earlier years, in the previous century, and before that. This is true. Only, High Chamber, did the Poles, when they emigrated, impose their rules on those countries? Did they even terrorize people? No, they worked hard, with great humility, often with excessive humility.”

He was supported by MP Marzena Wrobel (also PiS):

“(…) Jean-Claude Juncker (…) claimed in the European Parliament that 20 million Poles lived outside of Poland as a result of economic and political emigration, with which he implied that Poland should therefore accept a large number of illegal immigrants who are pressing towards Europe at the moment. (…) The Germans accepted a relatively small group of refugees in Munich, but do you remember what happened next? Later, the Germans closed their border and suspended rail connections with their southern neighbors. This is German policy. They say one thing and then do something else. We are to pay their debts; the countries of Central Europe are to pay their debts.”

Both quotes are a good representation of the attitude of PiS towards refugees and underline the differences in the perception of the Polish emigrants on the one hand and the Syrian migrants on the other. At the same time it illustrates that, in Poland, the idea that the West did
the country a favor by accepting its emigrants, is firmly rejected. What is more, the responsibility is placed completely on the West: Accepting the refugees is not, as Juncker had indicated, a chance for Poland to reciprocate in light of the support it had once received. Rather, for Poland and other Central European countries, it is seen as the forced and costly result of Western European policies including Germany’s. Since emigration from Poland helps the individuals and the receiving countries, yet is detrimental to the Polish state itself, Polish migration is seen as Poland doing the Western countries a favor, rather than the other way around.

In the most recent elections in October 2019 emigration was not a central topic in the electoral manifestos. In the electoral manifestos it was primarily the ruling ‘Law and Justice’ (PiS), that concentrated on the issue more than the other parties. Only the extreme right ‘Konfederacja’ mentioned as an aside the need to support migrants returning to Poland and to reform the return programs. A closer look at the framing of emigration in the PiS manifesto reveals a pattern: Although the causes of emigration and many of the solutions are portrayed as being of an economic nature, the consequences of emigration on the other hand are presented in a clearly cultural-nationalist context. The party takes the view that Polish citizens are forced to leave their own country to live and work in a foreign environment. And consequently they are seen to be forced to contribute to the development of a foreign country instead of their own.

Although none of the other parties mentioned emigration in their 2019 electoral manifestos this does not have to be an indicator of a lack of consideration of the issue; it is more a reflection of the low urgency of the topic at the time. For example, although it is not mentioned in the electoral manifesto of the coalition Lewica, one of its constituting parties, Partia Razem, promises better representation of the diaspora in domestic politics.

From the analysis of the electoral manifestos since the EU accession (2005, 2007, 2011 and 2015) three important findings have emerged. First, in the period from 2005 to 2007 all parties addressed the topic of emigration. Second, above all parties from the right spectrum focused on the topic – the further to the right the more pronounced the focus. Neither Civic Platform nor the left parties (SLD and Ruch Palikota 2011, United Left 2015) mentioned emigration in 2011 or 2015; the current coalition partner of Civic Platform, Nowoczesna, only did it in passing when talking about simplifying return migration (p. 39). Third, it is striking that, across all parties, there are hardly any concrete policy proposals. A few do in fact exist, for example the “return” program (p. 56) announced by PiS in 2007 or the aforementioned proposals made by Nowoczesna with regard to the support of school children. In most cases, however, emigration is only portrayed as a secondary problem stemming from problems like mass unemployment, insufficient economic development, a housing shortage or low wages. As a result, most proposals aimed at preventing emigration focus on tackling fundamental problems and not emigration in particular.

Since the parties are largely in agreement about having a pro-return migration policy and maintaining the relationships to the diaspora, the topic is primarily in the hands of the government, as only it has the instruments for the realization of these aims. Therefore, to a certain extent, emigration is not even the subject of political competition, but rather a part of the administrative tasks of the state. However, although a few of the initiatives are aimed at the cultural and social needs of the (mostly older) emigrants, the majority deal more with the emigration rates themselves.

The issues of emigration and the diaspora are traditionally addressed in the exposés of newly elected Prime Ministers. It is usual for every government to pursue a policy which creates incentives for return migration. Thus there is a certain level of continuity, e.g. with the governmental program to support repatriation (called the “stork programs” because of the red and white coloring of storks and their seasonal migration pattern) or the state-run online portal, which contains comprehensive information for people who are contemplating a return (https://pwroty.gov.pl). In addition, there are programs which provide financial support for those returning, although on closer examination it is apparent that it is more a case of measures to simplify access to general social welfare benefits. Currently, however, on the macro level the government is focused in particular on simplifying access to foreign labor markets, improved recognition of qualifications, the avoidance of double taxation or the protection of the labor rights of Polish workers abroad (Stefaniska 2017: 108-112).

The state also fulfils the task of taking care of and protecting the Polish diaspora and the Polish minorities in other countries. Both chambers of the parliament, Sejm and Senat, have standing committees on maintaining contact with the diaspora. It is also expected of the embassies and consulates that they not only deal with the legal and organizational matters, but that they also provide support to local Polish organizations in their respective area of jurisdiction. The protective task of the state is also reflected in the introduction of the Karta Polaka (Pole’s card) in 2007, which was intended to be for people with a Polish background but without Polish citizenship. The card confirms that the holder belongs to the Polish nation and entitles the holder to various privileges (e.g. exemption from the obligation to apply for a work permit). The card was originally intended only for Poles in 15 post-Soviet states but the law was changed in 2019 in order to include Polish nationals from all countries (Gazeta Prawna 2019). Furthermore, the new citizenship bill from 2012 (Dz. U. 2012 poz. 161) was given a chapter (Chapter V, Art. 38-45) on regaining Polish citizenship, for people who were forced to give it up before 1989 as a condition for emigration. This was widely considered as making amends for past wrongs of the state towards its citizens (cf. Senat 2019).

Polish citizens abroad are also allowed to participate in the national elections and do not lose this right, regardless of how much time has passed since their departure. Although there is regular indignation in social media about the fact that people not living in the country have an influence on who is to govern it, neither political parties nor any other organizations publicly express a resentment of this kind. In the most recent presidential elections in June 2020 more than 0.5 million voters abroad registered to vote (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza 2020a). This number is considerably lower than the estimated 2.54 million Poles who live abroad (although this number also includes persons who are not eligible to vote). Although historically voting behavior has in general reflected that of the homeland, only with a tendency to be somewhat more liberal, in the most recent elections the incumbent president and eventual winner, Andrzej Duda, only received 25.9 percent of the votes in the electoral districts abroad, while the opposition led by Rafal Trzaskowski was able to achieve an overwhelming majority with 74.1 percent of the votes (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza 2020b).
INFOBOX – Migration in times of the Corona pandemic

In the public discourse there has hardly been any connection made between the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and emigration. As a matter of fact the measures to contain the virus – in particular the suspension of all international train and air connections and the compulsory 14-day quarantine for citizens returning from abroad (March until June) – kept Polish emigrants out of the country. Polish citizens with residence in other countries accordingly often decided to remain abroad. The state-organized repatriations were predominantly used by stranded tourists. The only emigrant group that was heavily affected by the coronavirus pandemic was the local cross-border commuters, as they were now cut off from either their place of work or residence. After numerous protests at the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders, in early June the state waived the compulsory quarantine requirement for those who could present documents confirming employment in other EU member states. The fight against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic was therefore clearly formulated as a European matter and the closed borders were interpreted not only as a violation of the freedom of movement and the spirit of European integration but also as an obsolete and ineffective measure to contain the pandemic. Here, reference was made to the fact that local commutes of a few kilometers (e.g. between Görlitz and Zgorzelec or Cieszyn and Těšín), which could often be traveled in one’s own car or by bike, were forbidden, yet journeys with a much higher risk of exposure to the virus (e.g. train trips from Stettin to Warsaw or Krakow) were allowed.

OUTLOOK

It is difficult to predict how the discussion about emigration will develop in future. On the one hand it seems improbable that those who have left the country will return to Poland in the short or mid-term. The wages and working conditions in Poland, despite some improvements in the last years, are still not attractive enough. Although the times of mass immigration are a thing of the past, it still seems unlikely that emigration will come to a complete halt.

On the other hand, the new developments could certainly change the pattern of migration in Poland. Firstly, the overall pace of emigration has continued to slow down. Secondly, the return rates in recent years are the highest they have been since 2004. Thus, all things considered, a situation will probably emerge in which the balance of migration of Polish citizens is only slightly negative. Thirdly, the demographic situation – above all the low fertility rate and the aging of society – will make the Polish economy more dependent on immigration (and return migration). The influence of the most recent immigration to Poland should not be underestimated here: the Polish economy is opening up for immigrants and Polish work permits are some of the easiest to obtain in the EU. As a result, a significant number of migrants have moved to Poland, which has effectively turned the country into an immigration and emigration country.

If a new crisis rocks the country, a reverse of the migration flows is possible. The Poles who already have experience of emigration could once again leave the country in large numbers. The nature of the crisis also plays a role, as the Poles emigrate not only because of economic but also because of political reasons. The current protests against the de facto ban on abortion show that if a new government does not take office, then others could also feel compelled to emigrate.

If the new migration trends in Poland remain unchanged, then in a couple of decades Poland will – in terms of its migration patterns and share of foreign-born population – look more like one of the Western countries. Until now Poland’s dominant self-image has however been that of an emigration country, and it will be a long process to reconcile this self-image with the new reality.
EMIGRATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Portugal’s recent wave of emigration is largely an outcome of its economic troubles following the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis. Between 2010 and 2016, more than 300,000 people permanently left the country.

The increase in emigration aggravated what had already been a challenging demographic outlook, given Portugal’s low birth rates, rapidly aging population, and consequent negative rate of growth. Net migration rates were negative for six consecutive years (2011-2016), with the country losing the equivalent of 3 percent of its population in 2010 during that time.

Although emigration is far from a new phenomenon in Portugal, it became a matter of political dispute during the crisis years. The salience of emigration increased both in the media and in the political debate. In essence, opposition parties blamed the austerity policies of the right-wing governmental coalition for driving people out of the country.

