

Brain Drain. Threat to Successful Transition in South East Europe?

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ABSTRACT

This article will discuss the present situation regarding the out-migration of highly skilled persons from the Balkans and the influence this has on the course of the transition that must take place in order for those countries to join the European Union (EU). Since most migration of highly skilled persons constitutes a 'brain drain' in the region, and because this part of the population represents the 'best and the brightest' human capital, the quality of transition is called into question. The main argument here will be that a variety of causes for emigration are closely related to the current social and political environment in the region, where oligarchic social orders 'push out' the highly skilled as an 'unwanted' elite. However, there are some encouraging examples which will be presented, allowing us to ask how a region like South East Europe might re-appear on the international scientific map and build its intellectual capital in a way that corresponds both to national interests and the needs of the global market, and not just exist as a source of low skilled workers for the EU.

Brain Drain and the Reasons Behind It

The brain drain phenomenon was first problematized during the 1960s when a mass and permanent emigration of highly skilled people (researchers, scientists, and even graduate students) took place and proved detrimental for the economic growth and development of their countries of origin. Much of the current emigration from South East Europe (SEE) is characterized by just such a brain drain process. However, the negative effects of the brain drain phenomenon in the new global market may be mitigated with proper policies to bring benefits to both the 'sending' country and the region. Indeed, scholars now recognize the beneficial impact that brain drain can have, and even strengthen socio-economic development over the long term. It is thus of great importance to know more about the movements of highly skilled people in

SEE in order to create specific policies that can turn the loss of talent into an exchange of knowledge.

In this article it will be shown that brain drain is usually understood as the permanent loss of highly skilled and educated people (who are the vital driving force of any country), and how this can be detrimental for a country's social and economic development if adequate policies are not put in place to deal with it. It will be stressed, however, that in spite of some negative effects, measures can be implemented to minimise the damage and turn 'brain drain' into 'brain circulation'. This can have the effect of encouraging more beneficial and temporary migratory flows, which in turn can strengthen the development of the whole region. Moreover, such circulation of highly skilled labour could improve the social and political environment which itself is a cause of emigration in the first place.

Brain drain tends to become a focus of anxiety because highly educated people are a rare resource and less developed countries suffer major losses when they decide to leave. Still, as Adamovic points out, this problem is very often overemphasized because only a minority of experts really do migrate (2003).

Possible causes of such migration include the violation of human rights or academic freedoms. In the previous decade there are many examples of scientists and intellectuals from South East Europe migrating because of war and human rights violations. This is to say that such violations constitute a 'push' factor: "Not all skilled migrants are in search of educational, economic or intellectual opportunities. Sometimes, they are forced to leave their homes as a result of war, or political, ethnic and religious persecution" (Cervantes, Guellec 2002). This is often compounded by the fact that the economic difficulties facing countries in transition make it less likely that they will be able to substantially invest in the science and education sectors where most highly skilled labour work.

A brain drain may also imply the infringement or absence of many human rights, including the right to work and all other rights that are guaranteed if a person is employed. Other rights may also be affected. For instance, the significant emigration of highly skilled workers might suggest the deprivation of the right to education. Indeed, education and science systems in post-communist transition countries are still underdeveloped in comparison with OECD countries. It is not surprising that given the opportunity, many young experts, scientists, and students will seek out better circumstances in which to study and work.

Still, the poor economic situation alone is often not enough to motivate people to leave. According to Olesen, bad governance also plays an important role in the migration of highly skilled persons. It seems that this population is particularly sensitive when "they find the human rights/governance situation in their home country unacceptable. This can have many forms: honest civil servants refusing to be corrupted; lack of freedom to speak ones mind, especially for civil servants; and promotions based on unprofessional criteria" (Olesen 2002: 137).

The proof for this argument can be seen in those cases when the human rights situation improves. Almost immediately “return migration starts, regardless of the fact that the economic situation in the home country may remain unchanged” (Sethi, Olesen 1998: 11).

