

THE EMIGRATION POTENTIAL OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY, LITHUANIA, POLAND AND RUSSIA: RECENT SURVEY RESULTS*

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Abstract This paper reviews the factors that have recently elevated the emigration potential of Russia and Eastern Europe. It also assesses that potential in the light of a unique February 1991 survey of 4,269 respondents conducted in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Bearing in mind the volatility of the situation in the region, it is demonstrated that the proportion of adults wishing to emigrate from each of these countries in February 1991 varied from a low of 2 per cent in Lithuania to a high of 13 per cent in Poland. Total emigration potential from the region is estimated to have been between 10.2 and 16.7 million. An analysis of bivariate relationships shows that there were negligible rural-urban and educational differences between potential emigrants and others, while young men who were pessimistic about their country's economic and political prospects tended more than others to desire emigration. A multiple regression analysis indicates that age and pessimism concerning democracy are the main factors that were independently associated with desire to emigrate.

About 240,000 of Vienna's 1.8 million residents are citizens of former Soviet bloc countries who have arrived in the city since 1989. Partly as a result of that influx, the Austrian unemployment rate, which stood at only 3.1 per cent in 1989, very nearly doubled by 1991. Competition from Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Russian Jews and others has angered Austrian workers, strained Vienna's ability to provide social services, and tested the tolerance of its long-term residents. The result of the November 1991 Viennese municipal election was thus not entirely surprising. The right-wing Freedom Party more than doubled its popular support, winning nearly a quarter of the vote and becoming the second strongest party in the city. The party's leader, Jörg Haider, campaigned on an anti-immigration platform, having achieved notoriety earlier in the year when, as governor of Corinthia, he praised Nazi labour policies (Tagliabue 1991b).

So far in Austria no violent anti-immigration mobs have attacked foreigners, as has become commonplace in France and, especially, Germany, where 200,000 foreigners, mainly from Eastern Europe and the former USSR, arrived to seek political asylum in the first 10 months of 1991 alone. But in Austria and much of the rest of Western Europe a simmering xenophobia is being fuelled by the threat and the reality of mass emigration from the former Soviet bloc countries. Ominously and typically, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National

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Front won 14 per cent of the vote in France's regional elections held in March 1992.

Exactly what is the magnitude of the immigration 'threat'? In 1990 some 1.3 million people left the former Soviet bloc countries permanently. Most analysts predict that the flow will continue at nearly that level for the next year or two. Afterwards, the picture becomes clouded, although serious estimates of emigration in the period 1993–2000 range from half a million people per year from the former Soviet Union alone to 2.0 million people per year from the entire region (Chesnais 1991; Clauss, Keating and Duesing 1991; Heitman 1991b; Tagliabue 1991a; Thorson 1991).

Western European governments are certainly taking legal measures to stem the flow. The most dramatic example of such action is German unification, which put a virtual end to immigration from former East Germany by incorporating that country's population into what was West Germany and implementing an economic recovery plan. Less dramatically, visa requirements for tourists have been tightened. Moreover, the Dublin Convention, which will be ratified in January 1993 by the countries of the European Community, will prevent people whose refugee claims have been rejected in one country from seeking asylum in another (Oziewicz 1991; Whitney 1991).

Despite such actions, however, new destinations, such as certain South American countries, may become available to emigrants (Moore 1992). As far as traditional destinations such as Germany are concerned, there are strong ideological and political pressures to build no new walls and to continue to recognise free travel and open borders as human rights (German Information Office 1991 : 1). There are also illegal means of entry. Thus in 1991 more than half of the *rejected* asylum applicants (close to 100,000 people) are believed to have stayed in Germany alone, while another 50,000 people entered through the quite porous Eastern border (Clauss, Keating and Duesing 1991 : 7). The number of Soviet citizens alone visiting the United States climbed to 100,000 per year in 1989 and 1990, but some of them never returned: there are now an estimated 30,000 illegal Soviet immigrants in the United States (Mydans 1992 : 7). Finally, the (conservatively estimated) half million or more Poles, Czechs, Russians and other Eastern Europeans now working temporarily in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy may also represent an important source of illegal immigrants (Reichlin et al. 1992). In short, the number of emigrants depends not just on the restrictiveness of Western regulations, but also on Eastern demand.

