Changing family formation behavior in post-socialist countries: similarities, divergences, and explanations in comparative perspective

Theodore P. Gerber
University of Wisconsin-Madison

October 2009

DRAFT prepared for presentation at the "1989: Twenty Years After Conference.". Please do not cite without consulting the author (tgerber@ssc.wisc.edu.)

ABSTRACT. Following the collapse of communism, all countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia have experienced dramatic changes in family formation. Some common patterns include delays and/or declines in marriage and fertility, increasing rates of non-marital cohabitation and non-marital childbearing, and, in many countries, rising rates of divorce. Not all of these trends have exhibited the same pattern in all the post-socialist countries: their duration, intensity, and timing have varied cross-nationally. Demographers have debated the origins and implications of these patterns, which some describe as part of a "second demographic transition," proposing economic, cultural/normative, and political explanations for them. This paper documents the trends, considers the main explanations for them, and suggests potential consequences in the coming years.

Introduction: The Quiet Revolution

When state socialist regimes collapsed throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet in 1989-1992, few observers saw the potential impact on family formation behavior as one of the most likely or most important ramifications. Instead, most scholarly and policy analyses focused on the dramatic changes the post-socialist transition ordained in terms of economic life, politics, and culture. However, in recent years both researchers and policymakers have come to recognize what the Russian demographer Sergei Zakharov (2008) has aptly called the "quiet revolution:" virtually all the Eastern European and post-Soviet countries experienced a common set of dramatic, rapid, and unprecedented changes in marriage and fertility patterns, and these changes may prove to have equally or even more important longer-term consequences for their societies as the economic, political, and cultural transformations. A growing literature, much of it developed by demographers from the region itself, has documented the emergent family formation patterns and sought to understand why they have taken place so swiftly, whether they are temporary or permanent in nature, and what their likely consequences will be in the future. Twenty years after the collapse of state socialism, no consensus has been reached on these issues. This paper describes the main patterns in question, notes some of the important variations across countries, discusses the principal explanations that have been proposed, and considers the potential consequences.

Changing patterns: a tale of two decades?

Needless to say (but worth noting), each of the former state socialist societies has its own distinctive history, culture, and contemporary economic, political, and social circumstances. These factors combine to produce variations in marriage and fertility, as well in their trends. At the same time, several broad tendencies characterize the post-socialist experience. Economic reforms shifted economies from state-administered to market-base systems, albeit unevenly and at different speeds. All the countries experienced severe economic crises in the immediate aftermath of reforms, though the duration and severity of these crises varied. Political reforms eliminated one-party rule and strict limitations on civil liberties, implementing in their place some form of democracy and protections of individual freedoms, though elements of authoritarian control remain present, even resurgent, especially some of the former Soviet countries. With the end of rather extensive restrictions on the capacity to organize groups outside of the party state, voluntary organizations, independent media outlets, and other components of civil society emerged everywhere, notwithstanding (again) considerable variation in their number and strength across countries. These societies all "opened up" culturally, in the sense that socialist-era censorship and restrictions on the free exchange of cultural artifacts, ideas, and images with Western societies were effectively removed. Finally, barriers to the free movement of people within and across national borders fell, leading to increases in both international and domestic migration.

As this brief summary suggests, there are sufficient common elements in the processes of post-socialist transformations experienced by the Eastern European and former Soviet countries to expect that a similar set of parallel changes in the area of family formation may also have taken place. Moreover, to the extent that economic circumstances, cultural norms, and political

institutions and policies affect family formation, it stands to reason that common developments in these areas would have some degree of uniform impact on marriage and fertility patterns.

The countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet also share a distinctive historical legacy pre-dating the state socialist period in terms of family formation. At least as early as the 19th Century, Russia and other European countries east of a line running from Trieste to St. Petersburg exhibited a distinctive "East European" family formation pattern: marriage was more universal and took place at younger ages than in Western Europe (Hajnal 1965; Coale, Anderson, and Haerm 1979; Coale 1992). This pattern persisted in Russia and other East European countries during the first half of the 20th Century, a period when many Western European countries actually moved in the direction of East European pattern of younger and more universal marriage. In Russia, for example, the massive societal disruptions associated with world wars, revolutions, and famines predictably led to short-term declines in marriage rates and increasing average ages at first marriage, but their impact was only fleeting (Scherbov and Van Vianen 1990).

In light of the long-term stability of the Eastern European family formation pattern in this region of the world, the rapid shifts in marriage and fertility behavior following the collapse of state socialism is especially striking. As I will document in more detail in the rest of this section, the clear tendencies are as follows: 1. marriage rates have declined and those who do marry typically do so at older ages than they generally did in the state socialist era. 2. Divorce rates appear to have increased. 3. Non-marital cohabitation has become more common, as has non-marital childbearing. 4. Fertility rates have fallen precipitously, and in many cases women now wait until they are older before bearing children than they did under the previous regime. In short the institution of marriage appears to have been significantly weakened, and low fertility has become the norm. These trends have been described and discussed by other researchers (e.g. Zakharov 1998; Caldwell and Schindlmayr 2003; Kalmijn 2007; Frejka 2008), but for the most part these studies deal only with the 1990s. One purpose of the present study is to extend these analyses forward through the 2000s and consider the implications of more recent developments for the explanations proposed for trends in the first post-socialist decade.

In order to provide some empirical illustrations of changing family formation behaviors, I show the trends from 1989-2007 in some broad indicators of these specific phenomena for eight countries: Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria. All data come from the TransMONEE Database, a compilation based on national sources produced by UNICEF's Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, which is freely available on-line (http://www.unicef-irc.org/databases/transmonee/). In fact, the TransMONEE data provide information on all 28 countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. I limit my presentation to eight countries because the trends from all the countries are difficult to plot in a manner that yields visually clear pictures, due to the variety in initial levels and in the timing of changes of the rates analyzed. In choosing which countries to include in the charts, I sought to cover the whole geographic range of the region (from East Central Europe and South Central Europe to the Balkans, Eurasia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia), excluded countries that have experienced sustained military conflicts during the last 20 years, such as the former Yugoslav republics (because military conflict itself is likely to have a pronounced and possibly idiosyncratic impact

on family formation, which would further complicate an already complex picture), and prioritized countries where the data are more complete, consistent, and reliable.

Declining Marriage

The best available macro-level measure of marriage behavior is the age-specific marriage rate, which is simply the number of marriages in a given year divided by the number of people (at midyear) in the age-range of 15 to 44 years old, the ages during which the vast majority of marriages take place. This measure is somewhat better than the "crude" marriage rate, which is the number of marriages divided by the total population, because it at least restricts the denominator to those who are old enough to marry and most likely to be eligible to do so because they are not currently married. But the age-specific rate suffers from a major shortcoming: ideally, in order to capture annual fluctuations in marriage entry behavior it would be necessary to include in the denominator only that part of the population that is actually at risk of getting married during a particular year. This would exclude not only those too young to marry, but also those who are already married. By including those already married in the denominator, the age-specific marriage rate tends to produce offsetting trends over time, because as rates of marriage increase in a particular year, the effect (other things being equal) is to reduce the size of the marriage population in subsequent years; thus, even if the rate of marriage entry among those at risk is stable, there will be to be a decline in marriage entry using the age-specific rate. Moreover, other things are seldom equal, and relative cohort size (within the 15-44 age window) also can play a big role, given that there is considerable variation in marriage rates by age. Unfortunately, governmental statistical bodies seldom collect data on the size of marriage-eligible population, so actual measures of the annual rates of marriage entry among those at risk for marriage entry can only be estimated from survey data from individual countries. Nonetheless, the age-specific marriage is suitable for identifying broad tendencies. For the purposes of broad comparisons it is the best available measure. Note that in this context marriage refers exclusively to legal marriages: cohabiting unions are not included.