Emigration is predominantly seen in negative terms, resulting from the economic crisis context. Emigration is also considered to have negative consequences (namely in terms of demographic and fiscal impact as well as loss of human capital). This contrasts with the overwhelmingly positive tone towards the Portuguese diaspora.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

Portugal has more than two million citizens living abroad, the equivalent of more than 20 percent of its resident population. If one adds the descendants of emigrants to that number, the total is over five million (Pereira/Azevedo 2019: 3). This means that Portugal has one of the largest shares of emigrants in proportion to its population among EU countries, together with Croatia and Malta. There are several countries with a sizeable Portuguese immigrant community, both in Europe and in the Americas. This is most notably the case for France and Switzerland, where the Portuguese constitute the third largest immigrant community respectively, but also for Brazil and Luxembourg, where the Portuguese are the largest immigrant group. France and Switzerland are also the two foreign countries with the highest percentage of Portuguese nationals (or those who were born in Portugal), followed by the USA (in the case of countries with the most people born in Portugal) and the UK (with regard to countries with the most foreigners with Portuguese citizenship). If one looks only at ‘EU mobile citizens’ of working age (20-64), the share of Portuguese residing abroad within the EU accounted for about 10.8 percent of the Portuguese resident population in 2019, which places Portugal fourth in the EU in terms of the most mobile citizens within the EU (Eurostat 2019).

Emigration is far from a new phenomenon, as Portugal has historically been a ‘country of emigration’. Migration scholars usually point to three or four large-scale waves of emigration in Portuguese history (Pereira/Azevedo 2019). The first one covers the period from 1850 to 1930, the so-called transatlantic cycle, as part of the wider European labor dislocation to the American continent following decolonization. About 2 million people left the country in this period, with Brazil as the main destination.
The second wave is the one most salient within Portugal itself, often invoked during debates on emigration. In order to highlight the severity of the present situation, media and political actors often argue that the current wave of emigration is reminiscent of this past one. It comprises the period from 1950 to 1974, in other words the final decades of the authoritarian regime and the era of colonial wars. Even though reliable statistics are hard to come by (in part because many left clandestinely), it is estimated that more than 1.8 million people emigrated during that time. Two-thirds of them left to industrialized European countries, most notably France and, to a lesser extent, Germany, with the rest choosing the Americas (Venezuela, Canada, the USA, and Brazil) and Africa (South Africa, Angola and Mozambique).

Some scholars speak of a third cycle of emigration from 1980 to 2000, when an average of 20 000 people per year left the country, most notably to Western Europe. A key feature of this phase, particularly during the 1990s, is that Portugal actually also experienced increasing immigration (as well as returns), registering positive net migration rates from 1993 onwards. While still very much defined by emigration, Portugal has also become a country of immigration, the scale of which has, however, remained lower than for the rest of Southern Europe. Overall, Portugal continues to register a much higher total number of emigrants than immigrants.

Finally, the fourth and current wave started at the beginning of the 21st century and became drastically more accentuated from 2011 onward as a result of the recession provoked by the Eurozone crisis and subsequent austerity measures. Growing unemployment rates will undoubtedly have played a role here as they disproportionately affected young people: In 2013, the total unemployment rate reached a peak of 16 percent, among young people however it was at a staggering 38 percent. The recent migration flows are largely concentrated with the European continent. In addition to traditional destination countries, such as France, the United Kingdom became a major new destination and, to a lesser extent, Spain too. Figure 1 shows the official statistics, capturing what is referred to as ‘permanent emigration’, that is, individuals who leave the country for a period longer than one year. It shows how Portugal went from an average of less than 10 000 permanent emigrants per year prior to 2008 to around 50 000 between 2011 and 2014. Though emigration numbers have been steadily, albeit modestly, declining ever since – mirroring the recent economic uptick –, even today they are still more than three times higher than before the crisis. To put it in different terms, 7.5 people per 1,000 inhabitants left the country in 2019. This is less than the 12.9 registered in 2014, but significantly higher than the 2.1 emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants registered in the year 2000 (PORTDATA 2020a).

Note that these numbers refer to permanent migration only – if one adds temporary migrants to that total, the numbers spike to more than double (PORTDATA 2020b). Among temporary migrants there are the so-called ‘posted workers’. Though there is little research in this regard, so far it seems that European companies take advantage of lower Portuguese wages, using Portuguese subcontractors who ‘post’ contingents of laborers, for example, to construction sites (King, 2019: 273). It is estimated that between 2007-2011, Portugal had more posted workers than any other nation within the EU, averaging over 60 000 per year (ibid.). Note also that the numbers in Figure 1 are known to be conservative and to underestimate the real number of emigrants. The Portuguese Emigration Observatory, which adopts a different method from INE for calculating the number of emigrants, typically produces higher estimates, with the difference being particularly striking in the period from 2000 to 2010, with estimates more than five times (!) higher. 1

The scenario described above had a significant impact on net migration rates (the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants), which were negative from 2011 to 2016 (Figure 2). This is not only an outcome of increasing emigration, but also declining

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1 While INE uses the Labour Force Survey to estimate the number of emigrants, the Emigration Observatory compiles data on the entry of Portuguese immigrants in destination countries. http://observatorioemigracao.pt/np4EN/Dados/

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Emigration has a negative demographic impact not only because of the obvious decrease in population, but also because migrants are mostly working-age, thus contributing both to population overaging and declining birth rates, aggravating the problem of the sustainability of the welfare state. Note that Portugal has one of the most rapidly aging populations in the EU – after Italy and Greece and together with Finland, it has the largest share of population over 65 and one of the highest old-age dependency ratios (Eurostat 2020a).

In addition to that, it is often assumed that emigration is particularly damaging when it involves a substantial share of highly qualified people, contributing to what has been popularly termed ‘brain drain’. This is because of the loss in tax revenue (coming from higher tax brackets), the loss of potential entrepreneurs or of people capable of adding value to the economy, the possible shortage of skilled professionals, etc. Although Portugal has historically been a country of low-skilled migration (in line with the generally low levels of education of the total population), the recent wave of migration has commonly been associated in the media and in political discourse with the outflow of highly skilled migrants.

Among highly qualified migrants, a sector that sometimes attracts media attention is the health sector, in particular nurses. Between 2010 and 2017, it is estimated that more than 14,000 nurses left Portugal, though it should be said that this was not only due to the crisis but also aggressive recruitment campaigns by foreign agencies, most notably from the UK. See Expresso, 12.05.2017. 3 Among highly qualified migrants, a sector that sometimes attracts media attention is the health sector. In particular nurses. Between 2010 and 2017, it is estimated that more than 14,000 nurses left Portugal, though it should be said that this was not only due to the crisis but also aggressive recruitment campaigns by foreign agencies, most notably from the UK. See Expresso, 12.05.2017.

3 Recent Eurostat data (2018) are very similar, showing that only 13 percent of Portuguese ‘EU mobile citizens’ between 20-64 have completed tertiary education. 2

While emigration is mostly discussed in terms of its negative impacts, the positive ones also deserve recognition. This is most apparent in the case of remittances, the total sum of which has a significant impact on the Portuguese economy. Figure 3 shows how much Portugal benefits from the remittances sent by its emigrants.
remittances, even when the remittances sent by migrants living in the country are subtracted. In 2019, remittances amounted to the equivalent of 1.5 percent of the Portuguese GDP.

EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

The treatment of emigration at the political and institutional level fundamentally depends on what exactly one is speaking of when speaking of emigration. As Portugal has a long history of emigration and a very substantial fraction of its citizens live abroad, the treatment of the Portuguese diaspora has long been an object of political engagement. It is therefore important to distinguish between the political treatment of the diaspora – understood as citizens permanently settled abroad – and the treatment of emigration as the (current) exiting of people. The next section deals with political engagement towards the diaspora, while the subsequent ones address emigration in general, distinguishing whenever possible between the two dimensions above and focusing predominantly on the second.

EMISSION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Emigration is an issue than has never been entirely absent from the political arena in Portugal – even if it has been of low salience most of the time –, given the large outflows of migrants in the recent past and the presence of a very substantial diaspora abroad. It is not uncommon for parties to dedicate a small section of their manifestos to what is most commonly referred to as the “Portuguese communities” (Comunidades Portuguesas) abroad. Parties have largely converged around the idea of maintaining or strengthening the ties with the diaspora, including the protection of what are unanimously considered their rights – such as representation rights and ensuring the teaching of Portuguese language to their descendants. Therefore, issues related to the Portuguese diaspora periodically make it to parliament.

The government has a specific consultative body (Conselho das Comunidades Portuguesas) in charge of representing the communities abroad and advising the government on policies related to them, although its powers and functions are limited. Moreover, emigrants are entitled to elect members of parliament through two specific voting districts (‘Europe’ and ‘Outside Europe’, each with two representatives). Although the number of seats is limited and the proportion of total seats allotted is significantly lower than the proportion of the population living abroad, this nevertheless allows emigrants to have a direct voice in parliament because their representatives often raise some of their concerns. Portugal was in fact one of the first countries to grant voting rights to citizens abroad, following the establishment of democracy in 1974 (Lisi et al. 2019: 74).

Traditionally, the center-right (Partido Social Democrata – PSD) has benefited the most from the emigrant vote, particularly the one from outside Europe, something that has been explained by, among other factors, (1) the proximity to emigrant communities and party working groups abroad, as well as (2) the dominant profile of migrants in the first and, to an extent, second emigration waves, coming from rural areas with low levels of education (Lisi et al. 2019: 81). This also accounts for the greater importance which the party has historically placed on emigration-related themes, which in turn has reinforced its strength among emigrant communities.

Despite the fact that the outflow of Portuguese migrants never truly came to a halt, emigration per se – i.e., the exiting of people – was rarely a topic in the political debate until the most recent wave. A cursory look at media data and parliamentary debates illustrates this: Figure 4 shows the yearly evolution of references to ‘emigration’ in one of the leading newspapers in Portugal, Jornal de Noticias. The use of the word increases significantly during the ‘crisis years’, with more than double the number of yearly references in 2013-2015, compared to pre-crisis years. The difference is more striking in the case of parliamentary debates (Figure 5), where the use of the word ‘emigration’ is at least four times higher in that same period. Though these numbers constitute only a very rough approximation of the actual salience of emigration, the trend is clear and illustrative.

Though many of the references to emigration do not directly address the issue and only mention it in passing, the increase in the use of the term in the political arena is unmistakably linked to the context of soaring emigration and to its use as a political tool by opposition parties to blame the government for emigration.

Fig. 4: Relevance of emigration in the media

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Fig. 5: Relevance of emigration in parliamentary debates

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right-wing government coalition\(^4\) for the wide-reaching consequences of its austerity policies. The topic became particularly visible and hotly debated near the end of 2011, when several government actors, most notably the Prime Minister, made declarations that unequivocally suggested emigration as a viable alternative for the unemployed. These statements were widely taken as an invitation to emigrate and were therefore met with much political and public backlash. From then on, rising emigration rates were one of the various negative indicators that opposition parties repeatedly drew attention to in order to denounce the so-called ideologically-driven austerity policies of the incumbent right-wing government, insistently pointing fingers at the government for inviting or even forcing young people to leave.