That demand is unlikely to be affected much in the short or medium term by changing economic conditions. Even if unemployment rates in Western Europe rise, the huge imbalance between West and East in standards of living is likely to persist for many years. Thus the Russian Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs Aleksandr Shokhin stated on 29 November 1991 that up to 15 million Russians could become short-term unemployed and another 15 million long-term unemployed over the next two to three years (Bush 1991). A study released by the International Labour Organisation on 30 March 1992 forecasts that the number of unemployed in the Community of Independent States (CIS) will exceed 15 million by the end of 1992, and that another 30

million people may be at risk of becoming unemployed or face under-employment. The study, based on interviews with CIS government officials and visits to 500 factories, also estimates that more than a quarter of those now employed are surplus to requirements (Bush 1992). And on 25 April 1992, Egor Gaidar, First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, told *The Economist* that by the end of the year social pressures connected with unemployment may become politically dangerous (Teague 1992).

The promulgation of new emigration laws in Russia and elsewhere in the region is hardly likely to dampen the demand to leave. The new emigration law, approved by the Supreme Soviet on 20 May 1991, comes into effect on 1 January 1993. With few restrictions, it recognises the right of every Soviet citizen to leave and enter the USSR freely (Heitman 1991a). True, the USSR no longer exists. But to the degree that its successor states and the other states in the region are liberal-democratic in orientation, they are unlikely to limit freedom of movement substantially.

This paper focuses on the question of how many citizens of the former Soviet bloc countries want to settle in the West. Omitted from consideration here are certain groups of sponsored emigrants from the USSR totalling about 400,000 people annually since 1990: roughly 50,000 Jews and Armenians going to the USA, approximately 150,000 ethnic Germans going to Germany, about 180,000 Jews going to Israel, and 20,000 or so Pontian Greeks going to Greece. These groups are unusual in that they have strong Western ties and influential advocates.¹ My concern is with the far more numerous masses of Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Poles and Russians who lack Western connections. How many of them want out?

My tentative answer to that question will be based on the results of a unique survey conducted in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Russia in February 1991. A stratified random sample of respondents fifteen years of age and older from those five countries yielded 4,269 usable interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and in the languages of the respondents. Among other questions, respondents were asked whether they would like to go with their families to one of the developed Western countries and, if so, for what length of time.

During the Cold War it was widely believed that, if given the opportunity, most citizens of the Communist world would pack up and leave. Whatever the validity of that claim in the past, it is clearly very far off the mark today, notwithstanding the disastrous economic situation and unstable political climate of the region. As Table 1 shows, fully 68 per cent of the respondents said they wanted to go to the West for a few months and 38 per cent said they would like to stay for one or two years. On the other hand, 14 per cent said they were interested in remaining in the West for five to ten years, and only 7 per cent expressed the desire to emigrate forever.²

Although these percentages are lower than one might expect, in absolute terms they translate into some very large numbers. For example, Russia had a population of 148.3 million in February 1991. Since 4.6 per cent of the Russian respondents said they wanted to emigrate permanently, that amounts to 6.8 million potential Russian emigrants.³ More precisely, it is possible to calculate

Table 1
'Would you like to go with your family to one of the developed countries of the West for some months? A year or two? Five to ten years? Forever?' Percentage Answering 'Yes' by Length of Time and Country (Number of Respondents in Parentheses)