Former state socialist countries all experienced declines in the age-specific marriage rates throughout the 1990s (Figure 1). In the countries under consideration here, the decline was steepest in Kyrgyzstan, which began the period with the highest rate of marriage entry. It was most moderate in Poland. It is also evident from Figure 1 that marriage rates were declining in all four Soviet republics examined *prior to* the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. The trends in marriage rates began to diverge in the 2000s. In some countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary) they remained essentially flat throughout the decade. In the others, they rebounded, in some cases in the early 2000s and steeply (Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan), in others later and modestly (Estonia and Poland). As discussed above, it is difficult to say whether the increases in marriage rates observed reflect actual increases in the rate at which eligible people entered into marriages as opposed to changes in the denominator (an increase in the proportion of unmarried people within the age range and/or changes in relative cohort size due to aging). Available country-level studies using survey data tend to confirm that true marriage rates (among those at risk for marriage) fell during the 1990s, but (largely for the lack of more recent data) they do not address the 2000s (Hoem et al. 2008; Philipov and Jasilonienne 2000; Gerber and Berman 2009). Thus, while it is safe to conclude that a common pattern in the former socialist countries was a decline in marriage rates during the first decade following the fall of the

Berlin Wall; developments during the 2000s are less certain and appear to be more heterogeneous. In all likelihood, the declines in marriage ceased in about 2000, and in some countries counter-trends emerged at that point or later in the decade.

[Figure 1 about here]

Declining marriage rates can reflect and overall decline in marriage propensities that affects all age groups more or less equally, or they can reflect a nascent tendency to delay marriage rather than forego it altogether (see Goldstein and Kenney 2001). One way to measure the delaying process is to consider the average age at first marriage, here reported for women (Figure 2). This measure exhibits fairly monotonic increases in all the countries considered: throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, women (and men) are tending to wait longer before entering their first marriage. The rate of increase was slow at first, but took off in most countries during the late 1990s. Russia is a possible exception to this general tendency: there, the official data suggest virtually no increase in the average ages at first marriage during the early 1990s, and no official data are available after 1998 (due to changes in government data collection protocols.) But survey-based estimates by Zakharov (2008) suggest that the mean age at marriage did increase in Russia starting in the late 1990s.

[Figure 2 about here]

The evident trend of increasing age at first marriage implies that the declining marriage rates of the 1990s could have been delaying effects rather than a sign that increasing numbers were foregoing marriage altogether. Although some studies (Hoem et al. 2008; Gerber and Berman 2009) suggest that at least part of the decline reflected across-the-board drops in marriage rates (as opposed to pure delay), it is not possible to tell definitively whether total cohort marriage rates (the percent of a cohort that ever marries) fell during this period until the cohorts in question reach their 50s. In any case, an increasing tendency to delay marriage will generally result in a decline in cohort marriage rates because some individuals who delay miss the opportunity to marry when they are young and never get another chance.

Divorce

The only cross-nationally comparable data on divorce consists of the annual number of divorces, the crude divorce rate (annual divorces per 1000 population), and the "general" divorce rate (the number of annual divorces per 100 annual marriages). These measures all have obvious flaws, in that none use the appropriate denominator: as in the case of marriage, the actual divorce rate should be the rate at which those at risk of divorce (i.e., those who are married) get divorced. Perhaps the best of these deficient measures is the general divorce rate, as that at least provides a picture of the change in the size of the married population attributable to the joint effects of entry via marriage and exit via divorce (as opposed to exit via out-migration or death).

For the two decades following the collapse of the Berlin wall, the general divorce rates in the former state socialist countries exhibit rather mixed patterns (Figure 3). Generally speaking, the rates increased for most of the 1990s, though at different rates and different modalities. Keeping in mind that this was the period of widespread decline in marriage rates, it is not clear whether

divorce actually became more common among those who were married. Starting in the late 1990s, the trends began to diverge. In Hungary, Bulgaria, and (for the most part) Poland and the Czech Republic, they essentially continued to climb through the late 2000s. In the former Soviet countries they either receded or remained fairly flat. Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, two of the more socially conservative societies in our sample, exhibited very little change over the course of the two decades, while Russia and Estonia, which started out with the highest divorce rates, experienced explosive growth followed by sharp declines (though even after the declines the divorce rates by this measure remained higher in 2007 than they were in 1989). Survey-based studies suggest that true divorce rate (the rate of divorces among married individuals) did rise in Russia at least through 2003, even though Russia has long had one of the highest divorce rates in the world (Philipov and Jasilioniene 2008; Zakharov 2008). Altogether, it would seem that rising divorce rates characterize the post-socialist era in Eastern European countries, while the pattern is more heterogeneous in the former Soviet Union.

[Figure 3 about here]

Fertility

The total fertility rate measures the expected number of children a woman will have in the course of her life time assuming that the age-specific fertility rates that obtain in the country during that year obtain in the future. It is therefore an ideal age-adjusted measure of *period* fertility. The countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union all experienced substantial declines in their total fertility rates during the 1990s (Figure 4). The declines were steepest in those countries with initially higher fertility rates (Kazakhstan and Armenia). The TFRs stabilized during the early 2000s and in some cases began to inch upward again at some point in that decade. However, for the most part the improvements in TFRs during the 2000 were modest, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the steep declines of the 1990s. By 2007 all the countries except Kyrgyzstan and Estonia had TFRs well below 1.5, qualifying them as "very low" fertility countries.

[Figure 4 about here]

As in the case of marriage, short-term declines in TFRs can reflect delays in childbearing rather than long-term declines. This may be the case in some of the former socialist countries: in the post-socialist period the average age at first birth increased monotonically, though at different rates, in all the countries in our sample except for Armenia (Figure 5). Russia, again, is another possible exception: the average age at birth actually fell during the initial transition period, until regaining its 1989 level in 1998 (the last year for which Russian data available). In fact, given the timing of the declines in TFRs, it is interesting to note that the increases in average age at first birth date to the mid-1990s rather than the outset of the transition period. Delayed childbearing has been especially pronounced in Hungary and the Czech Republic, where the average ages shot upward dramatically from under 23 to over 27. Overall, the patterns here suggest that some of the moderate increases in fertility observed in the latter half of the 2000s resulted from "catch-up" childbearing by women having their first births in their late 20s and early 30s. If these women have additional children, then TFRs will continue to grow modestly, though overall cohort fertility rates are unlikely to ever approach those of the socialist era (Frejka

2008). It is usually the case that when women delay childbearing they end up with fewer children than they may have wanted because it proves difficult or impossible for them to have children at older ages (Kohler et al. 2002).

Also, the typical pattern in Russia and Ukraine is that most women have one child, but stop there (Perelli-Harris 2005). Survey based research suggests that this pattern intensified in Russia during the 1990s and early 2000s: women continued to have a first child at relatively young ages, but they had second children at rapidly declining rates, while in Bulgaria a growing number of women postponed or avoided first births, but among those who did have them the rate of transition to a second birth remained stable (Philipov and Jasiloniene 2008). This helps explain the unusual combination of trends in Russia, where declining fertility accompanied decreasing ages at marriage and first birth (Hollander 1997). Altogether, these patterns indicate that the fertility declines in these countries reflect a combination of both delayed fertility and across-the-board declines in fertility – in technical terms, both "tempo" and "quantum" effects – and also that the specific patterns of fertility decline vary from one country to the next.

[Figure 5 about here]

Non-marital fertility

Another striking development in the former state socialist countries is the sharp rise of non-marital births as a percentage of total births in all countries (Figure 6). These rates rose dramatically even in relatively conservative countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Poland. The sharpest increases were observed in Estonia and Bulgaria, where by 2007 over half of all births were to unwed mothers. In the space of two decades, non-marital childbearing went from being a relatively minor, if not entirely insignificant issue, to an area of major social concern. Apart from Estonia, no country's rate of non-marital births exceeded 15% in 1989, but by 2007 all except Poland had rates of 28% or higher.