Finally, Mahroum is persuasive when he argues that scientists thrive in and value institutions that “draw on their talent and professional socialization experiences and reward them for recognized scholarship. Therefore scientists ascribe greater value to certain institutions and rank them relative to others. Because such perceptions can have powerful consequences on the career paths of scientists who become affiliated with these institutions, mobility is an obvious tactic of professional socialization” (2001). It is understandable that any career path based on skills, merits and competence is more attractive for true scientists than one which lacks these qualities.

Highly-skilled Migration in South East Europe in the Context of Future EU Enlargement

Although highly skilled labour migration in general should not be equated with brain drain, the nature of such migration in the Balkans does in fact correspond to this notion. In terms of Gunnar Myrdal’s divergence theory, South East Europe is suffering the ‘backwash effects’ caused by mass emigration from periphery to centre. Although one may believe that globalisation will eventually reduce the divergence between periphery and centre, such a perspective is still only a prediction and does little to help deal with the region’s present problems. There are few conditions that would make a ‘brain gain strategy’ work, and in the near future this is not a realistic option. Rather, the first step towards remedying brain drain is the creation of possibilities for ‘brain circulation’ between SEE and more developed countries, as well as within the region itself. An example of this latter possibility will be presented later in the article.

EU enlargement is particularly problematic for new member countries from East Europe. According to the microeconomics of migration, it is likely that the skilled, relatively young and dynamic men will leave Central and East Europe to look for their luck in other countries of the EU as the freedom of movement becomes facilitated by membership (Fischer, Wolburg, Straubhaar 1997: 49-90).

The migration between SEE and EU countries has shifted over the past decades. The mostly unskilled migrants that left SEE countries during the 1960s were driven mostly by economic and political reasons. In the last few decades, however, patterns of migration have come to include large numbers of highly skilled workers. Even though the more economic and politically developed countries of the EU experience the circulation of highly skilled workers among one another, some developed countries, like the U.K. and Germany, undergo brain drain to the more attractive United States.

Even outside of the context of future EU inclusion of SEE, troubled economies, political instability, severe unemployment and in some cases war

have spurred especially high levels of emigration from South East Europe. While precise figures are scarce, estimates put the number of migrants from Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria at almost a million people during the past 12 years. It is estimated that from Yugoslavia alone, at least 400,000 people emigrated in the past decade and around 10 percent of those migrants were highly educated.

Although partial and fragmented, the figures on highly skilled labour migration from South East Europe to the European Union are clear evidence that brain drain in the region is no small matter. One of the most striking examples is Albania, arguably Europe's poorest country. According to some sources, it is currently undergoing a potentially devastating brain drain. Around a sixth of the population—including roughly a third of the country's intelligentsia—was seeking work outside the country in 2001 (Tomiuc, 2001). Although remittances are increasing from year to year, some of the highest state officials share the view that this form of migration, because of the absence of discerning and educated voters, poses a serious threat to democracy and the electoral process. Indeed, today Albania has one of the highest emigration rates in the world: during the 1990s almost 40% of lecturers and researchers left the country. There are many examples of experts and students who study in Italy, Greece, Canada and Germany, and it is estimated that only 5% of them will return. For the moment, the only possible benefits from the drain are the growing remittances.

In Romania there are professionals who believe that the outward migration of elites from former communist countries has reached alarming proportions and can only be limited through cooperation and bilateral agreements with Western countries. They expect that the brain drain will be stabilized in the context of transitional reforms. Still, some believe that the government in Romania has yet to come to grips with the problem of highly trained scientific specialists being attracted to work abroad. According to a 2000 survey, 66 percent of Romania's students are likely to emigrate (Tascu, Noftsinger, Bowers 2002). The aging of Romanian society, restrictions on industrial activities and a decrease in the total student population are among the most salient negative elements of the present situation. The post-communist government is faced with the challenge of including the educated elite in the transition reforms that must take place to intensify bonds with the European Union.

