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Article

## **Between ‘Labour Migration’ and ‘New European Mobilities’: Motivations for Migration of Southern and Eastern Europeans in the EU**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates in comparative perspective different accounts of the motivations for migration offered by Bulgarian, Romanian, Italian and Spanish nationals living in another EU country, or planning to move. In-depth interviews yield a range of accounts for the decision to leave the home-country, from narrowly defined economic motivations, professional and ‘qualitative’ labour market considerations, to desires for cultural/lifestyle exploration. Both individual and country-level factors are mobilised in motivational accounts, which are also set against the backdrop of major external shocks, such as the 2007 enlargement of the European Union and the 2008 global financial crisis. Findings highlight the need to consider the interplay between macro and individual-level factors—that is, perceptions of cultural, economic, political and societal structures as well as individual characteristics—in studying migratory behaviour. Moreover, the findings to a certain extent support the distinction between the ‘classic’ labour migration behaviour of Bulgarian and Romanian respondents and the ‘new European mobilities’ of Italian and Spanish participants, who emphasise more the overlapping professional, affective, cultural and quality of life considerations that shape the decision to move. However, convergence across groups may be expected in the future as East-West movers become more socialised into ‘new’ cultures of European mobility and as South–North migration patterns increasingly reinforce some of the ‘periphery-core’ dynamics of contemporary intra-EU mobility.

### **Keywords**

economic crisis; European Union; mobility; motivations for migration; Central and Eastern Europe; Southern Europe

### **Issue**

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### **1. Introduction**

This article provides a comparative analysis of accounts of motivations for migration across different country-cases and individual profiles: both higher-and lower-skilled workers originating from Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain. The literature on contemporary intra-EU mobility trends underscores broad differences in reasons for migration from Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies compared to Southern European (SE) ones. On the one hand, migrants from the more recent EU-accession CEE states seem to be driven overwhelmingly by ‘classical’ economic considerations, ranging from economic hardship to a desire to increase purchasing power or in-

vestment capacity (Recchi, 2015; Santacreu, Baldoni, & Albert, 2009). Citizens of SE countries, on the other hand, have enjoyed unrestricted access to European labour markets over a longer period as well as comparatively higher standards of living. In spite of high unemployment rates, especially in the aftermath of 2008 economic crisis, individuals from SE countries tend to display multiple and overlapping work-related, affective and lifestyle motivations for migration to Northern European destinations (Santacreu et al., 2009; Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2014).

Nevertheless, specific macro-level shocks have triggered sudden increases in migration flows from both regions, highlighting how external opportunities and constraints shape any migration decision, however econom-

ically or personally motivated. These are the 2004 and 2007 CEE countries' accession to the European Union, on the one hand, and the particularly severe impact of the 2008 global financial crisis on the labour markets and societies of Southern Europe and Ireland, on the other. Both of these events are at the root of recent transformations in the nature and patterns of EU mobility (King & Williams, 2018; Stanek, 2009; Williams, Jephcote, Janta, & Gang, 2018) and have had an objective impact on individuals' life plans and propensity to migrate. While we take into consideration these macro-level conditions, we are mindful of de Haas' (2011) distinction between macro-level determinants and individual-level motivations that shape migration flows. Therefore, our investigation focuses on in-depth individual accounts of the migration decision, setting these against informants' subjective experiences of external constraints and opportunities that may trigger migration behaviour. The aim of this study is to explore some similarities and differences across sending-country cases and migrant profiles.

## 2. Exploring Motivations and Aspirations for Migration across Multiple Contexts

### 2.1. Country-Level Perspectives

Several studies based on large-scale surveys, including the Eurobarometer, have presented in comparative perspective the willingness and aspirations to migrate across youth and general populations of a number of European countries in recent years (Hadler, 2006; Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014; van Mol, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Though migration aspirations are not equivalent to actual migration behaviour, such research is a useful starting point from which to compare the different national and social contexts in which migration decision-making processes occur, particularly in the under-researched comparison of the SE and CEE populations of Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain. One interesting result from this strand of migration research is that young people from Bulgaria and Romania seem to display some of the highest intentions for future migration across Europe, with over 60% of people under the age of 30 in each country claiming to have international migration aspirations in 2014 (van Mol, 2016). Though the migration aspirations of Italian and Spanish youth that same year were not far behind (just under 60%), there is less convergence when it comes to country-level contexts in which these aspirations take shape, for instance, if we take into account the different rates of registered youth unemployment in the CEE and SE contexts. Indeed, van Mol (2016) shows that though the migration aspirations of youth in the four countries were averaging at 60%, there was significant variation in CEE and SE figures of youth unemployment: approximately 24% in both Bulgaria and Romania, 42.7% in Italy and 53.2% in Spain. Moreover, young people in Greece, a country with a comparable youth unemployment rate in 2014 (52.4%) as Spain's, displayed consider-

ably lower migration aspirations in 2014, with 44.6% of youth claiming they wanted to move abroad.