[Figure 6 about here]

Cohabitation

In considering the trends in marriage and non-marital fertility, it should be kept in mind that in many East European and post-Soviet countries non-marital cohabitation has grown dramatically in popularity. There do not appear to be macro-level data demonstrating this, but it is evident from survey-based estimates in a number of studies of individual countries or subsets of countries (Kalmijn 2007; Philipov and Jasilioniene 2008; Hoem et al. 2009; Gerber and Berman 2009). The increase in non-marital unions casts the declines in marriage and growth in non-marital childbearing throughout the region in a different light. To some extent, non-marital unions have emerged as a substitute for the institution of legal marriage. Moreover, many mothers who unmarried at the time of their birth are in cohabiting unions: in Russia, at least, much of the growth in non-marital childbearing results from the increase in cohabitation rather than an increase in births to single mothers (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2009). This does not mean that non-marital childbearing is a "benign" phenomenon: if cohabiting unions are less

stable than marriages in Russia, then the increase in the proportion of births to cohabiting mothers will lead to an increase in single-mother headed households.

Explanations

Having portrayed in broad outline the key trends in the family formation patterns of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, we turn now to the explanations that have been offered for these trends. As in our description of the trends, our discussion of the explanations perforce must simplify some complex arguments in the interest of brevity and clarity. Three broad classes of explanation can readily be identified, which focus respectively on the economic crisis, on longer-term normative shifts, and on political and institutional factors.

Economic crisis and uncertainty

An obvious candidate to explain the declining rates of marriage and fertility in the former socialist countries is the economic crises that befell all of them following the collapse of state socialism. Economic explanations for both marriage and fertility abound. Many researchers have found, for example, that in the United States men require a minimal level of economic resources before they can take on the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, and they do not make attractive marriage partners unless they have good economic prospects (Easterlin 1976; Lichter et al. 1991; Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Lloyd and South 1996; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, and Lim 1997). Qian and Preston (1993) and Sweeney (2002) find that better economic prospects also make women more attractive marriage partners. Applying this logic, the rising unemployment and declining wages of men and women during the post-socialist crisis period would make fewer of them good candidates as marriage partners and thus would reduce marriage rates so long as these phenomena persisted. Consistent with the economic explanation for marriage decline in post-Soviet Russia, economic crises in Latin American countries since the 1920s have typically produced nearly immediate declines in marriage, even as other demographic consequences occur only after lags of one or more years (Palloni, Hill, and Aguirre 1996).

The same logic applies to fertility: limiting the number of children per family is a rational response to economic hardship: children cost money, and so when times are bad fewer individuals think they can afford them. Historical studies from a variety of contexts have in fact documented the responsiveness of fertility to economic change. For instance, Lee (1990) has linked levels of fertility to the price of food in in a number of historical contexts. Palloni et al. (1996) point to evidence that fertility decline after 1955 in several Latin American countries was associated with a drop in per capita GDP. There is a counter-argument, according to which fertility should increase during difficult economic times, either because childbearing is a hedge against uncertainty and a means to enhance marital solidarity for individual women (Friedman et al. 1994) or because the short-term opportunity costs for childbearing are lower (Butz and Ward 1979). But most observers would ascribe to the view that economic troubles and dislocation tend to reduce fertility.

A related argument emphasizes not individual-level economic hardship as such, but the uncertainty or social anomie produces by macro-level dislocations, rising unemployment, and

inflation. Even if individuals are not directly affect by downsizing and, say, wage arrears, they fear they may experience such problems in the future and are thus reluctant to enter in long-term commitments like marriage or childbearing (Kohler et al. 2002; Perelli-Harris 2006; Kaljmin 2007).

Scholars commenting on marriage and fertility decline in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union often assert that deteriorating wages and growing unemployment are the primary causes (Heleniak 1995; Vannoy 1999; Cartwright 2000; Kohler et al. 2002; Kohler and Kohler 2002; Sobotka et al. 2003; Buhler 2004; Perelli-Harris 2005; see also Kantorova 2004). Several analyses of the sharp decline in marriage rates in Eastern Germany following German unification in 1989 cite economic crisis and uncertainty due to the loss of state welfare benefits and insecure employment as the culprits (Eberstadt 1994; Adler 1997; Rudd 2000). Economic explanations for declining marriage and fertility have also abounded political and media circles, at least in Russia (Zakharov 1999; Anderson 2002). The appeal of the economic explanation is so intuitive that Caldwell and Schindlmayr (2003) suggest it may have led scholars to overlook family formation trends in the former socialist countries during the 1990s on the assumption that any changes were just ephemeral responses to economic crises and would quickly reverse once growth was restored.

Indeed, historical evidence suggests that once conditions improve, fertility typically regains its pre-crisis level. According to Lee (1990), fertility is lowest in the year following economic crisis, then rebounds to above-normal levels before returning to normal. Although a decline in childbearing accompanied the 1958-1961 economic crisis and famine in China, fertility increased once conditions improved (Ashton et al. 1984). In the United States, women postponed childbearing during the depression era until the economic crisis had passed (Anderson 2002; Elder 1974). Thus the drop in fertility during the depression itself proved temporary, and yielded a baby boom after the depression. So, one way to assess the power of the economic explanation is to ask whether the demographic trends reversed once the economies of the former state socialist countries stabilized and resumed growth.

On this score, the economic explanation is clearly wanting. Per capita GDP may be a flawed measure of the economic conditions experienced by most of the population, but it is a reasonable summary index of change over time in such conditions. Although the countries in our sample experienced a short-term decline in output, all except Kyrgyzstan rebounded quite strongly (Figure 7). In fact, the turnaround came quickly in the three Central European countries, as well in Estonia: growth resumed in the early 1990s and continued through the 2000s. Russia's economy stabilized in the mid-1990s, but growth did not really resume until after the August 1998 financial crisis. As the previous figures show, there is little evidence of a broad reversal in the signature family formation tendencies. Moreover, such hints of reversals as there are do not correspond at all to variations in economic performance between countries: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Poland experienced the earliest and most impressive economic growth but generally show the least evidence of reversal in demographic patterns. If the latter did not shift in response to dramatically improved economic circumstances, it is hard to maintain that they originated in response to the sharp economic deteriorations immediately following the collapse of state socialism.

[Figure 7]

A related issue is when the demographic patterns actually began. If, as the "economic crisis" explanation implies, economic shocks related to the transition are the driving force behind shifting family formation behaviors, then it follows that the demographic shifts should not have started before the collapse of state socialism. The TransMONEE data do not give us much opportunity to address this question, but recent studies of individual countries have concluded that at least the decline in marriage and increase in cohabitation began earlier in the 1980s (Gerber and Berman 2009; Hoem et al. 2009).

Several micro-level empirical studies focusing on Russia cast further doubt on the economic explanation. Kohler and Kohler found no negative association between labor market uncertainty and fertility at the individual level; furthermore, in some cases women or couples who were directly affected by the labor market crisis actually had a higher probability of having a child in 1994-1996 than those who were affected to a lesser extent, which is more consistent with the countercyclical argument. Kharkova and Andreev (2000) conclude that economic crisis is not the only, or even the primary, cause of fertility decline in Russia based on an analysis of 1994 microcensus data. Gerber and Berman (2009) find that variables associated with economic well-being exhibit few associations with individual-level marriage and cohabitation entry rates in Russia from 1985-2000.

The former socialist countries are not unique in the persistence of demographic patterns that originated (more-or-less) in times of economic difficulty. In the United States the recessionary "retreat from marriage" continued, albeit at a slower tempo, during the economic boom of the 1990s (Lichter, McLaughlin, and Ribar 2002). The persistence of shifts in family formation behavior despite the economic recoveries in most former state socialist countries suggests that something other than economic crisis must be behind them.