The peak in the usage of the word ‘emigration’ in parliamentary debates in 2014 and 2015 is largely due to this dynamic, whereby opposition parties used emigration to discredit the right-wing coalition, ahead of the 2015 general elections. At a time when employment rates were finally showing positive signs of recovery – and the government was taking this as an indicator of success –, opposition parties refused them credit by recurrently referred to emigration as the main reason why unemployment rates were decreasing, an accusation the government denied. The 2015 electoral manifestos of the main opposition party, the center-left PS, serves as a good example of the ‘blaming tool’ dynamic described above:

“The strategy of the PSD-CDS government of ‘going beyond the troika’ led to an explosion of unemployment and emigration, provoking a sharp downfall in birth rates.” (p. 78)

“... as a result of the crisis and the emigration wave promoted by the austerity policy of the PSD-CDS government, many Portuguese – particularly highly-qualified young people – were forced to abandon the country and search for employment elsewhere.” (p. 88)

In line with this, the issue became more salient during the 2015 electoral campaign, as all parties to the left of the government devoted more attention to it than usual. Figure 6 shows the salience of emigration-related statements in the electoral manifestos of the main parties for the three last legislative elections. Tellingly, in 2015, the main opposition party, the center-left PS, dedicated more than 3 percent of its electoral manifesto to issues related to emigration, in line with its progressive policy on immigrant rights and integration, e.g. regularizations, voting rights, jus soli citizenship. In 2019, three out of five parties devoted more attention to immigration than emigration, though it should be noted that the topic remained unpoliticized and was only rarely brought up during political debates (see Mendes 2019). There is consensus among the two largest parties (PS and PSDB) about the positive demographic and economic contribution of immigration and most of their manifesto space on the topic is dedicated to ways of improving their integration into Portuguese society.

Parties do not appear to differ significantly in their positions towards emigration, neither does the topic seem to generate a great deal of political controversy, unless it is part of the ‘blame game’ whereby parties attack the incumbent for policies that drive people out of the country. This is particularly the European refugee crisis. As shown in Figure 7, their relative importance varies significantly over time. Whereas in 2011 neither of the two topics were particularly important in party manifestos, in 2015 much more attention was to the issue of emigration, in line with the negative net migration rates of that time. The only party that consistently devotes more attention to immigration in its manifestos is the Left Bloc (radical left), in line with its progressive policy on immigrant rights and integration, e.g. regularizations, voting rights, jus soli citizenship. In 2015, the peak in the usage of the word ‘emigration’ in parliamentary debates in 2014 and 2015 is largely due to this dynamic, whereby opposition parties attack the incumbent policies of the government, insisting on the so-called ideologically-driven austerity policies of the incumbent right-wing government, persistently pointing fingers at the government for inviting or even forcing young people to leave.

One way of assessing the relative salience of emigration is by comparing it to immigration, a topic that usually attracts more attention, particularly since

\[\text{Percentage of words devoted to emigration and emigration-related statements in party manifestos.}
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\[\text{Source: Manual coding / own representation}\]

\[\text{Percentage of words devoted to immigration and immigration-related statements in party manifestos.}
\]

\[\text{Source: Manual coding / own representation}\]

\(^4\) Said coalition was composed of the center-right PSD and the conservatively right CDS-PP and governed from 2011 to 2015.
evident in their discourse regarding the diaspora, as parties largely overlap in their positive view of the Portuguese communities abroad, the expressed desire to strengthen ties and exchanges, and the economic and cultural potential they are said to represent, both to Portugal directly (e.g., through remittances, investment, Portuguese exports, etc.) and to the diffusion of Portugal’s positive image throughout the world. It is interesting to note that the positive tone towards the diaspora in the discourse stands in stark contrast to the negative tone towards the recent wave of emigration.

Nevertheless, the government and opposition did clash over their rhetoric on emigration. As mentioned above, the topic became controversial in late 2011, when several governmental representatives suggested emigration as a valid alternative for the unemployed and for those seeking better opportunities. After a governmental representative stated that “if we are unemployed, we must get out of our comfort zone and go beyond borders” — a declaration he later denied —, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs came to his defense, affirming that “whoever wants to find [opportunities] abroad, in a more or less short term, and always with the prospect of returning, can strengthen his education and get to know other cultural realities, which is extraordinarily positive” (Meireles 2013). He further accused the opposition of having a poor and backwards vision of emigration. This line of thought seems to have been shared by the Prime Minister at the time who, speaking of teachers in particular, declared that in the absence of opportunities in Portugal, they could look to other Portuguese speaking countries as an alternative. Naturally, these statements were met with a hefty backlash. The opposition interpreted the Prime Minister’s statement as an open invitation to emigrate, accusing him of giving up on his country and adopting an immigrationist discourse. From then onwards, the government repeatedly denied having made such an invitation and chose to largely avoid the topic.

Note, however, that parties do not clash significantly over their interpretation of the causes of emigration, as the government itself recognized the absence of opportunities in Portugal. In this sense, all parties agreed that, during the crisis, emigration was an outcome of citizens being pushed by socio-economic circumstances rather than a simple expression of freedom of movement. As the subsequent center-left Prime Minister stated, “freedom of movement is great, but there is an enormous difference between the freedom to leave and the necessity to leave due to not having a job in Portugal” (TVI24 2014). However, parties do differ in terms of their interpretation of the root causes of emigration, which tend to be in line with their general socio-economic outlook. While for the left emigration is a clear symptom of the general precariousness of the Portuguese labor market, the conservative-right CDS-PP sets itself apart by also putting the blame on a ‘work culture’ that does not value productivity, effort, and individual merit, thus driving talent out of the country. Its 2019 electoral manifesto stated the following:

“Culturally, the Portuguese blockade, in terms of productivity, also resides in an aversion to individual merit, ‘socializing’ or in the leveling down of effort and remuneration. This culture, resultant of the permeability of the values dominant in left-wing egalitarianism, is so destructive of life expectations and of individual projects (...) that it is also responsible for the new highly-qualified emigration.”

As far as the consequences of emigration are concerned, parties seem to differ most of all in terms of what they choose to emphasize. While they agree on and often highlight the negative demographic impact of emigration, the left more resolutely stresses the negative economic impact of emigration. The Communist Party, for example, explicitly links emigration to a significant loss of fiscal revenues and social security contributions (Electoral Program 2015). The ‘new radical left’ (Left Bloc) instead – more in line with its highly-educated voting basis – puts the emphasis on specific sectors, such as (1) researchers, and the need for more investment in higher education to avoid brain drain, and (2) nurses, whose mass emigration is taken as a symptom of insufficient investments in the health system (Electoral Program 2015).

The fact that the right is more agnostic about the economic impact of migration primarily has to do with its incumbency during the most severe migration period. However, critics of the right-wing government have often pointed out that emigration was, in the short-term at least, beneficial to the government as it impacted positively on unemployment numbers and took some of the pressure off the welfare system by decreasing expenditure. This would explain why some members of the government seemed keen on encouraging young people to migrate.

An aspect all parties agree on is that the loss of qualified human capital is particularly damaging for the country. As noted above, highly skilled migrants are often brought up by both parties and media outlets, whereas the less skilled migrants are rarely the object of attention. Though there is little doubt that the share of highly qualified migrants has increased over the years, the (meagre) existing statistics show that an overemphasis on the latter and the ‘invisibility’ of the low-skilled is a gross misrepresentation of reality. An illustrative example of this is the fact that, in its 2011 electoral manifesto, the main opposition party at the time (PSD) claimed that the migration wave that Portugal was experiencing “falls mostly upon highly qualified young people, representing the largest brain drain in the whole of the OECD”. This is false, because in 2010 the OECD reported higher emigration rates of the highly-skilled for countries like Ireland (20.3 percent), Luxembourg (22.4 percent), or Iceland (14.2 percent) (Arslan et al. 2014).

In addition, there is overwhelming consensus among the parties that there are no easy solutions to tackle emigration and that the only effective remedy is a more attractive labor market (though they naturally differ in the ways they would attempt to achieve this). Nevertheless – and in apparent contrast to the positive contributions that the diaspora is said to make –, all political forces agree that the return of emigrants should be encouraged. Although this is one of the most agreed-upon avenues for tackling the demographic challenge, parties differ with regard to the emphasis placed on immigration as a complementary solution in this regard. While the left is explicit in pointing to immigration as one of the various avenues to counter depressing demographic indicators, the conservative right does not explicitly refer to this in its electoral manifestos, focusing instead on family and fertility policies.

What is also interesting to note in this regard is that Portugal’s historical and present condition as a ‘country of emigration’ is often invoked during parliamentary debates on immigration policies. This is a rhetorical tool often used by parties, particularly on the left, to justify a particular moral responsibility towards immigrants, that is, to justify a ‘humane’ immigration policy for those who choose to come to Portugal, in light of the country’s nationals own experiences of being immigrants elsewhere.

Also relevant is the fact that, perhaps because of the absence of a populist radical right party with parliamentary representation (until recently), emigration is rarely been framed in nationalist terms. When it is, it is always in connection to the Portuguese diaspora and always in positive tones – such as to emphasize the emotional and national ties of the diaspora to Portugal or its role in projecting Portuguese identity and culture abroad. There is no obvious ideological cleavage in this regard (as the Communist Party or the Socialist Party adopt this type of discourse too), even if it is likely that it is more accentuated on the right.
LAUNCH OF A ‘RETURN PROGRAM’

In light of the context described above, in 2019 the Portuguese government launched the so-called ‘Return Program’ (Programa Regressar) which offers emigrants who have resided elsewhere for at least three years monetary and fiscal incentives to move back, provided they can secure a work contract. These incentives include a 50 percent reduction in income tax for five years, a cash payment of 2,614€ and additional aid in covering relocation and other associated costs up to a maximum of 7,879€. By February 2020, according to governmental data, at least 1,300 people had already taken advantage of the program. Many, however, remain skeptical about the effectiveness of this type of program, as such incentives cannot possibly make up for the large wage gap and relative lack of opportunities differences compared to other developed countries – the average yearly income in Portugal is less than half that of the Euro-area average. One of the novelties of this program is that it intends to attract emigrants regardless of their qualifications. This novel return program now exists in addition to a number of policies aimed at highly skilled migrants – that is, professionals in so-called ‘high value-added activities’, which have already been in place since 2009, establishing a 20 percent flat tax rate on earned income for ten years.\(^5\)

This is on top of the existing policies directed towards the Portuguese communities abroad, such as those that relate to the promotion of Portuguese language training, the social protection of vulnerable emigrants, the promotion of associative initiatives, and the maintenance of a media channel for the emigrant community, among others.