Bulgaria has also registered an increasing brain drain. Bulgarian students are among the largest SEE student populations in many European countries, and scientists from Bulgaria usually have a very high skill-ratio. According to some estimates, between 1990 and 1992 around 40,000 Bulgarian scientists emigrated to the U.K., Germany, France and Ireland with the intention of settling permanently (Straubhaar 2000). As in other post-communist countries, labour mobility increased with exposure to competitive international labour market and the loosening of travel restrictions. Some scholars in Bulgaria argue that there are no negative effects of highly skilled emigration and that it should not be cause for concern. They claim that the

only negative effect is that Bulgaria has not seen any benefits from this form of emigration (Sretenova 2003). Others say that the negative impact of the brain drain will only be felt over the long term, and claim that the remittances which emigrants send do not have strategic value for the country. Chompalov shares the view that for the future democratic development of Bulgaria it is of great importance to preserve a creative research and development labour pool (2000). It is estimated that that 50,000 Bulgarian citizens leave the country annually (*Economist* 2003). If we take into consideration that approximately 20 percent of them are highly educated, the negative impact worsens exponentially each year (IOM 1997).

What is perhaps more important is that none of these countries has yet developed a set of policies to manage highly skilled labour migration. Also, while informal Diaspora networks do exist, they do not participate in a significant way in these countries' development. Although SEE is still comprised of mostly 'sending' countries, it is likely that some of them will soon become 'receiving' countries, suggesting a small shift to the brain circulation form of migration. These countries, also called 'buffer zone countries', will probably become attractive for immigrants from distant places because they are located along the EU border (IOM 2003). The stakes for SEE policymakers to regulate and shape the flow of skilled labour are high:

Throughout post-communist Europe, scholars and reformers recognize that their prospects for creating a new, stable democratic order depend on enacting effective educational reforms. A weak educational system today will produce a weak social elite who will be responsible for guiding the new post-communist society in the next decade. If today Eastern Europe undergoes social atomization, the prospects for creating an effective and responsive social and political order will be severely inhibited (Tascu, Noftsinger, Bowers 2002: 226).

Immigration to the EU is likely to continue to increase in the near future, as a result of both the demand for labour and low birth rates in EU countries. In the short and medium term, much of this demand is likely to be met by flows from East Europe, particularly following the eastward enlargement of the EU. The newest trend in some countries of the European Union is to legalize and formalize skilled immigration in the increasingly global battle for the best and brightest (Mahroum 2001: 28). Following Straubhaar, one can conclude that highly skilled labour migration to EU countries is an inevitable part of the enlargement processes (2000).

Impacts, Measures and Policies

The mass emigration of highly skilled persons from a country or region means the weakening of the human potential necessary for social changes. In most cases, this potential is difficult to replace in one generation.

Undoubtedly, from the perspective of 'sending' countries, the highly skilled represent an important element of the labour force and of the society as a whole, for they are responsible for consolidating advanced technologies. It is not for nothing that educational reforms and investment in science and technology have become basic indicators for categorizing the overall development of a country.

Thus far this article has stressed that brain drain may have detrimental effects in transition countries if proper policies are not applied. On the other hand, there are authors that claim that brain drain can have positive growth effects on the source economy as it may increase productivity and stimulate human capital formation. They argue that although the emigration of educated workers leads to lower growth and welfare in the short run, it can act as a stimulus for government to invest more in education in order to improve their labour market and increase the skill level (or so-called 'skill ratio') of their workers. Unfortunately, because of the high risks involved in such a policy, most of the countries do not take these steps (Lundborg, Rechea 2002).

Of course, there are more substantial positive effects of highly skilled labour emigration when people decide to return to their home country.

The return of migrants with its human capital implications is one of the most commonly cited benefits of migration for the sending country, along with remittance and labour market effects. But this is not the only form of capital transfer involved with return migration. Financial and social capital can also be mobilized through migrants return. Migrants can accumulate savings while living and working abroad and bring them back once they return. They may also make professional and personal contacts, which prove useful and productive for their endeavours back home (Ammassari, Black 2001: 17).

Findlay also finds that such emigration can be beneficial and stimulating for the country of origin:

There are three major feedback effects of skilled migration. Return migrants, in particular, bring back their skills and work experience from abroad boosting productivity. Expatriates who remain abroad contribute money via worker remittances; and many observers claim that their transfer of knowledge or technology to developing countries can increase productivity and economic development (Findlay, Lindsay, Lowel 2001: 2).