Indeed, for van Mol (2016), while country-level factors such as high youth unemployment may be important in conditioning the migration aspirations of youth, other macro and micro-level factors should also be considered. In addition, he echoes Hadler (2006) and de Haas (2011) in arguing that neoclassical economic and functionalist theories of migration based on actors' rational responses to labour market disequilibria and incentives do not sufficiently account for intra-European mobility trends. In fact, many researchers stress the significance of individual and behavioural characteristics in predicting migration propensity. They underscore the high correlation between previous international mobility experiences as well as being young and male with having aspirations/intentions related to future European mobility (Hadler, 2006; van Mol, 2016). Moreover, in his in-depth study of 'Eurostars,' Favell (2008a) demonstrates that even among highly-skilled and mobile professionals the extent to which mobility decision-making follows anything like the abstract notions of rational-actor models can range considerably: from 'classic' calculations of cost-benefit to spontaneous 'shot in the dark' behaviour.

Nevertheless, even in conditions of freedom of movement and increasing economic integration across EU member states, one should not lose sight of the core-periphery dynamics at play in contemporary intra-EU mobility. Individuals from less economically developed parts of Europe's southern, eastern and western 'periphery' account for much of EU mobility toward the central 'core,' responding to social and political transformations related to the fall of the Iron Curtain, the accession of Eastern member states to the EU and the 2008 financial crisis (King, 2018).

### 2.2. Individual-Level Perspectives

Classic theories of the drivers of international mobility, whether premised on rational-actor models or on structuralist approaches that grant little individual agency to migrants are increasingly seen as insufficient to account for the 'new forms' of intra-European mobility. King (2018) considers how the diversification of migrant sending and receiving countries as well the profiles of migrants themselves should be set against the context of interdependent European and global economies and societies that are fostering more individualised and 'flexible' life-course strategies. These 'new forms' of international mobility indeed display features of classic economic migration, with labour-market conditions in sending and receiving countries at the heart of the phenomenon. Equally important, however, is how the mental maps of citizens—both mobile and sedentary—become increasingly marked by multiple processes of globalisation, resulting in "a widening cognitive and geopolitical space of free movement" (King, 2018, p. 5). As a result, I argue that the diverse drivers of intra-EU mobility can be

conceived as simultaneously ‘rooted’ in two processes. On the one hand, in processes of international migration captured by traditional labour migration paradigms, while on the other, increasingly resembling forms of ‘internal’ migration, characterised by overlapping work-related, quality of life, educational and affective dimensions (King, 2012; Santacreu et al., 2009).

Indeed, taking into account the economic and material dimensions of migratory behaviour from periphery to core countries should not preclude an analysis of its cultural aspects, notably where the increased individualization and Europeanization of migration strategies is concerned. Thus, understanding contemporary EU mobilities as ‘mixed-mode’ migration in terms of the mixed nature of migration flows and the mixed motivations in many individuals’ accounts of the decision to move (King, 2012) is appropriate on several levels. On the one hand, it allows for the integration of classic and more recent paradigms discussed above and for the bridging between multiple levels of analysis, including national contexts and individual trajectories.

A mixed approach to migration decision-making can also make sense of some of the contradictory evidence about the characteristics and motivations of CEE migrants in the literature. For instance, in some cases, young Romanian migrants have been found to be the most ‘economically-driven’ of young European migrants (Williams et al., 2018) while in others, to offer similar lifestyle and quality of life reasons for their migration decision as other EU migrants from more affluent countries (Sandu, Toth, & Tudor, 2018). To be sure, there is evidence that individual characteristics linked to the skills and life-course of migrants may transcend country- and region-specific distinctions when it comes to motivations and aspirations for migration.

As a result, accounts of motivations for migration vary according to migrant profiles (e.g., age at migration, education) and occupational sector (e.g., health-care compared to financial services professionals) as much, if not more, than according to region of origin. As Favell (2008b) remarks in his overview of the new forms of East-West European mobility sparked by the last waves of EU enlargement, both higher- and lower-status migrants from the East are attracted by the West. Moreover, a study on the mobility of Polish and Bulgarian scientists (Guth & Gill, 2008) suggests that although many CEE researchers are motivated by broadly economic considerations to pursue doctoral studies in the UK and Germany, these motivations are not articulated in narrowly economic terms. Rather, the professional motivations expressed by these scientists resemble those of mobile researchers from other countries. It is easy to imagine how other highly-skilled migrants from CEE countries may also frame the desire for mobility in more than just monetary terms. As a result, there is reason to believe that CEE university-educated professionals resemble highly-skilled SEs who are driven to migrate by more than the possibility of earning higher wages, but

also by “qualitative labour market incentives such as skills’ utilisation or involvement in research and development” as well as quality of life factors (Bartolini, Gropas, & Triandafyllidou, 2016).