INFOBOX – Migration in times of the Corona pandemic

Emigration, as understood in this report, has not been a salient topic during the Covid-pandemic. There was no visible impact on the debate on European internal migration or otherwise. Nevertheless, the government has shown some concern about the situation of Portuguese communities abroad and how the pandemic could affect them, namely when it comes to the disruption of the social and consular services usually provided (Almeida 2020). Moreover, as emigrants usually return for vacations during the summer, governmental representatives were keen on mitigating the decrease in numbers of incoming emigrants (Lusa 2020).

Border closures were unanimously endorsed by all political parties, always justified on public health grounds, however, there were certain exceptions, including for ‘cross-border workers’. In general, the government and opposition parties were keen on following EU guidelines on mobility and lockdown measures. There were, however, conflicts with other EU member states. This was most obviously the case with the UK, as it decided to impose restrictions on travelling to Portugal during part of the summer. This created tensions between the two countries, as the Portuguese tourism industry is heavily dependent on UK tourists.

Finally, when it comes to immigration, the Portuguese government took the unprecedented step of granting temporary residence to immigrants and asylum seekers with pending applications before the Immigration and Borders Service, in order to ensure their access to health care and social security services (Henriques 2020). Immigrants are a particularly vulnerable group during the current crisis, both in health and economic terms. On the one hand, there is evidence that the immigrant population has been disproportionally affected by COVID-19, partly because of precarious housing and working conditions (Lopes 2020). On the other hand, unemployment has increased the most in sectors where immigrants are numerous, e.g. restaurant and food services. Consequently, voluntary repatriation requests before the respective embassies (such as Brazil and Ukraine) have increased (Expresso 2020).

OUTLOOK

It is evident that there is a strong correlation between migration to and from Portugal and job market dynamics (Pires 2019: 34). The future evolution of both emigration and immigration is therefore greatly dependent on the socioeconomic conditions and the disparities between the sending and receiving countries. It must be noted, however, that emigration from Portugal was not only a relevant phenomenon in times of deep economic crisis: Outflows continue to be significant today and, if one takes the statistics of the Emigration Observatory into account, they were far from negligible during the period before the Eurozone crisis as well. It is thus unlikely that emigration will stop being a relevant phenomenon, given the persistently significant gaps in income and living standards between Portugal and the most advanced economies in Europe. Moreover, the existence of a large diaspora directly facilitates emigration networks and indirectly promotes a ‘culture of emigration’ that has long existed in Portugal and that was recently revived by the economic crisis.

Though the development of migration flows is hard to predict, the same cannot be said for other demographic trends. The most realistic demographic scenarios for Portugal all look grim, with low birth rates and a rapidly aging population.\(^6\) Not only is the country set to lose population, but according to Eurostat, it will have the highest old-age dependency ratio in the EU by 2050, that is, 63 elderly people per 100 people of working age (Eurostat 2020b). Only the most optimistic migration scenario – a positive and high net migration rate – is capable of abating such tendencies and mitigating the disastrous consequences for the sustainability of the welfare state. This is, however, plausible only in the unlikely event that Portugal manages to overcome the deep-seated structural weaknesses of its economy and labor market.

5 The so-called Fiscal Regime for Non-Habitual Residents, which also applies to foreign pensioners. See: https://www.portaldascomunidades.mne.pt/images/GADG/IRS__Regime_Fiscal_Residente_V2P01.30_Habitual.pdf

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Summary

During the last decades Romania’s international net migration has been negative. Emigration became one of the major aspects of social transformation and demographic shrinkage processes.

Emigration was initially framed in positive terms, perceived as beneficial due to remittances and the reduced pressure on the welfare system. Subsequently, however, another perspective emerged. This perspective focused primarily on the emigration of (highly) skilled workers trained in the country and its long-term social and economic consequences.

Romania’s image abroad has also played a central role in public debates about emigration, with the question of the ethnic affiliation of those who emigrated. Here, even state agencies were repeatedly at pains to emphasize a differentiation, strongly tainted with prejudice, between ‘ordinary’ Romanian emigrants and emigrated Sinti and Roma of Romanian citizenship.

The issue of (mostly) children and elderly left behind was of interest to all political parties and the media. Despite this issue being highly visible, no substantial policies have been adopted to address it.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

After the fall of the state socialist regime in 1989, migration was identified as one of the biggest transformation processes in Romania, accompanying the political regime shift towards democracy and the passage from a state planned to a market economy (Iftimioaei/Baciu 2018; Petrescu/Băcău/Zgură 2011). Half a million Romanians emigrated during each of the peak years of migration - in 1991, 2001 and 2007. After joining the European Union in 2007, Romanian citizens benefited from the freedom of movement, including labor mobility, in some member states (MS), while in others they were subject to temporary work restrictions. From 2007 there was a downward trend in terms of migration which persisted until 2013 when the lowest negative net migration rate was registered. While the median monthly nominal salary increased by 128 percent from 1042 RON (approx. 215 Euro) in 2007 to 2383 RON (approx. 493 Euro) in 2017, it still left Romanian employees as the lowest paid workers in the EU (Iftimioaei/Baciu 2018: 174). Despite the increase of salaries, a steady increase in emigration was registered after 2013 (Figure 1).

The negative net migration made Romania a workforce provider country, partially accounting for the drastic decrease in population, from 23.2 million people in 1990 to 19 million people today. While emigration accounted to a great extent for Romania’s demographic decline during the last decades, the decrease of birth rates aggravated it. The fertility rate has been trending downwards since 1970, reaching 2.2 in 1990, then steadily falling to 1.8 in 2018. The population projection shows that a demographic decline of almost 20 percent is expected over the period from 2010 to 2060. Between 1991 and 2002, 62 percent of migrants were part of the most fertile age group (Ghetau 2009).

While the risk of poverty and social exclusion of employed people decreased...
and 2019 the most common destination for Romanian emigrants was Spain – 18 percent, followed by Italy and Germany, each accounting for 16 percent of the emigrants. Canada and the United States each received 8 percent of the Romanian migrants during this period, followed by Austria and France (Figure 2).

Among the consequences of emigration, scholars distinguish between two periods. Before the accession to the European Union, emigration is said to have helped adjust the supply and demand of the workforce affected by de-industrialization, while after 2007, emigration supported economic growth through remittances and diminished the state budget deficit (Iftimoaei/Baciu 2018). As a negative consequence, Romania experienced a growing shortage of labor, which could not be compensated by immigration.

In terms of human capital, identified effects of emigration are the so-called ‘brain drain’ and ‘brain waste’. Studies showed that for some migrants, emigration led to a decrease of professional status in the receiving country, compared to their previous employment in the country of origin thereby making poor use of or ‘wasting’ their skills (Sandu et al. 2009). The ‘brain drain’ involved the migration of specialists from the IT and health-care sectors, engineers and technicians, researchers and teachers. For example, in 2013, more than 14,000 physicians were working abroad, which is equivalent to 26 percent of the overall number of physicians in Romania. A positive aspect of the situation is that the highly skilled population that emigrates has the potential to attract Foreign Direct Investments and to contribute to research and development (Suditu/Prelipcean/Virdol/Stangaciu 2013). Also the low-skilled labor force seems to potentially benefit from a superior professional environment abroad that can improve their qualifications and subsequently increase their salary in the country of origin upon return (Ambrosini/Mayer/Peri/Radu 2011).
Remittances, which are another positive effect of emigration, have an important impact on living standards. Their value has increased considerably since 2013 and reached 3 percent of the GDP in 2019 (Figure 3). While the purpose of one third of remittances sent home to Romania is saving or investment, two-thirds are spent on consumption. A major source of income for the migrants’ families, remittances are used to improve the standard of the household, or to renovate or build new houses (Grigoras 2006).

EMISSION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Based on the analysis of newspaper data from the Romanian news agency Agerpres1, the media salience of emigration peaked twice: in 2007 – the EU accession year – and 2015 (Figure 4). Emigration was discussed mostly in socioeconomic terms, emphasizing the shrinking workforce due to low salaries and poor working conditions. Although Agerpres has reported on the financial reasons that account for the trends in emigration in general, it is the emigration of highly skilled and skilled personnel that has attracted most media attention, with the issue having a high degree of salience (Hutter/Kriesi 2019).

The media emphasized and deplored the loss of highly skilled personnel, such as healthcare and IT professionals or skilled workers from the construction industry. They reported that the poor working conditions in healthcare facilities, professionals’ dissatisfaction with low salaries, overtime and lack of support for research were all factors that motivated physicians to emigrate. Additional reasons for leaving the country mentioned in media coverage were the lack of career recognition and possibilities for professional development.

Although unemployment continued to decrease after 2002, the emigration rates remained high. Labor market participation was at a low level and there was a big share of informal employment. Since salaries remained low, agriculture workers (an overwhelming majority self-employed or contributing family members) preferred to migrate for higher salaries than to engage in low-paid waged employment in Romania. Even during periods of economic growth, the media reported about skilled labor shortages and the difficulties experienced by multinationals wanting to employ workers from abroad.

Based on the analysis of newspaper data from the Romanian news agency, the political debates covered by Agerpress confirm a clear division between the periods pre- and post-EU accession in terms of the framing of emigration. Before Romania entered the EU, emigration was portrayed rather positively. The news agency reported the emphasis of political leaders on the benefits of remittances or the diminished pressure on the state budget. After 2007, a negative framing focusing on losses and costs prevailed. Political parties and government officials deplored the enormous educational costs borne by the state to train a labor force that was heading abroad, making it difficult to balance the welfare system, in the context of an aging population and youth emigration (Agerpres 2013a). Moreover, even in times of economic growth, the media debate on emigration has been dominated by complaints about the lack of skilled labor and the difficulties of multinationals corporations in attracting new workers to Romania from abroad.

Based on Agerpress media analysis, after 2015 the debate focused more on proactive measures to tackle emigration. President Klaus Iohannis asked for public policies and programs to make Romanian emigrants a national priority, declaring that “well anchored by a careful state, a strong diaspora can become an important resource for Romania’s modernization and development” (Agerpres 2016a, own translation). Reversing the trend of negative natural growth, attracting immigration, getting migrants to return and extending the active life of those able and willing to work beyond the retirement age were measures deemed necessary by the chief-economist of the National Bank of Romania in 2015 in order to increase the Romanian economy’s potential (Agerpres 2015).

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1 Agerpres is the oldest Romanian news agency, established in March 1889. According to the Law 19/2003 Agerpres is an autonomous public institution, of national interest, editorially independent and under the control of the parliament.
The Mailat case made headlines in 2007. Romulus Mailat was convicted and imprisoned for the murder of Giovanna Reggiani, who was attacked in Rome in October 2007. The facts of the case, which were widely publicized, led to a wave of outrage and a series of attacks on Romanians in Italy, their homes or on the streets.