Such positive effects can be strengthened and even utilised for a country's development if proper policies are implemented. Moreover, one should be aware that many of these positive benefits occur when the transfer from brain drain to brain circulation has already started to take place. This

suggests that where the negative impact of brain drain is more pronounced, conditions for brain circulation have to be urgently introduced. The presence of a highly skilled elite is required if a country wants to proceed with economic development and successfully implement transition reforms. In order to create the conditions for circulation, states must at least encourage the return of their nationals, increase investment in science and education, develop contacts with Diaspora and perhaps even initiate short-term positive discrimination in employment, tax and housing areas.

Given that the brain circulation phenomenon depends largely on the political and economic environment of a particular country, a regional approach can offer a lot, especially if it includes countries at a similar stage of development. Unfortunately, taking into consideration the huge gaps between the developing and developed countries between which most of the brain drain occurs, the benefits from brain circulation will be more difficult to realize in the less developed countries, especially in the short-term.

Quaked offers an interesting perspective according to which “long-term strategies to promote economic growth are needed to enable developing countries to retain and draw back their highly skilled and address the negative effects of the brain drain. Migrants themselves can play an important role through their remittances, Diaspora networks and own willingness to return - at least temporarily - to share their skills and contribute towards economic progress” (2002: 164).

The following argument is significant to develop the main thesis of this article. Iredale claims that either protective or preventive measures (such as further democratisation and socio-economic development) should be implemented to minimize loss without reverting to, or adopting, prohibitive measures (Iredale 1999: 108). Iredale suggests that ‘sending’ countries may consider encouraging or supporting their highly skilled population to take part in brain circulation instead of trying to contain them. This must of course be accompanied by long-term policies designed to assure the country’s development. In this sense, brain circulation can be utilised for the purposes of updating both technology and management in fields that are prioritised by these policies, followed with larger investments in this areas. The policies that have been mentioned thus far need to be matched with the improvement of the political, social and economic environment in the country (Cao 1996).

According to Iredale, this strategy has two goals: (1) accelerating the circulation of highly skilled persons in harmony with national development interests and in the context of globalisation, and (2) optimising their contributions to those interests regardless of their country of residence (Iredale 2001). Quaked claims that “long term strategies to promote economic growth are needed to enable developing countries to re-attain and draw back their highly skilled and address the negative effects of the brain drain”(Quaked 2002: 153).

It must be emphasized that return policies should be long-term oriented and can be efficient only when the home-country “can offer prospective returnees satisfactory career conditions in their field” (Gaillard

2001: 4-5), which itself implies a high(er) level of socio-economic development. Gaillard explains that “there are definitely no quick fixes to stop brain-drains because success depends very much on the level of economic, scientific and technological development of each country and on political leaders taking a long-term view of the whole thing” (Gaillard 2001: 5).

Through their nationals “countries may have access not only to their individual embodied knowledge but also to the socio-professional networks in which they are inserted overseas” (Meyer, Brown 1999). According to Gaillard (2001), the existence of a scientific and industrial community in the country of origin, long term political backing of the idea, and financial and administrative resources to organise such networks are conditions needed to accomplish the goal of connecting Diaspora with elites at home. Through Diaspora networks, highly skilled labour emigration can be utilised with little cost by using already embodied knowledge and modern technology.

Brain drain may come to be accompanied – but not entirely replaced – by the opposite process of what we might call ‘brain drain reversal’ at a later stage. In this sense, as the national economy becomes more integrated into the global one, it may also lead to brain circulation or short-term movements (Iredale 2003.). Brain circulation, as a phenomenon intrinsic to developed countries, ensures many benefits for participating individuals and exists as both the cause and consequence in the socio-economic development of destination and home countries. In this sense, a well developed scientific infrastructure, higher investments in the science sector, and the stability of a consolidated democratic government that assures human rights and academic freedoms all provide a suitable environment that allows for this form of migration to occur.

Two Sides of a Coin – Slovenia and Macedonia

At this point we will provide a short comparison between two countries to distinguish different effects of a decade of highly skilled labour migration in SEE - Macedonia and Slovenia.