Specifically, some converging accounts of the motivations for migration across younger informants in the study is expected, as suggested by the literature on flexible youth transitions and the rise in individualised life narratives in ‘second modernity’ (King, 2018). To be sure, new precarious forms of work and transitions to adulthood concern the market economies of both Southern Europe and post-Communist states. Kovacheva (2001) shows, for instance, how post-Communist market reforms coincided with new forms of youth transition in Eastern European societies at the turn of the 21st century. In the wake of liberal economic reforms, rising unemployment and the introduction of atypical forms of work, young people adopt flexible strategies that include further education, informal work as well as emigration abroad (Kovacheva, 2001). Similar strategies are observed among SE youth in the wake of the Great Recession. Compared to Eastern European societies, however, in which “family relations are becoming strained” (Kovacheva, 2001, p. 43), the SE familialist model may have demonstrated a great deal of resilience in the wake of recent and past economic crises, effectively absorbing a great deal of the shocks of unemployment and austerity and potentially curbing the emigration numbers (King & Williams, 2018; Rodríguez, 2009). There is evidence, however, that Eastern European household structures are increasingly similar to SE ones in the face of economic hardship, as departure from the parental home is delayed in the absence of the state support that used to facilitate youth transitions in the socialist era (Castiglioni, Hărăguș, Faludi, & Hărăguș, 2016). Thus, both the sudden reactivation of the South-North migration route as well as the rising East-West migration flows in recent years coincide with increasingly precarious forms of employment and delayed youth transitions. As a result, both Eastern and SEs may be driven toward more individualised life and work strategies involving moving abroad.

### 3. Research Design and Sample

This article draws on data collected in the framework of a larger study on *The Lived Experience of Migration* (Work Package 4 of the *Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets* project). An international team of migration researchers based in Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Spain coordinated and conducted in-depth interviews with migrants originating from these countries who were living in different EU national contexts. Fieldwork on Italian and Spanish migrants was conducted in Britain and Germany (mainly London and Berlin) while fieldwork on Bulgarian and Romanian migrants was conducted in Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain. Fieldwork sites were selected based on the significant presence of the relevant migration populations under study. In

addition, in-depth interviews with prospective migrants were conducted in each sending-country. Interview topics included experiences and perceptions of different stages of the migratory process (among others, the migration decision-making process) as well as perceptions of sending and receiving societies. A total of 154 migrants and 42 prospective migrants from all sending countries were interviewed, one-third of whom were experienced and/or trained in lower-skilled occupations (mainly construction, domestic care, hospitality and transport) and two-thirds of whom were experienced and/or trained in higher-skilled work (mainly ICT, finance, healthcare and architecture). The sampling frame ensured a roughly equal number of men and women were interviewed. The cross-country sample includes more high-skilled workers (between 62% and 70% of the sample, depending on the national group) than lower-skilled workers (between 29% and 34% of the sample, depending on the national group). 70% of interviewees were below the age of 39 and all 'actual migrants' had been living outside of their country of origin for a minimum of two years. Quotes presented in the findings have been translated into English by the relevant country-teams.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1. Material Accounts: Standard of Living Versus Working Conditions

Italian and Spanish respondents, many of whom were growing up and reaching adulthood during times of relative economic prosperity in the early 2000s do not report having faced severe economic hardship in their home country, even during economic recession. With respect to Bulgarian and Romanian respondents, however, financial difficulties—even the inability to meet basic needs—were cited repeatedly as a reason for migration. For example, respondents from Romania, especially lower-skilled individuals, migrated as a way to achieve a better income and standard of living:

The answer [to the question of why we left is simple]...[to make] a better living, because in our country we [had] nothing to do. We were working in our kitchen garden, money [was] scarce, there were no available jobs....It was very hard, at least for me. Prices were high as compared to my income. We could not afford to buy the minimum necessary things....I cannot say [any] good things about Romania. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 40)

In our country [Romania] we haven't had the possibility to work, neither me nor my husband, and we could not achieve anything. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 47)

It is notable that compared to their Romanian counterparts, lower-skilled Italian and Spanish respondents, es-

pecially in construction and other trades, reflected more on the lack of quality jobs in their field than on the lack of jobs altogether. Thus, they frequently remarked on the severe wage reductions and precarious employment in the wake of the demise of the construction industry in 2008. However, the work-related dissatisfaction tended to be more connected to the degradation in working conditions than to the inability to find employment.