Before 2000, debates and public policies concerning migration were scarce. During a high-level meeting with the Romanian President, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister in 2002, the British Foreign Secretary at the time, Jack Straw, said that “Romani (…) filing for political asylum are a problem for both countries” (Agerpres 2002, own translation). The analysis below emphasizes the politicization of emigration, which was perceived by the authorities as a problem, especially regarding bilateral relations, pre- or post-EU accession. During the period prior to EU accession, the politicization of emigration translated into an increase of the salience of the issue, especially before Romania’s accession to the EU, but also during the 2012-2016 parliamentary term (Figure 5). However, the analysis of the political declarations and public policy initiatives show that party positions on emigration are not polarized. In general, political parties did not address emigration in their political programs. In the few cases they did address the topic, they did so in relation to the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon and, more specifically, the migration of physicians and other highly skilled professionals. While medium-skilled and low-skilled workers have been left out of the political debates about emigration, the loss of health-care professionals was stressed as being a central priority by different parties during the last elections. In 2012 the Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Romania proposed the establishment of an alternative system of remuneration for health care employees in order to better motivate them and reduce their migration towards the West, whereas the Social Liberal Union politicized health-care migration to demonize the previous government, claiming it had destroyed the health-care system. Measures proposed were stopping the migration of doctors and investments in the health-care infrastructure and pharmaceuticals. In 2016, included among the one hundred liberal measures for national reconstruction proposed by the National Liberal Party was the idea “to stop the migration of doctors by doubling their salaries from July 1st, 2017 and reorganizing the medical profession within the Romanian salary system based on a rational grid” (own translation).

Within parliamentary debates, the politicization of emigration translated into an increase of the salience of the issue, especially before Romania’s accession to the EU, but also during the 2012-2016 parliamentary term (Figure 5). However, the analysis of the political declarations and public policy initiatives show that party positions on emigration are not polarized. In terms of expansion, looking at the number of actors approaching a specific issue, emigration was addressed in a discontinuous and fitful manner through various projects initiated by NGOs, such as “Te iubeste mama” (“Mom loves you!”) designed to facilitate free online audio-visual communication between children and remote parents, or actions by left-wing collectives protesting the exploitation of Romanian workers abroad.

The salience of emigration in the parliamentary debates grew considerably during the period prior to EU accession. The analysis below emphasizes the main frames used by MPs in their political declarations or public policy initiatives with respect to emigration. Before 2000, debates and public policies concerning migration were scarce. Establishing a legislative framework for Romanian citizens abroad was the central aspect on the political agenda concerning emigration. During 2000-2004, the socioeconomic dimension of emigration was emphasized in both the positive and negative aspects. The socioeconomic dimension of emigration was mainly politicized by the far-right Greater Romania Party (PRM).
especially in 2002, when countries included in the Schengen area removed visa requirements for Romanian citizens, making a valid passport sufficient for entry. In this context, a representative of the PRM deplored the constraints and burdens that drive Romanians to work abroad – such as poverty and a high rate of unemployment, but also the government’s apparent lack of concern regarding poor working conditions and the discrimination of Romanians abroad, while it celebrated the reduced pressure on the social welfare budget (Sonea 2002).

The debate about the socio-economic causes of emigration peaked in 2004 when other parties joined the discussion, especially in the context of the Madrid train bombings, when sixteen Romanians died. For the national-liberal PNL and the right-wing nationalist PRM, this event was an occasion to question the framework conditions which motivated Romanians to move abroad. They came to the conclusion that in view of the growing gap between rich and poor, there was in fact “no alternative” to emigration, i.e., that those who emigrate basically have no other choice (Arghezi 2004, Rădulescu 2004).

In particular, the Social Democrats (PSD) in government between 2000 and 2004 were subsequently attacked by the opposition for their alleged inability to create attractive jobs in Romania and were therefore indirectly blamed for the deaths of Romanian “guest workers” in Madrid (Bara 2004).

During the years preceding the accession to the EU, the rights-based framework, referring to the regime of free movement and the protection of Romanian citizens working abroad held a crucial place in the parliamentary debates. In the context of transitional measures established by the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania, some member countries imposed temporary work permits on Romanian and Bulgarian citizens (Annex 7, Title 1, Article 6 Protocol: Transitional measures: Romania).

Although of peripheral interest, some PNL representatives questioned the discriminatory nature of the work permits with respect to EU’s fundamental freedoms. Emphasizing the positive effect of remittances on the Romanian economy and their contribution towards reducing poverty, PNL insisted that the government needs to strengthen the existing collaboration with other EU member states in the field of labor exchange in order to increase the number of contracts and identify potential tenderers abroad. Party members also pleaded for labor rights to be respected, including access to social security, specifically health insurance, unemployment benefits and contributions to pension funds – deploring the fact that these rights were enjoyed only by very few Romanian emigrants. The coalition government at the time made up of liberals and Hungarian democrats (UDMR) proposed a package of measures to evaluate the situation of Romanians working abroad and an incentive scheme to stimulate the return of Romanian workers from abroad.

As this mixture of partly contradictory proposals shows, no conclusive assessment of the emigration problem had yet been found in government, parliament or the public. While some emphasized the benefits of emigration in terms of stimulating the economy or reducing pressure on the social budget, others pointed primarily to the shortage of both high- and low-skilled labor, the decline of rural areas, and the social and psychological pressures faced by affected family members. Although migrants perceive their emigration experience with regards to family relations in rather positive terms – emphasizing the economic benefits and financial support they can offer to relatives at home – studies have underlined that emigration increases the vulnerability of the children and elderly left behind (Alexe/Horvath/Noica/Radu 2012).

It was during this legislature (2004-2008), that the situation of children left at home by parents working abroad, and the related situation of the elderly taking responsibility for their upbringing, became highly politicized. However, while representatives of the major parties and independents acknowledged the issue of “home-alone children” and emphasized the necessity to act, the legislative proposals initiated at the time to ensure the protection of these children and to support them in their educational path, were rejected.

In August 2007, a proposal was drafted by independent MP Meir Nati to oblige parents traveling abroad to inform the social assistance services (SPAS) of their departure and of the person who would be responsible for the children left at home, or to make a monthly payment of 5 percent of their salary abroad to the social assistance fund (Meir 2007). In contrast, the Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat Liberal, PD-L) initiated a legislative proposal aimed at bringing together various governmental and civil society actors, such as child protection services and local councils, for the social and psychological condition of these children. Finally, the 2013 initiative of the populist ‘People’s Party Dan Daianescu’ (PP-DD) provided financial support in the form of vouchers to persons caring for children whose parents are temporarily abroad.

Although the fate of the people who remained in their homeland in this way but were nevertheless affected by emigration has always been a central subject of political debates on emigration and has been taken up and lamented by countless political statements and emotionalizing speeches, the aforementioned legislative initiatives ultimately remained unsuccessful. During the 2016-2020 parliamentary term, the interest in emigration dropped. While still present in the parliamentary debates, the situation of children whose parents work abroad was less politicized. Nevertheless, PSD representatives emphasized the urgent need to create pilot-centers for “home-alone children” in the North-East region of Romania, one the poorest in EU, with three times more “home-alone children” than the national average (Macovei 2019).

In fact, in the past 20 years, not only those left behind, but above all the fates of children whose parents are temporarily abroad.

3 Source of data: http://www.cdep.ro/ In order to assess the meaning of migration in general and emigration in particular in parliamentary debates, the frequency of use of the word stems of ‘ilungriji’ and ‘migratie’ (in Romanian migrant and stream) in each of the legislative periods from 1996 onward was determined here.
of those who emigrated have been at the center of the Romanian discussion on emigration. The experience of stereotypes, exploitation and discrimination with which Romanian emigrants were confronted in other European countries has repeatedly played a decisive role. Various cases covered by the international press triggered the indignation of certain representatives, such as the case of three Romanians living and working in France who each owned an iPhone and were arrested on the streets of Paris in 2011, accused of stealing them (Rigaux 2016). At the beginning of 2015, UK’s Channel 4 released the documentary “The Romanians Are Coming” which triggered also indignation because of what was considered a disparaging and discriminatory portrayal of Romanian workers. The Romanian community in the UK organized a silent protest in front of the media outlet in London, to express their discontent with the way they were depicted in the documentary and the fact that they are treated as second-class European citizens (Digi24 2015). In addition, the Romanian foreign affairs minister sent a letter to his British counterpart to express his dissatisfaction, the Romanian ambassador to the UK publicly condemned the Channel 4 portrayal of Romanians and parliament representatives used diplomatic channels to emphasize the need to firmly intervene to prevent this kind of denigration (Fonta 2015; Mazul 2015).

However, not only cases of degradation, but also fraud, breaches of contract and slave-like working conditions, which the emigrants sometimes had to suffer, were regularly the subject of political discussion in Romania. Labor conditions and exploitation were brought under parliamentary scrutiny when the serious labour and sexual exploitation suffered by Romanian women working in greenhouses and fields in Ragusa hit the international press in 2017 (Tondo/Kelly 2017). Romanian experts within the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) put the issue of their jobs, as well and brought further the issue to European Parliament (EWL 2017; Stur 2017). Outside parliamentary politics, the exploitation of Romanian migrant workers abroad was politicized by the left-wing collective Claca, for example when Romanian construction workers involved in the building of a mall in Berlin, subsequently called “the mall of shame”, were not paid for their work (Ana 2020: 199). Some placement agencies also came under fire for unfair practices, false promises and fraud in placing people willing to emigrate. To prevent abuses of Romanian workers abroad by foreign employers but also placement agencies, several deputies from different parties, proposed a law that would introduce an obligation for employment agencies to transmit the contact data of the workers they place abroad to the Romanian diplomatic missions. The proposal was rejected.4

However, not only the experiences of the emigrants, but also the economic consequences of their emigration for Romania have been discussed rather critically in recent years. Already during the 2012-2016 legislative period, the situation in Romanian hospitals in particular came to a head due to a steadily worsening shortage of personnel, which is why the Romanian parties increasingly addressed the emigration of health care personnel. The underfunding of the health care system and its partial privatization as part of austerity measures resulted in nationwide protests in the winter of 2011/12 (Ana 2017). To encourage them to stay in the country, a supplement of 150 euros was finally granted to practicing physicians in 2014, and the salary of health care workers was increased by 25 percent in 2015. In 2016, young Romanians were even encouraged to return to the country through a “Di-aspora Start-up Program”. Despite these incentives, in a 2016 survey, more than eighty percent of Romania’s young physicians said they still consider emigrating.