Changing norms/culture: "second demographic transition"

The main alternative explanation understands the emergent demographic behaviors as the result of broad and long-term changes in norms and values that many other countries experienced in the mid-1960s through the end of the 1980s. In this period, first northern and western Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, but eventually southern Europe and Japan exhibited declining marriage rates, increasing age at first marriage, and more widespread non-marital cohabitation (van de Kaa 1987; Qian and Preston 1993; Lesthaeghe 1995; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Raymo 2003; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). Some link these trends to a broader "second demographic transition" that also includes delayed childbearing, declining cohort fertility, increasing divorce and out-of-wedlock births, smaller household size, and growing proportions of single-parent families (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995; Raymo 2003; Sobotka et al. 2003; McLanahan 2004; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004; Rindfuss et al. 2005).

Most scholars who embrace the notion of a second demographic transition point to ideational changes (shifts in norms and value orientations) as the driving force behind these trends in demographic behavior. Beginning in the 1960s or 1970s, societies undergoing the transition began to turn away from traditional values and altruistic orientations regarding children. They embraced alternative lifestyles, emphasizing individual fulfillment and self-expression rather

than sacrifices to the family and the collective good, even encouraging what some have labeled "hedonistic individualism" (Mayer 2004). Young adults no longer felt bound by tradition to marry and have children; instead, they saw their lives as opportunities to realize their personal goals for self-expression and enjoyment (Preston 1986). These shifts may have been rooted in post-War economic prosperity, longer-term secularization, rising education levels, and the feminist movement (van de Kaa 1987; Inglehart 1990; Lesthaeghe 1995; Lesthaeghe and Neels 2002; Inglehart and Baker 2000). Sobotka et al. (2003, p.254) aptly describe the new values associated with the second demographic transition: "higher standards of partnership quality, growing risk-aversion regarding life-long commitments, growing tolerance for minorities, increased consumerism, decline in conformity and rejection of authority and distrust in political institutions." Whatever their origin, ideational shifts in the direction of this rather diverse set of norms make marriage and childbearing, associated with responsibility to others and sacrifices of individual freedom, less attractive.

The second demographic transition perspective has become popular as an alternative to the economic crisis explanation of family formation patterns in post-socialist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Zakharov 1999, 2008; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002; Sobotka et al. 2003; Frejka 2008; Philipov and Jasilioniene 2008; Sobotka 2008; Gerber and Berman 2009; Hoem et al. 2009). Proponents of this explanation argue that the cultural opening up of state socialist societies to the West, which originated prior to full-fledged collapse of state socialist regimes but really took off in the post-transition era, exposed the citizens of state socialist countries to Western norms of individualism, sexual expression, feminism, and consumerism, as well as Western family formation models (Sobotka et al. 2003; Thornton and Philipov 2008; Gerber and Berman 2009). Perhaps state socialist institutions did something to delay the rise of the norms associated with the second demographic transition, but ultimately socialist regimes were not able to avert their diffusion.

The second demographic transition perspective has its appeal, but it, too, is not without its issues. To begin with, normative shifts are generally inferred from behaviors rather than demonstrated empirically. It is hard to directly measure shifts in attitudes in the absence of long-term panel studies or at least public opinion surveys conducted using the same questions over a long period of time. Some have tried to do so using comparative surveys (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002), but the correspondence between the measures on these surveys and the underlying second demographic transition concepts is seldom exact, and these surveys also do not go back far enough in time to test whether there have been aggregate shifts. Moreover, when researchers look at the survey data on attitudes toward family formation in individual countries, the data often suggest that early childbearing and multiple children remain the normative ideal (see, e.g. Kostowska et al. 2008 on Poland; Koytcheva and Philipov 2008 on Bulgaria; Stropnik and Sircelj 2008 on Slovenia).

Second, the structural, social, and economic conditions usually associated with the second demographic transition in Western countries, such as increasing education levels, high female labor force participation, secularization, and economic prosperity either obtained in most state socialist countries well before the late 1980s or did not really apply at all at the time of the purported shift in values. For example, female labor force participation in Soviet-era Russia was among the highest in the world, and women maintained their presence in the workforce during

the transition era, despite fears they would disproportionately suffer from job losses (Gerber and Mayorova 2006). In addition, the patterns of individual-level variation implied by the second demographic transition approach do not always hold up well empirically in studies of the region. For example, for Russian women higher education is associated with higher rates of marriage (Gerber and Berman 2009) and lower rates of non-marital childbearing (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2009), whereas the second demographic transition logic would predict that the most educated women are the most likely to adhere to the "new" values rejecting traditional views of marriage. For these reasons, scholars who apply the second demographic transition concept to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union usually observe that it has taken a particular, distinctive character there (Sobotka 2008). But the specific nature of that distinctive character is hard to generalize from one state socialist to the next, and so the notion of normative change loses theoretical coherence and becomes more of a descriptive characterization.

Third, critics of the second demographic transition theory have often noted that the discrete components of the syndrome of family behaviors linked to it rarely appear together in the same context. So it is with the former state socialist countries: Russia, for example, has declining fertility and marriage rates and rising divorce, but also stable or declining average ages at first marriage and first births. Across countries, different measures of the social strength of marriage as an institution such as the average age at first marriage, the total marriage rate (percentage who ever marry) and divorce rate are weakly correlated (Kalmijn 2007), which raises the issue of whether societies have broad attitudes toward marriage as an institution at all. For these reasons, the second demographic transition perspective, while promising, requires additional elaboration and empirical testing in the context of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Politics: changing institutions and policies

A third perspective on changes in family formation behavior in former socialist countries, developed most extensively by Tomas Frejka (2008; see also Kalmijn 2007; Sobotka 2008) emphasizes the changes in institutions and policies associated with the demise of state socialism. In terms of institutions, proponents of this view note that there were many aspects of state socialism that promoted early marriage and childbearing: guaranteed employment security throughout one's career, free health care and education (which reduce the costs of raising children), the preferential treatment of families with children in the dispensing of housing, state supported child care and generous maternity leave provisions, and child benefits. For their part, state socialist authorities became concerned about the low fertility rates in their countries during the 1960s and actively pursued a diverse array of changing policies intended to bolster childbearing, including discouraging the use of modern contraception in the 1970s and 1980s (Frejka 2008). The lack of access to contraception at a time when Western European countries were embracing the birth control bill is evident in both the high abortion rates and also the high rates of shotgun marriages (Cartwright 2000). Furthermore, the broader context of authoritarian control and mutual suspicion in society may have made the nuclear family especially important as a potential arena of solidarity and agency (Gerber and Berman 2009). In these concrete ways, state socialist institutions and policies thwarted any incipient tendency for post-materialist values regarding family formation by making the practices of early marriage and childbearing perfectly rational responses to the institutional and policy context.

The collapse of state socialism did not just initiate economic crisis as such; more importantly it destroyed some of the key institutions that undergirded early marriage and childbearing. The shift from a state administered to a market-based economy entails the loss of a sense of security, as one no longer can count on lifelong employment at a relatively low but sufficient (and secure) wage. Just as young people embrace the consumerist values associated with the second demographic transition they also come face to face with the reality that they have no guarantees of being able to realize their material goals: hard work, luck, and perhaps two-career partnership arrangements will be necessary to sustain a desirable standard of living. Uncertainty is not so much the hallmark of economic crisis as it is endemic to market based economic institutions where governments withdraw from regulating the economy and the myriad forms of state support for childbearing and the nuclear family recede. Consumerism and individualism made little sense in the low-risk but also low-reward environment of the state socialist economy, but under market conditions not only did individuals have to rely on themselves and their networks to obtain goods and services previously provided by the state, they also had new freedoms and opportunities to realize their individualistic material and expressive goals. A rational person facing these incipient uncertainties will hesitate before entering into the type of long-term commitments that marriage and childbearing entail: in these concrete circumstances it becomes completely logical to cohabit before legally marrying and to wait to have children until one can assess a partner's career trajectory.