An Italian plumber explains his difficult working life during the crisis years as follows:

From 2007 to 2011...these were tragic years for me, because I was working for thirty euros a day. I changed my job every two, three months....I always found work...but they [employers] were always exploiting [me]. To the point [that I left] Italy. (Italian man in Germany, aged 28)

Similarly, a Spanish construction worker suggests:

There were several motives that combined together and that led me to come here [Berlin]. One was the financial crisis in Spain. Then there was the fact that although you could find some kind of work, it was excessively precarious. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 35)

Indeed, these examples of economic motivations of SE migrants diverge from the emphasis on material deprivation made by several Romanian and Bulgarian respondents in lower-skilled work. Though the Italian and Spaniard cited above can be considered as labour migrants in the traditional sense, responding to labour market pressures in the country of origin and opportunities in the country of destination, reports of severe economic hardship were absent in Italian and Spanish informants' accounts of the migration decision.

In addition, while issues such as unemployment or underemployment as well as workplace or salary dissatisfaction shaped the motivational accounts of informants in the Italian and Spanish cases, mainly in construction and healthcare-related professions, it should be noted that most SE respondents were in some form of employment or had recently been in studies at the time of migration. This is consistent with survey findings from Triandafyllidou and Gropas (2014): Though unemployment as a motivation for migration increased following the economic crisis, it is not the most important motive for migration among SE professionals.

It is notable that many CEE participants' accounts of the material considerations that led to the migration decision are often framed in conjunction with long-term structural problems at the level of the country of origin. Indeed, for some Bulgarian respondents over the age of 39, depictions of economic hardship, such as food shortages, financial losses and unemployment, particularly in the context of the 1996–1997 financial crisis in Bulgaria, are intertwined with societal and political considerations. For instance, the decision to leave Bulgaria while she was



“still young, strong and able to succeed abroad” is expressed by a 54-year old Bulgarian woman living in Italy in reference to both economic and political desperation:

Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine...these were the darkest, worst times in Bulgaria...times of queuing with nylon bags in our hands in front of the shops....I had to make sure that my...[family] was fed...I was desperate from the politics, desperate from the situation in Bulgaria at the time. (Bulgarian woman in Italy, aged 54)

Thus, personal economic hardship was understood in the context of broader state-level transformations. Several respondents made references to the economic reforms during the market liberalisation period that restricted employment in traditional sectors of the economy and were seen as leading to both poverty and collective moral decline in Bulgaria and Romania:

Unemployment. People don't have jobs. They can't put food on the table. There is no work and the agriculture sector 'died'....Ten years ago, it was chiefly [in] tobacco [that] they worked. [When] there was tobacco—people worked...They had respect for each other. Now they have it no more. (Bulgarian man in Germany, aged 40)

In Romania everything began to break-down [following economic restructuring]; factories stopped existing; nothing, nothing was left, nothing was running [anymore], including the agriculture [sector]. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 47)

Therefore, though both Eastern and SE (mainly lower-skilled) migrants provide economic explanations for their migration decisions, the articulation of the material dimension occurs differently across groups. On the one hand, because SE respondents develop accounts related to the quality of employment, whereas CEE respondents are more inclined to reflect on starker forms of economic hardship. On the other, because the contextual background through which respondents make sense of their hardship is different. Indeed, CEE respondents identify their difficulties in making ends meet in terms of longer-term historical processes, whereas SE participants experienced a more sudden and recent decline in the quality of jobs as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. The latter therefore have less (long-term) experience with the kind of 'moral' and socio-economic decline that CEE participants alluded to and therefore may offer more individualized accounts of seeking better work opportunities elsewhere. Our findings therefore may reinforce the research by Williams et al. (2018) that Romanians who report a comfortable financial situation are less likely to leave their home country than their SE counterparts. They also support Bygnes and Flipo's (2017) comparative research on Spanish and Romanian emigrants that find a

higher emphasis on economic considerations as core motivations in Romanian migration narratives, compared to the accounts of Spaniards.

Before shifting the focus to the more explicitly non-economic motivations informants provided for the migration decision, the next section explores the 'qualitative' labour-market incentives that stress the long-term career orientations and professional identities that are central to the migration decisions of highly-skilled professionals, as highlighted by Bartolini et al. (2016).