INFOBOX – Emigration in times of Corona

During the pandemic, romanticized public debates regarding emigration oscillated between an initial condemnation of the Romanians working in Italy, Spain or the UK, returning home after losing their jobs and the subsequent pride and appreciation for the Romanians going to work abroad amidst the pandemic, coming to the rescue of Western European states in need of seasonal agricultural or care work. The situation of the most precarious migrant workers coming back home after being severely hit by the pandemic and not being able to afford to pay their rent and quarantine abroad after losing their job was belittled by the press and raised concerns among the governors. A distinction has been made in the public debates between “thieves and criminals” and the “serious diaspora”, triggered by the declarations of the MEP Rares Bogdan, a PNL candidate during the 2019 elections and sitting for the EPP group. The MEP sparked controversy after stating that some of those returning home are also “pimps, prostitutes, beggars and violent criminals” (Mediapool 2020). It was instantly ignored that among the most severely hit by the Covid-19 crisis were Romanian emigrants pressured to work abroad by poverty and lack of opportunities for survival who had then taken up precarious employment contracts or were engaged in illegal work; such as those working in slaughterhouses in Germany (Deutsche Welle 2020) or in care work in Austria or Italy and who found themselves unable to support themselves in the host country after losing their jobs. During the last decades emigration was mostly celebrated as it lowered the pressure on the welfare budget, even though some of its severe costs have been acknowledged and politicized at various moments. The return of Romanian emigrants during the pandemic, after many lost their issue on the woment, especially those involved in “dishonest work” who “need to be brought to terms” as Bogdan declared (Mediapool 2020). The more appreciative framing came when in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic – the government, managed to create special clear agreements with Western European states, by means of a strict lockdown enforced by police and army as emergency state measures were implemented, in order to send cheap Romanian labor abroad as the Western European states were in need of seasonal workers in agriculture or care.

OUTLOOK

In the last two decades Romania’s demographic decline has been the result of a complex evolution of birth rates, death rates and emigration, related to the socio-economic conditions after the fall of the state-socialist regime. The considerable deterioration of the years already during the 2012-2016 legislative period, the situation in Romanian hospitals in particular came to a head due to a steadily worsening shortage of personnel, which is why the Romanian parties increasingly addressed the emigration of health care personnel. The underfunding of the health care system and its partial privatization as part of austerity measures resulted in nationwide protests in the winter of 2011/12 (Ana 2017). To encourage them to stay in the country, a supplement of 150 euros was finally granted to practicing physicians in 2014, and the salary of health care workers was increased by 25 percent in 2015. In 2016, young Romanians were even encouraged to return to the country through a “Di-aspora Start-up Program”. Despite these incentives, in a 2016 survey, more than eighty percent of Romania’s young physicians said they still consider emigrating.

Against this background, the consequences of the massive emigration movements in Romania after 1990 are being discussed critically. Not only the continuing exodus of well-educated young people, but also the loss of low-skilled workers is already having a considerable impact on the Romanian economy and the capacities of the welfare state. The political consequences of this development are likely to become increasingly evident in the coming decade. A likely scenario is that the country will continue to educate and train cheap labor for abroad, both skilled and unskilled and in this case will rely on im-
migration to compensate for the loss of workforce. Alternatively, yet more unlikely considering the new international division of labor, the country may tackle the underlying causes of emigration and implement policies which incentivize return migration.

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EMIGRATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

SPAIN

Summary

The 2008 financial crisis, and the subsequent Euro crisis, had a substantial impact on migration flows in Spain. The increase in emigration and the decrease in immigration constituted a sharp break with the preceding period in which Spain’s foreign population swiftly increased and emigration numbers were low.

As a result, public and political attention partially shifted from immigration to emigration. The debate was mostly focused on the negative impact of the crisis on qualified young Spaniards, thus obscuring the fact that the vast majority of outgoing migrants were actually foreigners, that is, immigrants themselves.

Political parties framed emigration differently. While governmental representatives did not perceive emigration exclusively in negative terms, the left/opposition framed it in a completely negative and often dramatic fashion, blaming the retrenchment policies and labor reforms of the right-wing incumbent for driving people away. This is in contrast to the treatment of the Spanish diaspora, which is a consensual issue among parties.

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF EMIGRATION

According to its official statistics, Spain has an estimated 2.6 million citizens living abroad, that is, the equivalent of about 5.5 percent of its resident population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020a). Of these, only 32 percent (~838,000) were actually born in Spain, which speaks for the proportion of (a) descendants of emigrants and (b) immigrants who acquired Spanish citizenship and returned to their country of origin. The number of citizens abroad has increased substantially over the past decade, as in 2010 the official statistics registered only a little over 1.5 million citizens abroad.

This is not solely an outcome of emigration, but it is also the result of the introduction of new pathways to acquire Spanish nationality. About 60 percent of Spanish citizens abroad reside in the American continent and 36 percent in Europe. The overrepresentation of the former is both the result of a historical tradition of emigration to Latin America – Argentina being the country with most Spanish nationals –, but also of the fact that Latin American citizens have privileged access to Spanish citizenship via residency (as only two years of legal residency are required to request nationality). After Argentina (~473,500), the countries with the most Spanish nationals are France (~273,000), the USA (~167,000) and Germany (~167,000) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020a).

1 Spanish nationality law is to a large extent based on ius sanguinis, meaning that those born of a Spanish mother or father are automatically granted citizenship, regardless of where they were born (art. 17.1 Civil Code). Children of Spanish emigrants who lost their Spanish nationality can also request citizenship (if the parents were born in Spain) (art. 20.1 b Civil Code).

2 The so-called Historical Memory Law (52/2007) – meant to recognize and provide compensation for victims of the Civil War and the dictatorship – extended Spanish nationality by origin (1) to children of a mother or father who was originally Spanish even if not born in Spain and (2) to grandchildren of people who were exiled and lost Spanish nationality.
EMIGRATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

SPAIN

Similar to other South European countries, Spain was traditionally a country of emigration with little immigration. The first large wave of emigration, which started in the last third of the 19th century and continued until the 1930s, is part of the so-called transatlantic cycle, when about 3.5 million people left to the American continent, in particular to former colonies (only half of which returned) (Romero Valiente 2003: 225). Outflows came to halt during the Spanish civil war (1936-1939), but its end forced more than 200,000 people into political exile, particularly to France. The subsequent wave of migration took place from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, when peripheral European countries supplied workers to highly industrialized economies in Europe, while, at the same time, the predominantly rural economies of the South struggled to absorb population growth. More than 50,000 Spaniards left yearly – mostly to France, Germany and Switzerland –, with some estimates placing the total number of emigrants in this period at 2 million (Santos 1999: 30).

Net migration rates turned positive from the mid-1970s onwards, most of all as a result of a drastic reduction in emigration and significant return rates. In fact, up until 1994, the majority of incoming migrants were people of Spanish nationality returning to their home country (Romero Valiente 2003: 226). The flux of foreign migrants, however, progressively increased from the late 1980s onwards, booming around the year 2000. Spain’s foreign population grew exceptionally fast, as the total number of foreign residents went from less than 1 million in 2000 to over 5 million in 2008, corresponding to a period of sustained economic growth and job creation. This largely accounts for Spain’s continued population growth (going from 40 million people in the late 1990s to more than 46 million in 2008) and explains why the focus was mainly on incoming migrants.

This tendency was, however, reversed during the worst period of the recent financial and economic crisis, as Spain registered negative migration rates for the first time in decades. As shown in Figure 1, the number of outgoing migrants was greater than the number of incoming ones from 2010 to 2015. Though the difference is not large – as the influx of migrants was almost sufficient to offset increasing emigration rates –, it is nonetheless noteworthy that this constituted a drastic break with preceding tendencies. Between 2010 and 2015, two and half million people chose to leave (in comparison to the almost 2 million that arrived). Figure 1 also illustrates how closely population growth follows migration rates (secondary axis). While Spain lost almost 400,000 people between 2011 and 2015, it has already gained more than 800,000 people since then. This is exclusively due to positive net migration rates – which started to pick up in 2016 and are now back to the level of 2008 –, whereas the rate of natural increase has been negative in the last few years. In this regard, it is worth noting that Spain has the second lowest fertility rate in the EU (after Malta), well below the replacement level.

Figure 2 looks exclusively at the yearly number of emigrants and goes back to 2002, showing a clear and sharp rise in emigration, already starting in 2006-2007 and reaching a peak in 2013 – in that year alone, more than half a million people left. What is equally striking is the large overrepresentation of foreigners in emigration statistics, showing that the immigrant population gained more than 800,000 people since then. This is exclusively due to positive net migration rates – which started to pick up in 2016 and are now back to the level of 2008 –, whereas the rate of natural increase has been negative in the last few years. In this regard, it is worth noting that Spain has the second lowest fertility rate in the EU (after Malta), well below the replacement level.

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tion is the most mobile and the most heavily affected by the crisis.\(^4\) Out of the total outgoing population between 2008 and 2019, only about 18 percent (~747,000) were Spanish citizens (and this includes naturalized mi-
grants). Over that same period, the number of incoming Spanish citizens in immigration statistics amounts to a total of ~591,000 (partially accom-
imated over the last few years, coinciding with the period of economic re-
covery), which makes for a total loss of about 156,000 Spanish citizens (the equivalent of 0.33 percent of the country’s population).

There are good reasons, however, to suspect that Spanish nationals are seriously underrepresented in such statistics and that the actual number of Spaniards abroad is considerably higher. This is because (contrary to the outflows of foreigners) this data can be measured through other instruments,\(^5\) and on data of emigration of Spanish nationals is based only on their (voluntary) registration in Spanish consulates abroad. As there are no in-
centives (or actual disincentives) to do so, it is estimated that the number of Spaniards migrating is triple that found in official sources (González-Ferrer 2013: 17). There are several pieces of evidence that back this up. A survey of high-skilled Spanish emigrants, for example, has shown that only 36 percent of them registered at the respective consulate (En-
ríquez/Romera 2018). Similarly, ‘mirror data’ on incoming migrants of Span-
ish nationality in the UK or Germany show that the number of Spanish citi-
zens who registered there is more than four times greater than the official data released in Spain (González-Ferrer 2013: 6).

As far as the main destination countries are concerned, it is no surprise to see Romania and, to a lesser extent, Morocco, among the top destinations in the last decade, while avoiding long-term commitments for the largest immigrant groups in Spain. At the peak of the economic cri-
sis, Ecuador was also on this list, attesting for the significance of ‘return’ movements. In the last few years the United Kingdom has become the sec-
ond most important destination for the total emigrant population and the most important for Spanish nationals, followed by France, Germany and the United States.