These particular countries have been chosen in order to show that under certain conditions, brain drain (in an undeveloped country like Macedonia) can be turned into brain circulation (which already exists in Slovenia, a new EU member). The choice to compare these two countries was dictated by the fact that both of them are successor states of the same country; they belong to the circle of transition countries, and they have almost the same size of population. However, the differences between them are remarkable, including huge gaps in the success of transition reforms, democratic consolidation, economic development, EU integration measures, and the social treatment of science, education, and unemployment. All of these factors influence the path of highly skilled labour mobility.

On the basis of data from the newest surveys, the following main differences in migratory flows can be seen: first, brain circulation has a positive impact and benefits development, and second, brain drain has mostly

negative and damaging effects on fragile transition economies, particularly those that do not implement strategies to deal with the problem of skilled labour out-migration.

Macedonia

Macedonia is a good example of a country where brain drain is significant, where there is little awareness that a problem exists, and where almost no research has been carried out in order to examine what impact political instability has on highly skilled labour migration out of the country. There are at present no policies which could reverse the adverse effects of this exodus, and according to the available data, there are no signs of any measures planned for the future.

Uncertainty, together with the lack of security and low economic standards are the basic 'push' factors for the majority of highly skilled migrants from Macedonia. As mentioned above, there are no social policies to mitigate the negative effects of migration or exploit the benefits. Although rare, there are some efforts in the non-governmental sector to elevate the general awareness of the problem, but they still do not propose concrete strategies (except for NGOs like Open Society Institute). However, one encouraging example is a pioneer project on Highly Educated and Skilled Persons Migration that was recently carried out by the Institute of Economics in Skopje (IES). Most of the data regarding highly skilled labour emigration in Macedonia that appears in this article is drawn from this particular study because it is one of the rare surveys that focuses on the last decade. In an interview with the author of the study, Verica Janeska, it became clear that the negative impact of emigration in Macedonia affects the whole process of transition. More research is needed to give empirical weight to the qualitative-oriented results of this work.

According to Janeska, the data on highly skilled labour emigration in Macedonia is very poor and does not reflect the real situation in the country. She estimates that in the last decade 12,000 to 15,000 young, educated, and highly skilled persons left the country, a devastating exodus of the country's intellectual capital. Furthermore, according to the results of IES's study, around 85% of young Macedonians plan or wish to leave the country after they finish their studies (Janeska 2003).

Janeska claims that Macedonia's government has done little more than talk about the problem of brain drain. Concrete action and measures have not yet been applied. Although the country has been an emigration country for more than one hundred years, the Macedonian government has never had any consistent emigration policy, including for highly skilled labour (Janeska 2003). According to the available data, there are no attempts or initiatives from the side of the state or NGO sector to make contacts with their highly skilled expatriate nationals (Sretenova 2003). From a development perspective, the potential of Macedonia's diaspora is enormous. Today, according to Janeska, the overall character of highly skilled labour emigration

from Macedonia follows the brain drain form. Janeska describes it as “emigration of tertiary educated persons that is of longer-term or permanent character, and it is reaching significant levels and not compensated by the ‘feedback’ effects of remittances, technology transfer, investments or trade” (Janeska 2003), all of which are more characteristic of a brain circulation situation.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that there is no evidence regarding where young highly educated people are living and the possibility that they will stay in host countries. According to the results of Janeska’s research, “the permanent emigration of the highly educated cadres from Macedonia in the nineties of the last century reached very large proportions. It was consisting of young couples, persons with tertiary education in the area of technical and natural sciences, as well as young teaching and research staff from particular faculties” (Janeska 2003). Their destinations were usually the U.S., Canada, Australia, U.K., Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy and Holland. “Among the Macedonian citizens that today stay abroad, apart from a large number of highly educated persons, there is a certain number of scientific cadres who work in prestigious universities and scientific institutions” (Janeska 2003). In this way, more than 15% of the total number of Macedonian citizens with a university education left the country (Janeska 2003).

Causes of highly skilled emigration are also rooted in the socio-economic situation, and include the lack of any sense that the situation will improve. After a deep economic and social crisis hit the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia after 1981 and resulted in a decrease of production and the standard of living, the situation worsened after the country gained independence in 1991 and what followed was greater socio-economic turbulence and a further drastic decrease of investment and economic activity (together with an increase in unemployment). In addition to that, problems inherent to the transition process, as well as the political instability in the region, the reduction of human rights, military conflict in the spring of 2001, and two refugee crises negatively influenced the country’s movement toward a better and more secure living standard.