In short, this political/institutional perspective does not so much reject the economic crisis and normative change arguments as contextualize them and provide a deeper explanation of how specific aspects of the post-socialist experience interacted with economic crisis and helped produce the sweeping normative changes associated with declining marriage, increasing non-marital cohabitation, and lower fertility. It thus offers an attractive integrating theoretical framework that helps make sense of some of the anomalies that arise in relation to the economic crisis and second demographic transition perspectives. Despite its promise, the political/institutional theory has not been systematically tested using empirical data. Developing and applying suitable empirical assessments would appear to be an important item on the agenda for understanding changes in family formation in contemporary Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Consequences

Although the jury is perhaps still out on the matter, the majority of researchers examining family formation processes in the former state socialist world now believe that the revolutionary changes discussed above are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future rather than reverse in response to improvements in the economy. Governments in the region have recently been attempting to introduce policies to enhance fertility, such as Russia's "maternity capital" benefits, but experience shows that these policies have limited long-term effects. If so, what are the likely economic, political, and social consequences? Although few researchers have studied this topic extensively, some fairly intuitive repercussions can readily be proposed.

Most obviously, continuing low fertility rates – which are closely related to low rates of marriage – will likely cause the populations of these countries to shrink. In fact, although the mortality crises in countries like Russia has gotten more media attention, declining fertility generally

affects population size more than increasing mortality (Anderson 2002). Is shrinking population size necessarily a negative development? After all, European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Germany have experienced very low fertility (TFRs below 1.5) for many years now. Certainly, many governments think that shrinking populations are a cause for concern. Russia's (then) President Putin declared in his 2006 state of the country address that Russia's demographic crisis is the "most acute" problem facing the country. Russia is, of course, particularly worried about staffing its large military and populating its extensive territory, especially in light of the rapid growth of the populations on its southern borders.

Countries without these concerns may not have as much to fear, but shrinking populations are generally thought to be a source of economic problems. Other things equal, smaller cohorts of young workers would exert downward pressure on economic growth simply because there are fewer people producing output. In the post-industrial age that relationship may not be as tight as it was in prior eras, but it nevertheless is a legitimate source of concern. Another potentially serious complication is that the rapid shrinking of younger cohorts implies a distorted age structure will obtain as those born in the 1990s and later age into their working years: at that point, the ratio of retirees and children to working adults will be quite high, which is likely to produce obvious economic and political challenges. Shrinking populations are certain to stimulate political debates over topics as diverse as mandatory military service, immigration and naturalization policies, retirement ages and benefits, and the contours of the welfare state.

Non-marital childbearing is generally associated with economic deprivation in the United States, and some early studies of countries like Russia identify single-mother households as a key factor associated with poverty (see Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2009). If this trend continues, it is possible that family structure will come to play an ever greater role in the socio-economic stratification of individuals and households in former socialist countries.

Finally, the rise of smaller families, often taking the form of cohabiting relationships rather than marriage, may have long-term consequences for the social fabric of these societies. At the risk of over-generalizing, state socialism, with its low levels of generalized trust and endemic shortages, reinforced a historically rooted social structure based on tight social networks (see, e.g., Ledenova 1998). In turn, family ties served as the single most important basis for network ties. As families shrink in size and become less stable, they may become less effective in performing this function. Fewer children means fewer siblings, cousins, and uncles, and also fewer in-laws. Over time, the changes in family formation behavior may exert subtle but growing pressure on society to forge new bases for solidaristic attachments, perhaps even encouraging citizens of these countries to participate more in voluntary associations. Alternatively, a weakening of social networks could produce a long and ugly deterioration of social structure. Assuming that networks are undermined, whether and how they will be replaced will probably vary from country to country depending on economic, cultural, and political factors. This is highly speculative, but worth pondering.

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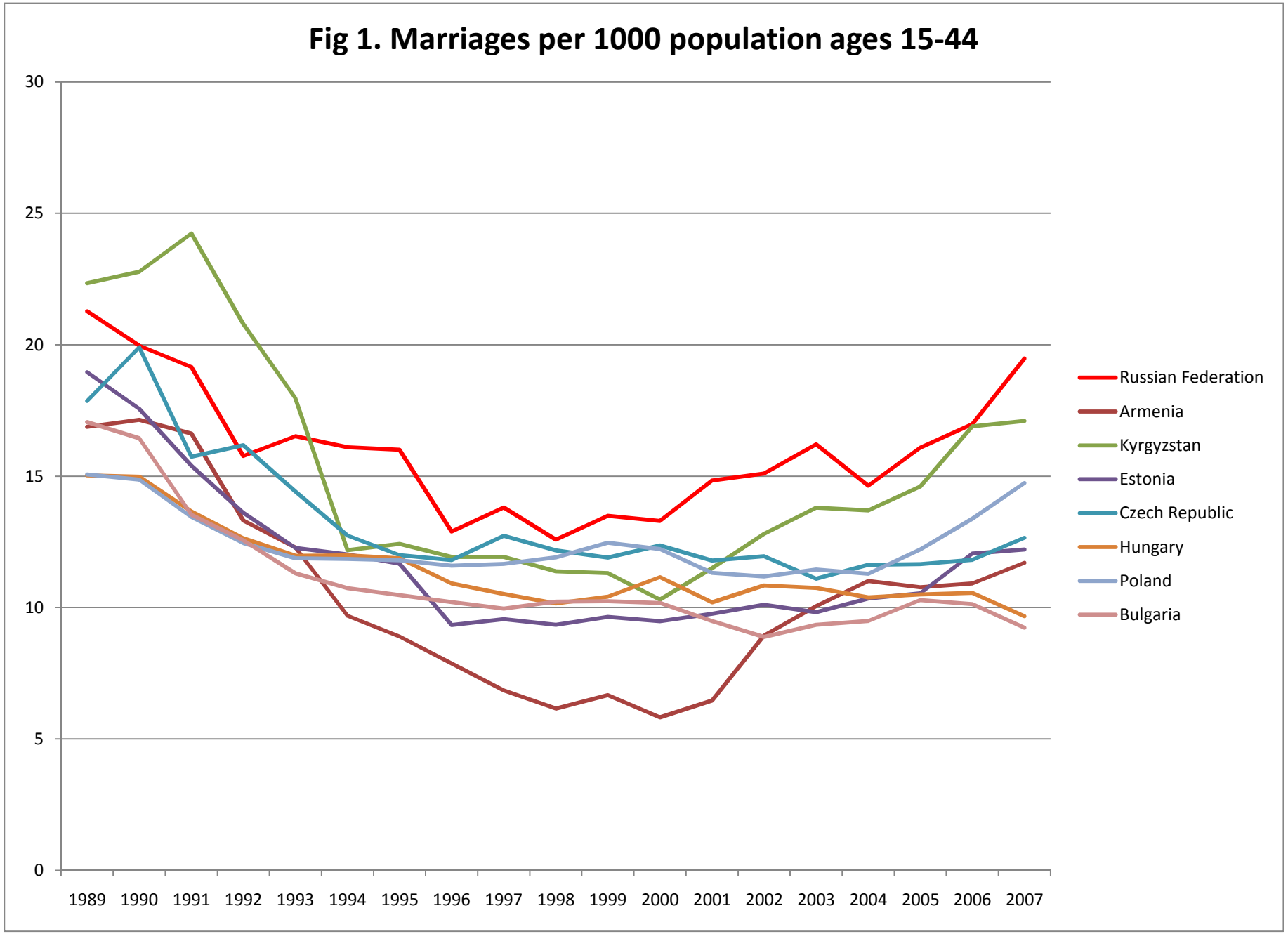
Fig 1. Marriages per 1000 population ages 15-44
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