In light of the diversity of people leaving Spain, it is to be expected that their profiles also vary, especially when it comes to qualifications. Though statistics in this regard are meagre and incomplete, there is a commonly held image, widespread among the general public and elites alike, that emigrants are predominantly talented and highly-qualified, a perception that spurred much talk about ‘brain drain’ and a ‘lost generation’ with little alternative but to leave.\(^6\) To start with, it is doubtful that the magnitude of this phenomenon warrants such fears given that Spanish citizens do not appear to be exceptionally mobile (or at least not across borders), Eurostat data on the mobility of EU citizens shows that Spain is among the countries with the least mobile workers percentage (about 1.1 percent in 2019). Even if one takes into account issues of underrepresentation in official sta-
tistics, one could still legitimately expect numbers to be higher in light of the seriousness of the economic crisis in Spain and exceptionally high un-
employment rates (only comparable to those of Greece).

However, it does seem to be the case that, among those who are mobile and hold Spanish citizenship, highly educated workers are in fact overrep-
resented. The same Eurostat data shows that the share of Spanish EU mi-
grants with tertiary education was 47 percent in 2019, significantly above the 37.4 percent identified for the general population in Spain. What is more, this difference seems to have increased substantially over the last ten years, as in 2009 the proportion of highly mobile citizens with tertiary education was only slightly higher (32 percent) than that of the general pop-
ulation (29 percent). Labour Force Surveys in the UK or France corroborate this, showing, for example, that between 2008 and 2012 about 60 percent of incoming Spanish migrants in those two countries held university de-
grees (Izquierdo Peinado/Jimeno/Aitor 2014). Such an educational gap is a commonly used indicator of ‘brain drain’ and can be observed most nota-
bly for Spain, Italy and Greece within the EU, though the absolute magni-
itude of this phenomenon remains limited nonetheless (Alcidi/Gros 2019: 12).

Taking into account net migration by education level, it is estimated that Spain has experienced a net loss of 87,000 highly skilled peo-
ple between 2007 and 2017 (ibid.). The impact of this loss of human capital might be relatively limited given Spain’s large share of tertiary graduates and the fact that many were unemployed back home.\(^6\)

Moreover, although it is true that to this day the outflow of Spanish nation-
als continues to be significantly greater than before the crisis, it is also the case that the proportion of Spanish citizens among incoming migrants has in increased in the last few years.\(^6\) This suggests that some of those who left in previous years are returning. Temporary emigration may thus turn out to be more of a blessing than a curse, relieving some of the pressure on the labor market in the short-term while avoiding long-term detrimental impacts, with the additional benefit that returning migrants will likely have accrued additional skills.

**EMIGRATION IN THE POLITICAL DEBATE**

The treatment of emigration on the political and institutional level funda-
mentally depends on what kind of emigration one is speaking of. As Spain has a long history of emigration and a sizable number of citizens abroad, the treatment of the Spanish diaspora – in particular, its rights and the perpetu-
ation or reinforcement of its ties to Spain – has long been an object of polit-
ical engagement. It is therefore important to distinguish between the politi-
cal treatment of the diaspora – understood as Spanish citizens permanent-
tly depending on what kind of emigration one is speaking of. As Spain

\(^4\) This is in part due to their overrepresentation in economic sectors heavily affected by the economic crisis, most notably the construction sector.

\(^5\) An anecdote illustrating the issue in this regard is the fact that all the large media outlets reported in 2013 that 89 percent of Spanish emigrants were highly qualified. What they failed to mention was that this estimate was based on an e-survey, which was most likely non-representative, as it was disseminated through social networks and the media, as the researchers behind the survey recogized themselves here: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/esp/.mvc/mvc/connect/ae4960a44651515d5awe65b30a3754fe85/GonzalezEnriquez-MartinezRodriguezSpain-migration-crisis.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ac4f48004469c16daee5bee307648e49

\(^6\) According to a survey of highly qualified Southern European emigrants, the Spanish were the ones with the highest unemployment rate back home, corresponding to 48 percent of those interviewed (Enriquez/Romera 2018).

\(^6\) Although sources indicate that in 2018 and 2019 the number of incoming Spanish citizens was higher than the number of outgoing ones, though outgoing migrants are on average younger, the age profile of the incoming ones does not support the commonly held assumption that those returning are older migrants coming back for retirement (as in 2018 and 2019 those over 65 years of age constituted only ~18 percent of incoming migrants of Spanish nationality).
for three decades now, most notably the (1) General Council of Spaniards Abroad (within the Ministry of Employment and Social Security) and (2) the Councils of Spanish Residents (attached to Spanish consulates). The general duty to safeguard the rights of emigrants means that they have, at times, been an object of legislative attention. Most notably, the Statute of Spanish Citizens Abroad (Estatuto de la Ciudadanía Española en el Exterior, Law 40/2006) consolidated the rights of citizens abroad and enshrined in law that citizens abroad have the same rights as citizens on Spanish territory.

Similar to other countries, Spain – and its political parties – has been keen on strengthening economic, political and cultural links with expatriates overseas. In addition to being a manifestation of ethno-nationalism, transnational ties with Spanish expatriates can help attract remittances and economic investment, promote the language and culture of origin abroad, and advance foreign policy interests in bilateral relations (Bauböck 2007: 2,400). Parties seem to be well aware of this, judging by the fact that they usually reserve a small section of their electoral manifestos for Spanish citizens abroad. In a similar vein, their rights – and the intricacies related to their safeguarding, enactment, consolidation, and adaptation – are a recurring topic in the Spanish parliament, particularly when it comes to (a) access to welfare or social security as well as (b) representation and voting rights. There is little to no political conflict in this regard, as all major parties agree on maintaining links with the diaspora and safeguarding their rights. The only significant difference found in recent electoral manifestos is that the radical left, most recently Podemos, has been the only advocate for the creation of a specific electoral district for emigrants, proportional to their number. Moreover, the ethnic/nationalist logic that is often behind the protection of communities abroad – i.e., keeping their identities bound to Spain – is not specific to any political group and seems to be endorsed across party lines.

Cross-party differences are most often related to the emphasis and amount of attention. In general, the issue seems to be of greater concern for the left, something that is most likely linked to its history of exile during the Franco regime. This is visible, for instance, in the fact that the left is generally more active in presenting parliamentary initiatives on the issue. Out of the 298 parliamentary initiatives surveyed between 2001 and 2019, more than half had been presented by the center-left party PSOE alone. Even excluding those which focused on emigration as the exiting of people and focusing only on the ones related to the diaspora, the PSOE presented 79 initiatives while the count for the conservative Partido Popular was 53.

Parliamentary speeches on emigration constitute a primary source of evidence when it comes to assessing the political salience of emigration, that is, the prominence of the topic in the political debate. Figure 3 shows the yearly evolution of the number of speeches and initiatives related to emigration in the Spanish Congress of Deputies from 2001 to 2019.8 Note that this includes almost all types of initiatives (see fn. 10) – including written questions that simply have a supervisory or informative function –, which is why the numbers appear quite high. If one excludes written questions (which are likely the least relevant type of initiative), variation in the number of parliamentary initiatives and speeches is much less pronounced (yellow line in Figure 3), suggesting that emigration-related issues were never highly salient. Figure 3 also breaks down those initiatives by sub-issue, according to whether they deal with issues related to emigrants abroad (diaspora), to emigration as the present exiting of people (emigration), or others. This unambiguously highlights that emigration as the exiting of people only appears as a somewhat relevant topic during the crisis years, most notably in 2013 and 2014. Prior to that, issues related to Spanish citizens abroad are the only relevant ones, which is logical considering the low emigration rates before the crisis.

The peak in political attention in the early 2000s has to do with various circumstances, namely (a) voting-related issues (as there were suspicions of electoral irregularities); (b) social assistance issues (including assistance to emigrants in Argentina in light of the dire economic crisis that country was going through at the time); and (c) issues related to migrants who had returned and their descendants, such as ways of facilitating their integration. The peak during the crisis years is obviously of a different nature. To begin with, the high number of written questions in 2014 is due to the fact that the main opposition party (the center-left PSOE) repeatedly insisted on surveying the numbers of those who ceased to receive unemployment benefits due to emigration – formulating separate questions for each province, each month. This is of course valuable information for political parties, in light of the limited availability of data on emigration as well as the fact that variation in unemployment numbers due to emigration – rather than due to job creation – has entirely different consequences for the political treatment of unemployment and the evaluation of the government. Apart from this, the opposition was naturally keen on confronting the government with rising emigration figures – or what they shrewdly termed ‘economic exile’ –, presenting a few initiatives with demands or proposals to prevent emigration and encourage the return of emigrants.

8 Based on the keyword search method, using the word ‘emigration’. All types of initiatives are included (law proposals, motions, oral questions, written questions, urgent appeals), except for ‘attendance requests’ (solicitudes de comparecencia). Initiatives that turned out to be about immigration were excluded.
The crisis years represent the only recent period in Spain where the salience of emigration seems somewhat similar to the salience of immigration. This is not so much the result of an exceptionally high salience of emigration, but rather of the accentuated decline in the salience of immigration in comparison to the pre-crisis years. Although more thorough research would be needed on this, the crisis years – corresponding to the PP legislature from 2011 to 2016 – were the only time period during which the number of parliamentary initiatives and speeches on emigration appears somewhat similar to those on immigration, whereas before and after those years immigration is a topic of much greater concern. This is visible in party manifestos too, where the space dedicated to immigration-related issues is greater than that dedicated to emigration-related ones, even in 2015 (Figure 5). Podemos is the only party (among the main ones covered) that devotes more attention to emigration than to immigration.

As mentioned above, there is little to no political polarization in terms of the protection of the rights of citizens abroad. However, when it comes to the recent wave of emigration and to its political treatment, the tone was often one of confrontation and there were notable differences in how parties framed the phenomenon. The left, in opposition, was keen on characterizing emigration as nothing less than a drama, often speaking of ‘economic exile’, ‘forced exile’ or ‘forced expulsion’. Predictably, this was frequently a means to criticize the government of the conservative Partido Popular for its retrenchment policies and labor reforms, blaming it for the high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. It was also a strategy of counter-framing, in reaction to statements of government representatives who framed emigration in a positive light.