	Czechoslovakia (996)	Hungary (1000)	Lithuania (509)	Poland (953)	Russia (811)	Total (4,269)
Some months	65 (645)	77 (771)	48 (246)	78 (741)	65 (496)	68 (2899)
1-2 yrs.	37 (367)	40 (393)	21 (109)	53 (500)	34 (246)	38 (1615)
5-10 yrs.	14 (138)	15 (150)	7 (37)	19 (178)	15 (106)	14 (609)
Forever	5 (50)	8 (75)	2 (12)	13 (126)	5 (37)	7 (300)

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.

high and low estimates of emigration from each of the five countries surveyed. Draw twenty samples of similar size, and nineteen will yield results within the predicted range. The results are given in Table 2, the main theme of which can be presented briefly: one can state with 95 per cent certainty that of the 216.1 million people in the five countries surveyed in February 1991, between 10.2 million and 16.7 million wanted to settle permanently in the West.

Table 2
Emigration Potential by Country: Low and High Estimates

	Czechoslovakia	Hungary	Lithuania	Poland	Russia
% Forever	5.0	7.5	2.4	13.2	4.6
95% confidence interval	± 1.4	± 1.6	± 1.3	± 2.0	± 1.4
Population (in millions)	15.70	10.56	3.71	37.78	148.31
Low estimate (in millions)	.57	.62	.04	4.23	4.75
High estimate (in millions)	1.00	.96	.14	5.74	8.90

Note: Population estimates for February 1991 are based on projections calculated from data in the *Handbook of the Nations* (n.d., 1991?) and Hunter (1991).

Some indication of the characteristics of those potential emigrants is given in Table 3, which shows the percentage of people in various social categories who answered 'yes' to the question of whether they wanted to settle in the West permanently. Consider male/female differences first. While small – they average just over two per cent in the five countries combined – they are consistent cross-nationally: in all five countries men were slightly more likely than women to want to emigrate.⁴ Smaller and cross-nationally inconsistent differences are apparent when residents of urban areas are compared to residents of rural areas and when people with different levels of education are

THE EMIGRATION POTENTIAL OF EASTERN EUROPE

compared. These findings indicate that the desire to emigrate was distributed approximately evenly between men and women, between urban and rural dwellers, and between people at various levels of educational attainment.⁵

Table 3
Percentage Answering 'Yes' to 'Forever' by Independent Variables and Country
(Number of Respondents in Parentheses)

	Czechoslovakia (50)	Hungary (75)	Lithuania (12)	Poland (126)	Russia (37)
Gender					
Male	6 (25)	10 (42)	3 (6)	16 (76)	6 (20)
Female	5 (25)	7 (33)	2 (6)	11 (50)	4 (17)
Age					
Under 45	8 (40)	11 (52)	4 (10)	17 (86)	7 (29)
45 and over	2 (10)	6 (23)	1 (2)	9 (40)	3 (8)
Rural/urban					
Urban	7 (24)	9 (49)	1 (2)	13 (75)	6 (29)
Rural	5 (26)	8 (26)	3 (10)	14 (51)	5 (8)
Education					
Elementary	5 (24)	9 (26)	1 (1)	13 (35)	5 (4)
Secondary	5 (19)	9 (42)	3 (11)	13 (74)	5 (20)
Higher	7 (7)	7 (7)	0 (0)	15 (17)	5 (13)
Development					
Optimistic	5 (28)	8 (44)	2 (2)	12 (74)	3 (11)
Pessimistic	8 (20)	11 (31)	3 (9)	16 (52)	8 (23)
Democracy					
Optimistic	4 (25)	7 (52)	3 (10)	12 (96)	4 (10)
Pessimistic	10 (21)	13 (23)	5 (2)	18 (30)	7 (17)

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.