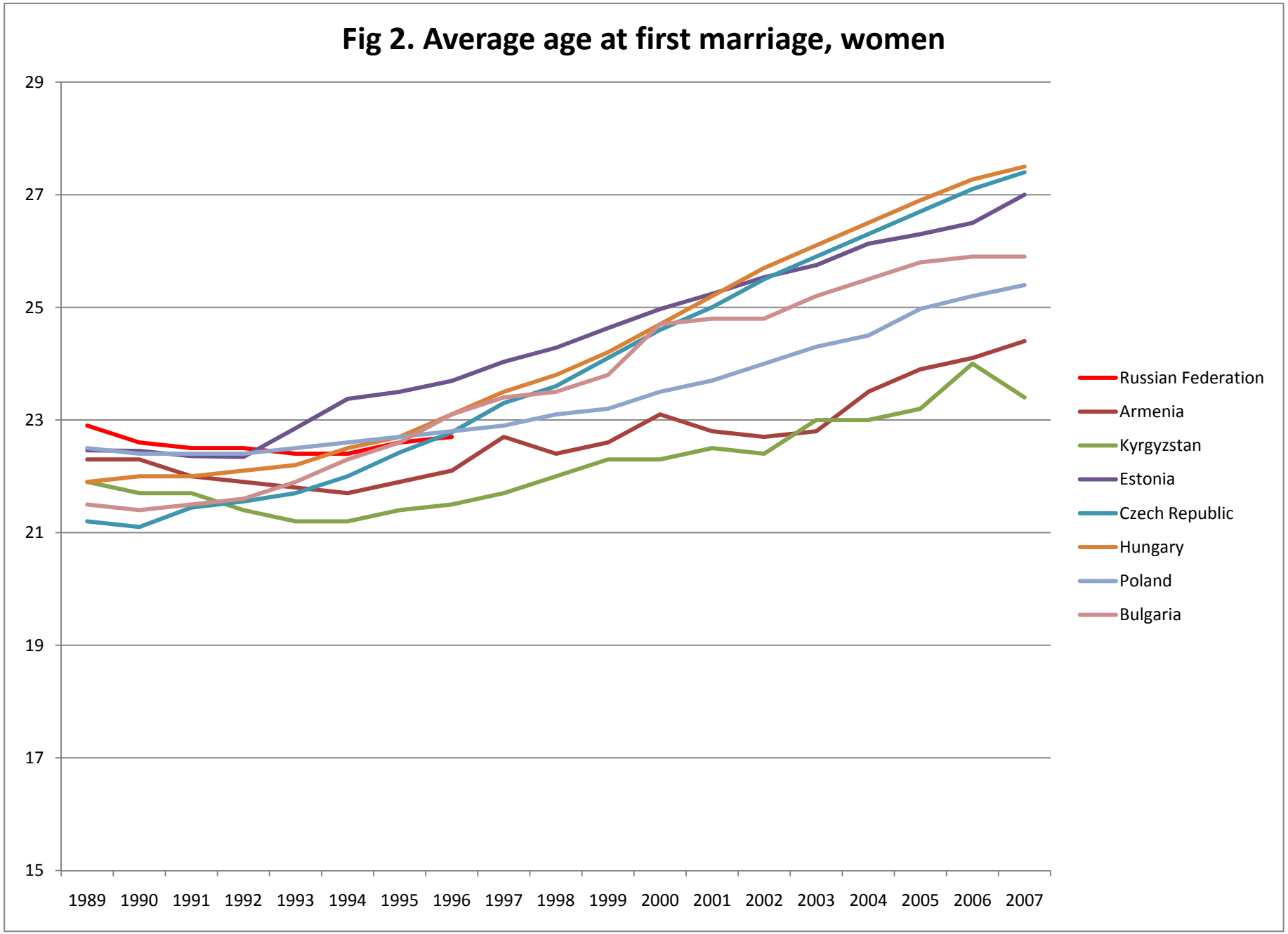
Fig 2. Average age at first marriage, women
29
27
25
23
21
19
17
15
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

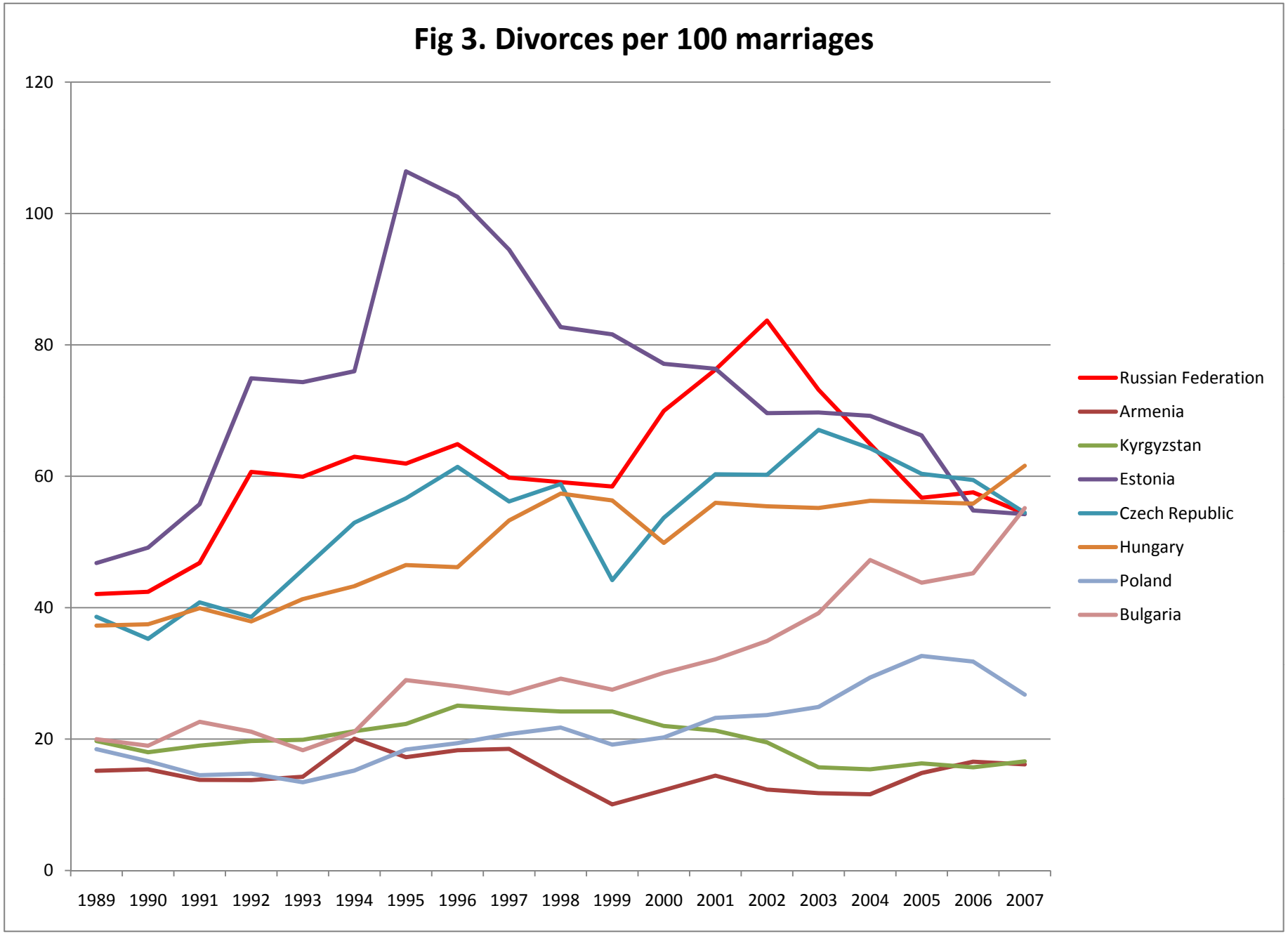
Fig 3. Divorces per 100 marriages
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