The first and most obvious instance of controversy was in late 2012, when the Secretary General of Immigration and Emigration, Marina del Corral, stated that immigration was not only an outcome of the economic crisis but also of globalization, freedom of movement within Europe, the demand for professionals with good technical knowledge and qualifications, and ‘why not say it, the adventurous impulse of the youth’, among other factors (ABC 2012). Furthermore, Corral insisted that emigration should be seen as something ‘essentially positive’ as qualified Spanish workers ‘have finally stopped being local’ (ibid.). Needless to say, these declarations sparked heated debate, as well as biting commentary on social media. When confronted in parliament with such criticism, governmental representatives did not engage directly with Corral’s words, simply adopting the usual strategy of blame-shifting, reminding the centre-left of how high youth unemployment rates had already been during the Socialist mandate (DSCD 2012: 67).

Another instance of confrontation where the difference in framing was obvious occurred a few months later, when the Minister of Employment and Social Security stated that the exiting of people in search of better work and training opportunities ‘is called external mobility’, also adding that there is an underlying ‘exchange’ in this regard, as many British, Germans or Italian reside in Spain too (El Mundo 2013). The opposition, instead, spoke of ‘economic exile’ and ‘brain drain’, directly blaming the government for ‘inviting young people to go away’ (ibid.). Its tone was invariably negative and often dramatic, recurring to images of the massive outflow of the 1960s to accentuate the severity of the circumstances. Take as examples the following excerpts from parliamentary speeches:

‘Nowadays, we have as many young people leaving as in the 1960s. Young people are not taking their backpack to go on excursions or because they have an adventurous spirit; They are taking their grandparents’ suitcase, the emigration suitcase. In the 1960s our grandparents left, but today, it is a generation of doctors, engineers and researchers (…) You are expelling the best generation of workers and professionals that Spain has ever had. A lost generation, ladies and gentlemen, it is a disaster.’

María González Venerus. PSOE, May 29th, 2013 (DSCD 2013)
The ‘brain drain’ issue was also perceived differently by governmental representatives and the left-wing opposition. While the latter inevitably framed it in a negative light, the Minister of Education considered that it should not be termed as such and that the fact that there are young people with the capacity and will to move (…) and with the wish to broaden their professional horizons can never be considered a negative phenomenon (Públicos 2010). The government statements, adding that there should not be a negative connotation, as ‘many graduates return, once they have gained experience in other countries, which is enriching for Spain and valued by businesses’ (ibid.). The President of the Community of Madrid, and President of the Partido Popular in that same region, had made similar statements, considering that it was a ‘reason for optimism that for the first time many qualified young people are working abroad’ and that this ‘will have a positive impact on Spain’s economy’ (El Mundo 2013). Furthermore, the Education Minister later considered that the ‘brain drain’ issue was being overestimated and numbers misinterpreted (La Vanguardia 2014).

Interestingly, the left/right (or opposition/government) divide in the framing of emigration seems to be commonly shared by newspapers with different ideological leanings. While conservative newspapers tended to emphasize different kinds of reasons for leaving the country (such as capital accumulation or learning foreign languages), often perceiving outwards mobility as a natural outcome of globalization and EU integration, left-leaning newspapers placed greater emphasis on the lack of choice due to mass unemployment and labor market precariousness (González-Ferrer/Moreno-Fuentes 2017: 452 f.).

Apart from the ideological underpinnings of such differences in framing, there are good reasons to suspect that framing is also strongly conditioned by incumbent-opposition dynamics. Though governments are probably unwilling to publicly admit it (as this would constitute an unpopular position), emigration in times of crisis can help mitigate economic shocks, as the outflow of people decreases social expenditure (especially if they are unemployed), as well as relieving some of the pressure on the labor market. It should therefore be of little surprise to see incumbents taking a more ambivalent position on the exiting of people than the opposition, particularly in times of economic crisis.

Alongside the legislation that deals with the rights of Spanish citizens abroad, the Spanish state has also taken some measures to support citizens that decide to return to Spain, particularly when it comes to specific social protection schemes for the most vulnerable. In addition, the Statute of Spanish Citizens Abroad (Law 40/2006) created a ‘Spanish Return Office’ (Oficina Española de Retorno) meant to assist those wishing to return to Spain, mainly by providing information on administrative procedures pertaining to multiple domains, including social security prerogatives. Specific policies to encourage return are, however, meagre. The most significant step so far has been the approval of a Return to Spain Plan in March 2019, with an initial budget of 24 million euro, outlining 50 measures meant to break professional and administrative barriers to return. Among the stated goals of such measures are the ones of (1) connecting migrants and businesses, (2) facilitating employment in the public sector, (3) enhancing support for scientific research careers, as well as (4) providing information and training assistance to entrepreneurs. Even though this program signals a greater effort of the government in this regard, the diagnosis does not seem to be substantially different from the one made by González and Fuentes (2017: 466), who reported that governmental initiatives are mainly reduced to providing information, some training opportunities and, in some cases, an online platform with job offers, or opportunities for young entrepreneurship. It should be noted, however, that there is variation in policies across the territory of Spain. Different regional governments have qualified such measures for the return of qualified migrants. Several of them offer financial assistance in covering relocation costs as well as fiscal incentives to businesses who offer returning migrants non-temporary contracts (El País 2020).

INFOBOX – Migration in times of the Corona pandemic

Emigration was not a relevant issue in Covid-19 times. The same is not true, obviously, for movement of people in general. Spain imposed one of the strictest lockdowns in Europe. The state of emergency was declared in mid-March and ended on June 21st. Internal and external movement was severely restricted during that period. In general, Spain has followed EU recommendations on travel bans, opening up its borders to the list of states approved by the EU Council. Border closures have proven themselves to be particularly problematic in the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, fueling tensions between the Moroccan and Spanish authorities. Morocco decided to close its land borders to Spain on March 13th, and they have remained closed ever since. The consequences for cross-border workers and for the economy of the region have been severe. On the one hand, thousands of Moroccan workers who used to cross daily into the Spanish enclaves are struggling, and many have lost their jobs (France 24 2020). On the other hand, this development also left many Moroccans stranded in Spain as Morocco barred its own citizens from coming home for more than two months (Voa News 2020). Border closures and restrictions on movement will surely have an impact on both emigration and immigration numbers in 2020. By comparison to 2019, official projections for 2020 estimate that the number of immigrants will decrease by 67 percent and the number of emigrants by 54 percent (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020b). Apart from this short-term impact, a medium-term effect is expected as well, given the upcoming economic crisis.

Spain continues, however, to be an important destination for asylum seekers. Even though the number of asylum applications decreased drastically over the months of April and May (during lockdown), they have picked up since then. Between January and August 2020, Spain registered more than 60,000 applications (a decrease of 13 percent in comparison to 2019). This is in large part due to the influx of Venezuelan and Colombian citizens, who apply for asylum after entering Spain as tourists. As for irregular migration, data from the Ministry of Interior shows that, up until mid-September, 15,985 people have irregularly entered Spain, a 22 percent reduction in comparison to the same period last year (Ministerio del Interior 2020). While there was a sharp decrease...
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in entries via Ceuta and Melilla, the number of sea arrivals to the Canary Islands increased dramatically. As this sea route is more dangerous, the estimated number of deaths and missing persons is higher for 2020, with 440 dead and missing by August (UNHCR 2020).

Additionally, the pandemic seems to have exposed just how vulnerable immigrants are in times of crisis. On the one hand, given their overrepresentation in sectors heavily affected by the pandemic (tourism, restaurant and food services, etc.), they are at a greater risk of unemployment. On the other hand, there are sub-groups among them which are particularly vulnerable, such as irregular migrants and workers in the underground economy - who may not be eligible for social protection schemes. As a result, NGOs have demanded the mass regularization of all irregular migrants in Spain, which they estimate to number at around 800,000 people (Sánchez 2020). The increase in poverty is visible on the streets, in soup kitchens, and in the significant rise in those who recur to organizations such as the Red Cross and Cáritas (Enríquez 2020). Oxfam estimates that one in every three people at risk of poverty are immigrants (RTVE 2020). The pandemic has also shed light on one particular type of migrant: the seasonal agricultural worker. Apart from migrants who usually travel from Eastern Europe or Morocco, there are thousands who migrate in a circular pattern between different harvesting locations in Spain, some of whom work and live in abysmal conditions. They were first an object of attention because of a potential shortage of workers in light of restrictions on movement – with the government adopting measures to facilitate the recruitment of the unemployed and immigrants already in Spain (El País 2020) – and second because several Covid-19 outbreaks occurred among seasonal workers.12

OUTLOOK

The Spanish case provides an excellent demonstration of the extent to which migratory flows are dependent on economic conditions. While Spain’s rapid development has transformed the country into a ‘receiving state’ in the last few decades, the Great Recession has shown that this trajectory is neither linear nor irreversible. Even though it is to be expected that Spain will continue to experience positive migration rates in the upcoming decades, the net rate is sure to change drastically in times of crisis. This has important consequences for Spain, particularly due to the over-reliance of the country’s demography on migration. It is now estimated that, because of the adverse effects of Covid-19, the net migration rate will not be as positive as expected in the upcoming years, with significant consequences for the aging population. Projections indicate that in 2030, 24 percent will be over 65 years (compared to 19.6 percent in 2020) and that the old-age dependency ratio will reach 38 percent in ten years (it is 30.2 percent in 2020) – three points more than the projections made in 2018 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020b). This is bad news for the sustainability of the welfare state, as Spain’s social security system was counting on higher immigration rates than the ones that are now expected (Jorrín 2020).

This is, however, not significantly different from the demographic scenarios faced by most EU countries, and in this sense the challenges are largely the same. Though policymakers are well aware that immigration is the most effective way to counteract the overaging of their populations, it is likely that the emphasis will be more on family and fertility policies, and perhaps on the return of Spanish nationals too. None of this is, however, independent from the evolution of the Spanish labor market and in this regard Spain continues to face serious structural difficulties (high unemployment rates, a high degree of labor market duality, precarious contracts, low-wage traps, skills’ gaps and mismatches, a sizable underground economy, etc.). The country has, however, the comparative advantage of having a large pool of potential immigrants with considerable cultural affinity (Latin American migrants), with positive consequences for integration and, hopefully, for a comparatively smaller cultural backlash.

12 The author would like to thank Katja Lindner for having done preliminary research on several aspects covered in this section.
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Parliamentary Initiatives and Speeches on Emigration (2001-2019)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>References to ‘brain drain’ in the media</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Relevance of Emigration and Immigration in Electoral Manifestos</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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PROFILE

The Mercator Forum for Migration and Democracy (MIDEM) examines about the impact of migration on democratic institutions, policies and cultures and looks into political decision making processes in the field of migration policies - in individual countries and in a comparative view of Europe. A spotlight is put on the relation between migration and populism.

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• Populism
• Migration policies
• Migration in urban and regional contexts

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• Providing a forum for public debates

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