Today, although formally a parliamentary democracy according to legitimate transition and democracy indicators, Macedonia still stands apart from other liberal or even electoral democracies in the uncertain stability of its regime and stagnating transit ratings (Karatynycky 2002). According to these ratings, Macedonia still has a transitional government and a transitional economy, with true democratic consolidation possible only over the long-term period.

From Janeska’s perspective, the implications of the intellectual emigration are numerous and very complex. Both short and long-term effects are especially visible in the area of human resources, development and growth. As she stresses, Macedonia confirms the expectations of the neoclassical model of economic growth (or the latest theory of endogenous growth), according to which intensive brain drain will have an adverse effect

on the development of sending countries. One clear effect of brain drain has been to significantly reduce the average level of human capital, which can cause a decrease in the economic growth potential in the country. Since the diaspora network is still not involved in the country's development, one can conclude that the 'connectionist' approach (Janeska 2003), while promising, still has not been recognized as a solution in Macedonia and the human capital approach is still dominant and influences the perception of the phenomenon through the lens of 'losses'.

From the other side, the positive effects (or so-called 'feedback effects') of highly skilled labour emigration, such as 'know-how transfer', investment in growth, or the influx of remittances are still very weak in Macedonia, because the highly skilled emigration is permanent. According to Janeska, if a larger number of those persons would return to the country, it would certainly have a positive influence on the country's economy and the standard of living. The pronounced flow of the educated and highly graded labour from Macedonia will no doubt induce negative consequences and losses for the country. These losses include not only indirect costs for their education and the difficulty to adequately replace them, but also the contribution to development processes that those persons would make if they were economically engaged in the country (Janeska 2003). As Macedonia is in the process of transition and restructuring, developing a proper labour force is one of the highest priorities for the country. At the same time, the crucial shift from energy to human resources still has not been carried out:

The current emigration, as well as the realization of the migration intentions of the young teaching and research staff and the best students of the faculties of natural and technical sciences will doubtless have far-reaching negative implications. Those implications will be manifested in the decrease of the number of necessary education staff, especially of the young education staff in some faculties, on the one hand, and in the development of scientific activities in particular areas and the development of the country, on the other hand. (Janeska 2003)

It is clear that future Macedonian policy must include measures that deal with the current and expected emigration of the highly skilled segment of the population (Ministry of Education 2001). Janeska stresses that

this problem cannot be overcome with partial measures and in short term. The solution must be sought in a well defined medium and long-term policy that should basically be directed toward the generation of presuppositions for the decrease of the volume of highly educated emigration and gradual return of part of the Macedonian citizens that today stay out of the country" (2003).

In order to intensify brain circulation, a course of action must be primarily directed toward stimulating temporary scientific emigration with obligatory return and intensifying the mobility of highly skilled labour. This latter measure would give scientists and experts a chance to travel, exchange ideas and visit conferences; in other words, to participate in global science and at the same time remain in the country and participate in the country's development. If the current absence of measures and policies that would cope with the highly skilled labour migration continues, the negative consequences and implications for socio-economic development, the enjoyment of human rights can be expected to worsen dramatically (Mojskowska 2003).

Slovenia

Slovenia is a clear example of a transition country with a consolidated democracy and a market economy which does not experience brain drain. It has already stepped on the path to a knowledge-based economy. This process is understandable if one is aware of the fact that Slovenia was the most developed republic with the strongest economy in ex-Yugoslavia. Compared to Macedonia, in Slovenia science is less academic and more development-oriented, which directly influences the country's economy. As opposed to Macedonia, brain drain is not a concern for Slovene state institutions. This is not because of a lack of awareness or policies, but because Slovenia already experiences brain circulation. The standards in Slovenia are a 'pull' factor, making it a destination for scientists and experts from poorer countries in the EU. In other words, the mutual migratory flows among countries at a similar stage of development already take place between Slovenia and its neighbours. Surely, much of the interest for citizens of other Yugoslav successor states in immigrating to Slovenia lies in its comparatively higher standard of living.