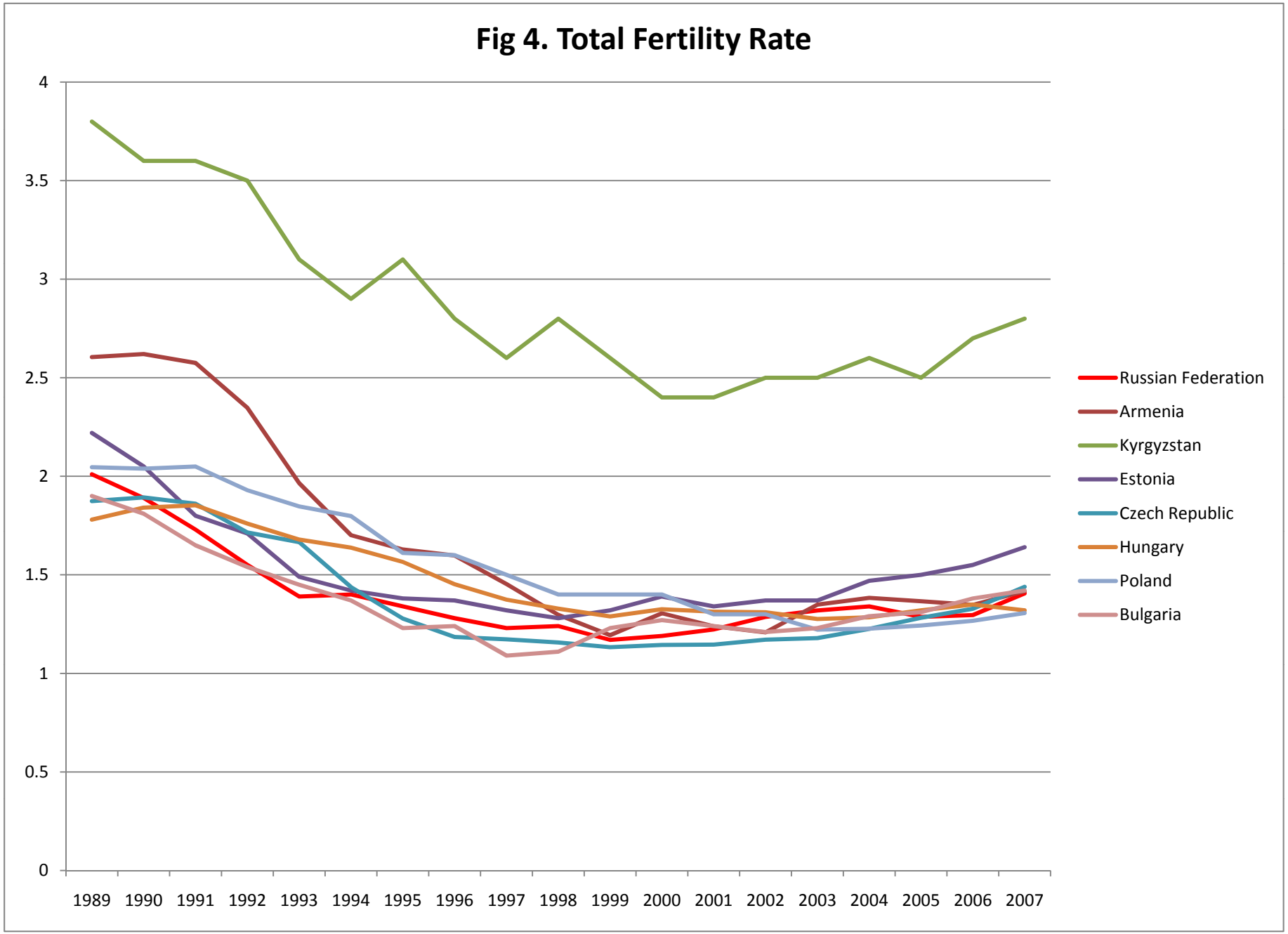
Fig 4. Total Fertility Rate
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

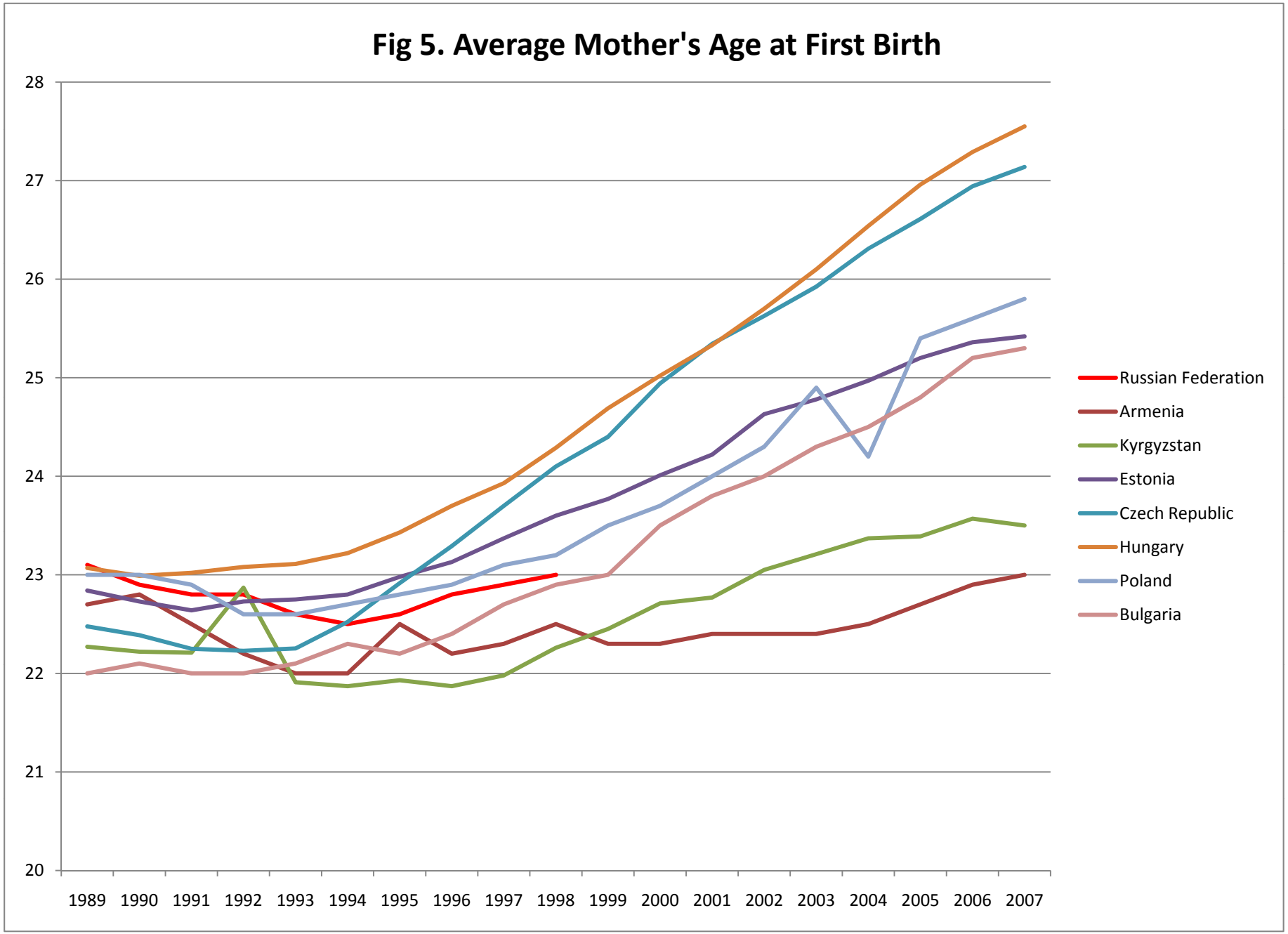
Fig 5. Average Mother's Age at First Birth
28
27
26
25
24
23
22
21
20
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
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2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