Larger differences emerge when one considers the respondents' economic and political outlooks. Respondents were asked to indicate on a ten-point scale whether they thought their country would be completely economically undeveloped (1) or fully economically developed (10) in five years. They were also asked to indicate on a ten-point scale whether they thought their country would be ruled by a dictatorship (1) or would be completely democratic (10) in five years. Let us label scores of one to five 'pessimistic' and scores of six to ten 'optimistic'. Doing so reveals that pessimists were more likely to want to emigrate than optimists. Specifically, six per cent of economic optimists but nine per cent of economic pessimists wanted to emigrate, and that difference was consistent across all five countries. Similarly, six per cent of political optimists but nearly eleven per cent of political pessimists expressed the desire to settle permanently in the West, again with cross-national consistency. A difference of similar magnitude was found when people under 45 years of age were compared to people 45 years of age and older: considering all five countries together, nine per cent of the younger people but only four per cent

of the older people expressed the desire to settle permanently in the West, and the direction of that difference was the same in all five countries.

Are these differences statistically significant or is there a reasonable chance that they would occur at random in a sample the size of this survey's? And are the statistically significant differences independently important? The multiple regression analysis reported in Table 4 allows us to answer these questions. In brief, Table 4 shows that youth was the single most important, cross-nationally consistent, and statistically significant determinant of the desire to emigrate, and that its influence operated independently of other variables measured in the survey. Political outlook ranked second in importance. Only in Lithuania was political pessimism not statistically significantly associated with desire to emigrate, and that may be a statistical artifact due to the small number of Lithuanian respondents: the Lithuanian sample was only about half the size of the samples from the other countries, while the number of Lithuanians saying they wanted to emigrate forever was less than a third that of the next smallest national group, the Russians. Gender in Poland and economic outlook in Russia were also statistically significant, independently important determinants of the desire to emigrate, but no variable apart from age and political outlook was important throughout the region.

Table 4
Multiple Regression of Emigration 'Forever' by Country (Slope Coefficients with $p < .05$; Standard Error in Parentheses)

	Czechoslovakia	Hungary	Lithuania	Poland	Russia
Age	-.1444 (.0326)	-.0044 (.0012)	-.0018 (.0009)	-.0050 (.0015)	-.0055 (.0013)
Gender	-	-	-	.0975 (.0437)	-
Urban/rural	-	-	-	-	-
Education	-	-	-	-	-
Development	-	-	-	-	-.0280 (.0086)
Democracy	-.1384 (.0368)	-.0256 (.0093)	-	-.0233 (.0108)	{-.0186 } { (.0075)}
Intercept	1.3347 (.0352)	1.1627 (.0868)	-.9741 (.0451)	1.1644 (.1116)	1.0735 (.0802)

Notes: (1) The dependent variable was coded 1 = no, 2 = don't know, 3 = yes. (2) For purposes of multiple regression, the independent variables were not collapsed into two or three categories, as in Table 3. (3) For Russia, pessimism about democracy significantly increased one's desire to emigrate permanently to the West, but only if one's forecast of the economic development of Russia was excluded from the regression equation. The slope coefficient and standard error for one's forecast of Russia's political future, with one's economic forecast excluded from the equation, are shown in braces.

One must be careful not to exaggerate the substantive importance of these findings. They say nothing about how many or what types of people will actually emigrate from the former Soviet bloc countries to Western Europe but speak only to the desire of the citizens of those countries to leave. Whether that desire will be actualised depends, in addition, on the restrictiveness of emigration laws in the East and immigration laws in the West as well as on economic conditions in both regions. It should also be stressed that the survey results represent a single snapshot at one point in time, while the situation with respect to emigration is volatile and in many important respects unpredictable. Repeated surveys of greater depth would help one gain a better sense of the conditions underlying the decision to emigrate, but the fluidity of economic and political conditions in the region makes all prediction hazardous.