Brain circulation positively influences socio-economic development and contributes to the pluralistic and multicultural image of the country. Also, it aids the development of the technology required to maintain a competitive economic profile. In this comparative overview, Slovenia is an illustration of a country without brain drain, which corresponds strongly to its higher stage of development and consolidated democracy. Since brain drain was low in Slovenia during the transition period, the highly skilled elite actively participated in the country's development.

It must not be forgotten, however, that Slovenia itself is not primarily an emigration country nor does it have an emigration tradition like Macedonia (or Croatia). After the fall of communism, some brain drain did occur in Slovenia while it was at the beginning stages of transition and democratization (which is the current experience of Macedonia). In this sense, the comparison with Macedonia is very significant: both countries were part of a single state, both of them are in the process of economic and democratic transition and both of them have the same size of population. Briefly, both are extremely small countries that must prove what they are able to offer their skills in a globalised world.

According to the available unofficial data, and confirmed by most scholars, state officials and scientists, around 2-3% of highly-educated Slovenians left the country in the last decade. However, this number does not seem to be worrying anybody in Slovene state institutions or civil society, as it is known that the same (or even a bigger) number of foreign highly skilled people already flows to Slovenia (Scott 2002).

The lack of any concern can be understood by the fact that among countries which joined the EU in 2004 “only Slovenia maintains a subjective well-being level that is equal to the EU-15 average” (Sretenova 2003: 11). Slovenian citizens already exhibit a high level of acceptance of increased mobility as a new mode of responding to international labour market demands.

The standard of living that was identified in Macedonia as the primary push-factor or reason to emigrate has already been achieved by the average Slovenian scientist. In a survey of Slovenian scientists, the majority placed themselves slightly above the middle of the social ladder, and unlike the results of the surveys in other candidate countries, they expressed optimism regarding the near future. Also, a very significant advantage to brain circulation in Slovenia is the fact that

in the period between 1990 and 1995, the Slovene respondents had many more contacts with foreign countries than the respondents in the region on average (most frequently in Germany, Italy, Austria, U.K. and U.S.). Almost half of them were participating in joint projects with foreign countries, which implied that in the observed year on average 30% of them planned to go to the West and a much lower percentage to the East (Bevc 1996: 17).

Although scientific motives play a significant role, Slovenian researchers were primarily ‘pulled’ abroad by economic motives (Bevc 1996).

This introduces a new perspective into this article. While under conditions of brain drain science-based motives represent a reason to migrate, under conditions of brain circulation, when conditions for adequate scientific work are guaranteed, economic reasons prevail as the main criteria to emigrate. The majority of potential mobile scientists intended to move to another state or private research institution (Bevc 1996). One can conclude, and further argument will confirm, that science has a significant role in Slovenia and is much more involved in the country’s transition to a knowledge society.

Because the drain is low, scientists are present in society and participate both in transition processes and democratic procedures. This particular fact confirms that the participation of highly skilled people is necessary if a country wants to consolidate its democratic system.

Although it must be taken with some reserve, according to some sources there are more and more questions about the desires of highly skilled nationals to return to the research sphere of Slovenia’s higher education system. (Lorber 2003). This fact favours the two arguments of my article:

first, that Slovenia's socio-economic development has already created a better environment for competent highly educated people, and second, that this country already experiences brain circulation. In addition to that, Slovenian scientists abroad cultivate the connections with their home country, especially with the institutions where they obtained their degrees. Some of them even work as consultants or researchers in Slovenia. Although there is still no available data to empirically confirm this correlation, one can assume that the participation of those scientists positively influences the country's development.

One must also not forget that Slovenia is one of the strongest economies in Central Europe, which is manifested in the growing number of work and residence permits. It is one more indicator confirming the brain circulation in that country. Moreover, "Slovenia has the lowest rate of unemployment and correspondingly this country does not face any brain drain issue" (Sretenova 2003: 8). Slovenia has also established a number of centres for excellence and gained generous funding from EU institutions interested in extending the European Research Area to candidate countries.