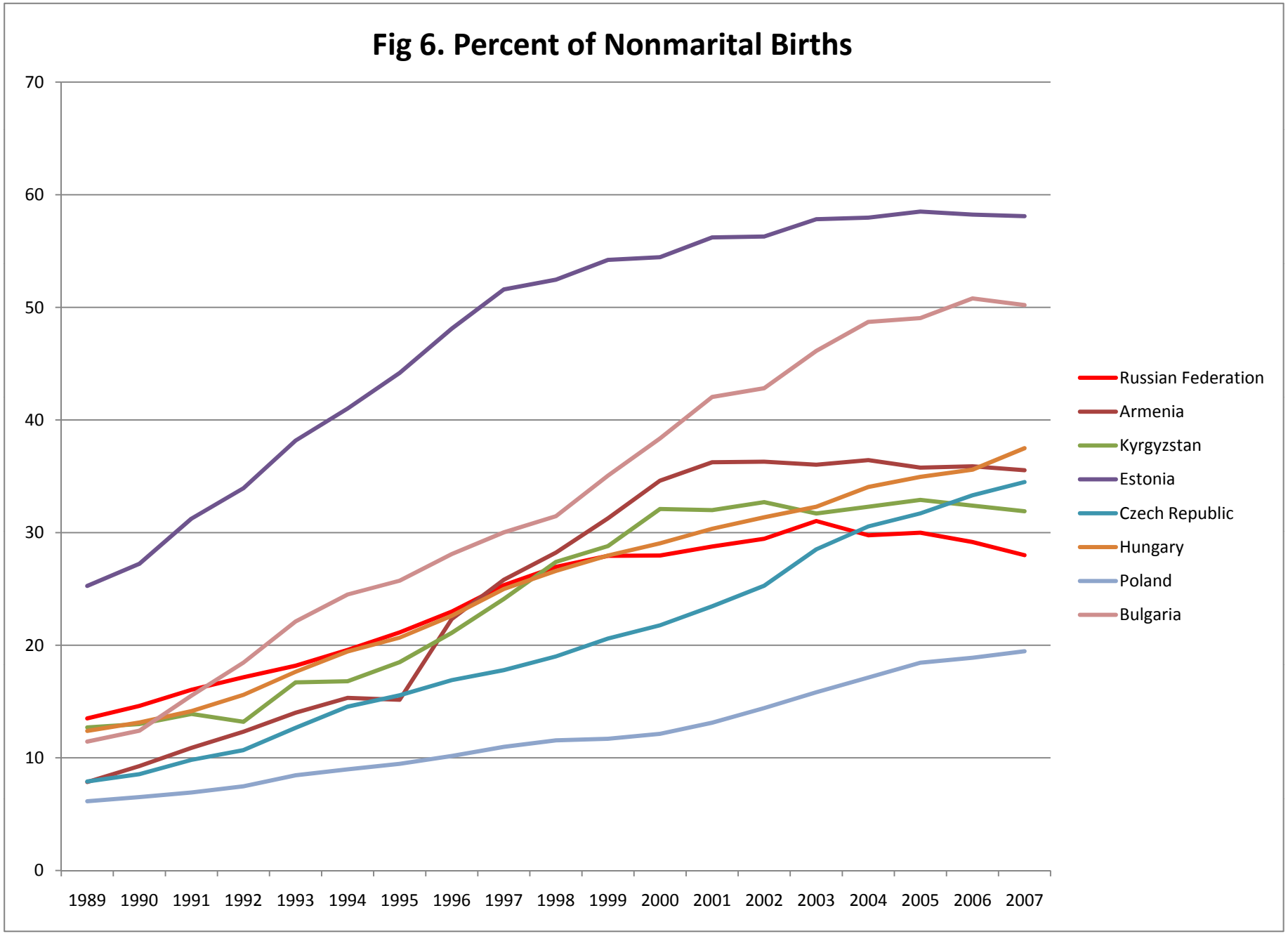
Fig 6. Percent of Nonmarital Births
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria

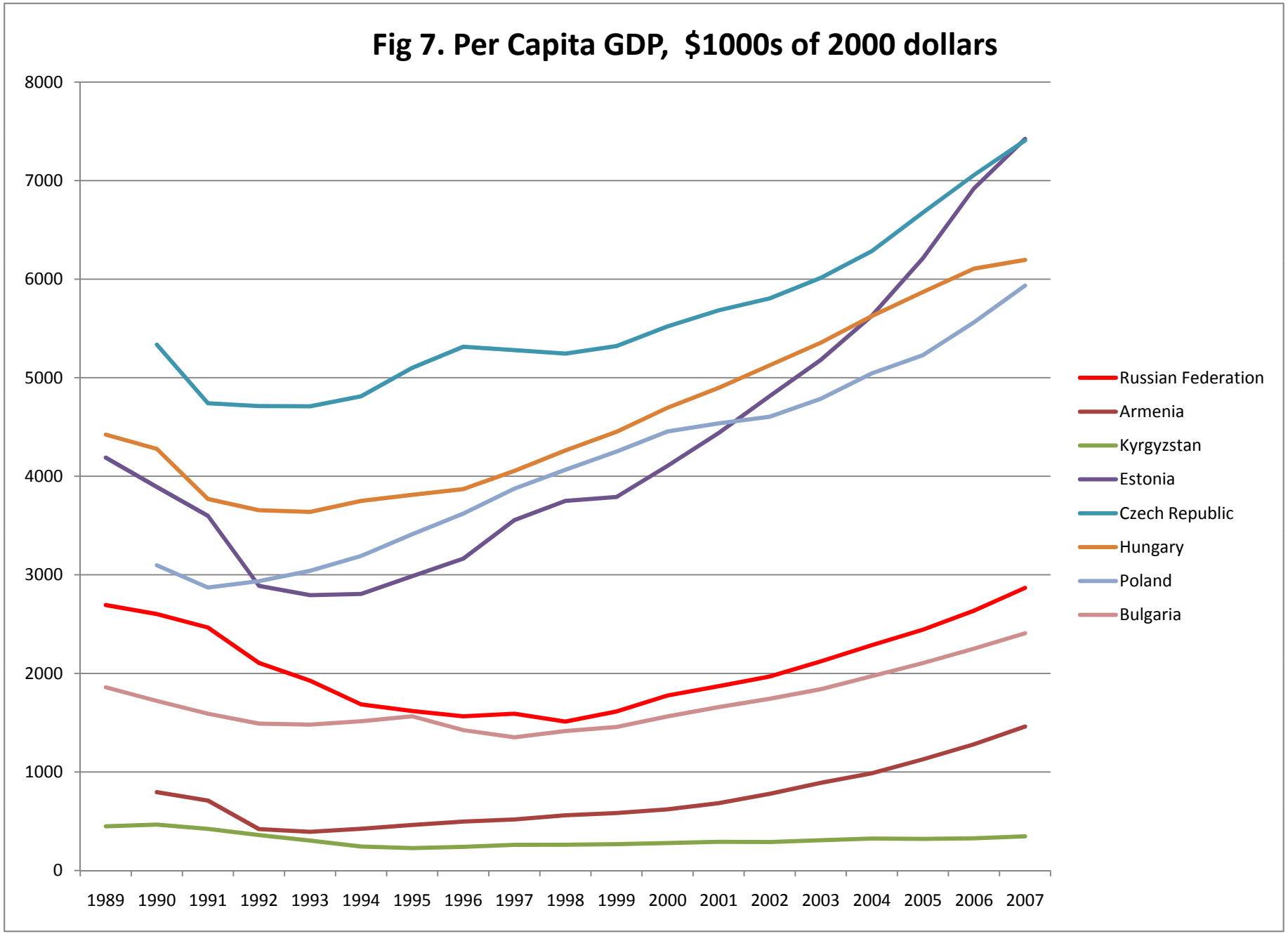
Fig 7. Per Capita GDP, $1000s of 2000 dollars
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
Russian Federation
Armenia
Kyrgyzstan
Estonia
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland
Bulgaria