Keeping these qualifications in mind, four conclusions nonetheless seem warranted on the basis of the data analysed here. First, the emigration potential of Eastern Europe and the former USSR is large, amounting to somewhere between 10.2 million and 16.7 million in the five countries surveyed in February 1991. Second, younger people are uniformly more likely than older people to want to emigrate. That is hardly surprising since starting a new life in an alien environment is a trying experience that is universally shunned by the middle-aged and elderly if at all possible. Third, and rather more interestingly, the desire to emigrate is approximately evenly distributed between men and women, between urban and rural dwellers, and between people with different levels of educational attainment. Significant numbers of highly educated people may be found among the potential emigrants, but it is clearly an exaggeration to characterise potential emigrants as representing simply a latent 'brain drain' since the desire to emigrate is equally strong among the better- and less-well-educated.

Fourth, and unexpectedly, it seems that political motives are rather more important than economic motives in prompting people to express the desire to settle in the West. There is undoubtedly something to the view that emigrants from the former Soviet bloc countries are deeply dissatisfied with their lives and are seeking better material conditions in the West. On the basis of the admittedly sketchy data presented here, however, it seems that what attracts the citizens of the region to the West has more to do with political freedom than material advantage. As in the case of the *émigré* agricultural labourers from East of the Elbe River analysed by Max Weber in the early 1890s, the '“bread and butter question” is of secondary importance' in causing some people from the former Soviet bloc countries to want out (quoted in Bendix 1962: 23).

Notes

1. On these groups, see especially Basok and Brym (1991), Chesnais (1991) and Heitman (1987). Some 95 per cent of sponsored emigrants are Jews and Germans. Based on census estimates, at the end of 1991 there were approximately 0.9 million Jews and 1.6 million Germans left in the former USSR, although many estimates place the actual number of remaining Jews at two million or more. At the current emigration rate, and especially given German repatriation

policies and the recent calls by the Russian-German leadership for the repatriation of the entire community, there will be no Germans left in Russia by the year 2000 (Sheehy 1992). On the other hand, a 17 per cent drop in the Jewish emigration rate in the first three months of 1992, combined with difficulties in the absorption of immigrants in Israel, suggest that a Jewish community may remain in Russia, even after the turn of the century (Heitman 1992).

2. Note the wide cross-national variations in desire to emigrate, ranging from 13 per cent for the Poles to 2 per cent for the Lithuanians. The percentage may be so high in Poland because it has the most substantial tradition among the five countries surveyed of sending migrant workers to Western Europe. Social ties to the Polish community in Western Europe, as well as practical knowledge about how to get established in the West, may encourage proportionately more Poles to regard emigration as a realistic alternative.

3. In making this calculation I assume that children under the age of fifteen would be as likely to emigrate as people fifteen years of age and older. This is a conservative assumption – it inserts a downward bias in my calculations – because young children are more likely to be dependents of young parents and, as we shall see, age is inversely associated with desire to emigrate.

In the (to my knowledge) only other sample survey on the subject of emigration from Russia, the United States Information Agency (USIA) sponsored a survey of 1,989 Russian citizens aged 18 and older between 15 February and 1 March 1991. The USIA question wording differed somewhat from the question wording in the survey analysed here. The two surveys are therefore not strictly comparable. They found that the pool of potential Russian emigrants ranged from 2 to 11 million (Grant 1991).

4. In calculating overall percentages for Table 3, I simply summed the percentages for each country and divided by five.

5. The USIA survey referred to in Note 3 determined that young, well-educated, urban men were the most likely to want to emigrate (Grant 1990).

6. A 1991 survey conducted in Romania on a sample of 1,264 respondents shows that 10 per cent of the population of that country is seriously interested in emigration (Sik 1992). There were also an unknown number of potential emigrants from Albania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (Morokvasic 1992) and the rest of the former USSR. In addition, the sponsored emigrants from the former USSR mentioned earlier (Jews, Germans, Armenians and Greeks) should be added to any calculation of the region's total emigration potential because these groups are relatively small and were effectively unrepresented in the Russian component of the five-country sample.

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THE EMIGRATION POTENTIAL OF EASTERN EUROPE

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