This very finding is significant and suggests that scientists themselves, as a special social group and part of the NGO sector (if associated in that way), can really change a situation. Most of the surveyed scientists considered the brain drain phenomenon a negative one and positive only under some conditions: if emigration is short-term, if they return home after a certain period of time, and if the state maintains contacts with them. In this sense, proper conditions for brain circulation were already established. In this way, Slovenia is an adequate example for countries in the whole SEE region. Because brain circulation corresponds with economic development, SEE countries must shape their policies over the long-term in order to follow in Slovenia's footsteps.

Edvard Kobal, Director of the Slovenian Scientific Foundation, confirmed the assumption that brain circulation is taking place in Slovenia in an interview with the author (2003). Kobal stated that the inflow of foreign students and highly skilled labour to Slovenia is almost equal to the emigration of highly skilled Slovenians. This situation is perceived as normal in the academic community. What remains a matter of greater concern, Kobal stressed, is the 'brain waste', i.e. when young researchers 'run' from the research sector to the industry sector, mainly attracted by higher wages: "It is important to them that employers are interested in them, that they can easily progress and that they have access to facilities and information" (Kobal 2003).

From Kobal's point of view, it is possible that some of the younger and most qualified researchers will choose another academic environment after Slovenia's full accession to the European Union, "[a]t the same time with the EU accession and assurance of free movement of persons, the differences in wages and attained level of economic development between

Slovenia and other EU member states will most probably gradually decrease” (Bevc 2000: 11).

Instead of a Conclusion: Two Elites

In closing, one more aspect should be considered and used to provoke new questions that could enlighten the whole brain drain issue in another, more sociological dimension.

Briefly, there is a widely shared agreement that transition to democracy is an elite-driven process: “There was also a - less outspoken - agreement, particularly in the early 1990’s, that reliable democracy should not be made by the masses but be crafted by elites” (Bozoki 2002: 1). If we assume, that highly skilled persons and intellectuals are part of a political, diplomatic, scientific, cultural, managerial or military elite that is an invaluable driving force of social change in transition countries, the possibility of their emigration in large numbers will open new questions. In other words, if a large number of such elites emigrate, there will be severe hardships in implementing transitional reforms. This in turn would pose a significant problem to establishing competent and excellent governmental and professional elites. Some authors already claim that this type of so-called interactionist elite, which assures a more open, richer and diversified form of social co-existence, is missing in transition countries (Bozoki 2002: 16).

In order to sharpen the debate, it could be said that most talent leaves a country because they belong to a parallel, invisible and unwanted intellectual elite whose perception of governance is based on meritocracy. On the other hand, the present social elite in their domicile countries have emerged from the turbulence of transition often tainted with corruption and a wild, non-ethical capitalism which created an ‘oligarchic’ concept of state-management that cannot be attractive. Under such circumstances, the reasons for emigration are primarily ethical. In this context, the brain drain phenomenon could be interpreted as avoidance of direct social conflict and some kind of silent revolution by those who want to be valued according to their merits and not ‘managerial’ capabilities that can be perceived as the base for implementing false-transition (Bozoki 2002: 14).

Their return to their domicile countries and (at least virtual) participation in the process of democratic transition—although perceived as a threat to the present elite—is necessary if further socio-economic development and democratic consolidation is the goal. Still, one can share the opinion that “governments are often pleased to see potential critics leave rather than having them as a source of local criticism” (Olesen 2002: 11).

Surely, the presence of highly skilled elites can aid successful transition and democratic consolidation processes and boost both social and economic development. From a critical perspective, I have suggested here that brain drain can inhibit the establishment of competent elites who can play a significant role in transition.

All countries in the SEE region are still transition countries and almost all suffer from brain drain. What is common in this sense for all of them is the absence of elite participation in transition processes.

One should know that the reservoir of knowledge and skills located in those expatriate nationals can be easily used to benefit a particular country if the political will exists, and if policy transcends the policy-maker. The transition process can support economic development and democratic consolidation only if a knowledgeable and skilled elite plays a role. And brain circulation, which can shape regional intellectual capital into a recognisable social group, can provide for both the successful transition of a country and the accomplishment of individual paths toward a higher standard of living and work.

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