#### *4.2. Career Opportunities and Professional Challenges*

Many respondents framed the migration decision as a means to take advantage of better career opportunities in specific sectors of dynamic foreign labour markets. Indeed, they appear driven less by material considerations such as financial problems and job instability than by clearly articulated professional identities and goals. These 'qualitative' aspects of professional advancement take different shapes across highly-skilled respondents, ranging from the drive to achieve a higher professional status through insertion in specific foreign labour markets (especially Germany and Britain) to the pursuit of human capital and career development perceived as achievable only through international experience.

For example, career development appears as a motivation for migration for high-skilled individuals across national groups and is articulated in terms of the difficulty of achieving professional goals in the country of origin. For instance, an Italian nurse in London believes:

You have opportunities that do not exist in Italy...especially [when you consider] the career that you can [make for yourself] here in England as a nurse. The ability to decide in which [clinical] department you want to work, decide when you want to move. You can decide for yourself, it's not others who decide for you. (Italian woman in the UK, aged 25)

Similarly, a Romanian physician doing his residency in Germany remarks that his core motivation for migration had to do with:

Professional fulfilment; when [studying for] six years and achieving a profession one wants to practice it in the best conditions. (Romanian man in Germany, aged 31)

Respondents in the sample who cited professional-development motivations for migration (and who had stable jobs prior to migration) emphasise being drawn to particularly dynamic sectors of country of destination economies. They often suggest that their professional identity is crucial to their self-understanding and life goals. The following quotes from Bulgarian and Spanish professionals are strikingly similar in this respect:

England is a challenge that is interesting for me and for us because here [in London] is where the market [for IT] is. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 38)

Germany for an engineer is a very attractive destination. [Even] before coming [to Germany on Erasmus exchange], it seemed like the ideal destination for an engineer. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 34)

According to a Spanish investment-fund manager who is increasingly orienting his career toward becoming an international entrepreneur,

Since a very young age, I have wanted to be an entrepreneur...and for me, being a good entrepreneur in today's world goes hand in hand with being global. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 32)

Many of these individuals show a highly pragmatic disposition, to a certain extent reinforcing the rational actor strands in the migration decision-making literature. To be sure, such informants tend to echo the traits of the most ambitious and 'rational' of Favell's (2008a) 'Eurostars.' The previous informants who articulate migration motivations through goals related to increasing competitive edge on home country and international labour markets seem to embody particularly well his depictions of a "fearless, focused, overachieving and hypermobile" (Favell, 2008a, p. 64) group of EU movers.

In this regard it is worth mentioning the international nature of some sectors, primarily finance, that explain the strong motivations to migrate of some of our respondents. Often, their deep-seated professional and personal aspirations can only be fulfilled through international career mobility. Two young financial services professionals, one Spanish and the other Bulgarian, are similar in this respect:

I wanted to pursue [a career in finance] and I wanted to move to a place that was centred on attracting international talent...where I could work on international projects. I had always liked financial markets and I wanted to come to London. (Spanish woman in the UK, aged 29)

Always since I was in the third grade in primary school I wanted to study abroad, and when the time came to apply for studies abroad, I chose Britain, first, because British universities are the best, then with my English I could easily find work there. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 27)

#### 4.3. *Reactions to Social, Political and Cultural Norms in the Country of Origin*

A range of motivations for migration are articulated by informants across skill-levels and country of origin that do not fit into narrowly defined understandings of eco-

nomics and career-related migration. Firstly, this section covers a broad category of motivations that spring from discontent with political, labour market and social institutions and norms of sending-countries. Secondly, it focuses on migration decisions as individual strategies to 'break-free' from what are perceived as conservative local/national societies and family structures. The latter type of accounts is notably presented by young single and/or homosexual respondents, as a vehicle to achieve independence and/or self-liberation in absence of opportunities for 'alternative lifestyles' in sending countries. Indeed, such orientations have been documented in the literature on motivations for intra-EU mobility (Favell, 2008a; Favell & Recchi, 2009).

With respect to the first set of 'non-economic' motivations, individual aversion to conditions broadly related to politics, culture and society are often directly or indirectly cited as motivations for migration across the cross-national sample. In spite of the different socio-political and economic environments of post-communist CEE societies compared to Italy and Spain in the wake of the Great Recession, it is notable how widespread dissatisfaction with the political and economic system was among participants from all four countries.

Discontent with the state system and access to social services is emphasised as a motivation for migration by several Bulgarian and Romanian respondents. A young woman who is planning on migrating in spite of being content with her work, income, family and social life expresses her disillusionment with Bulgarian social, political and economic institutions:

What I [and my social circle] believe in is in absolute contrast with everything else I see around me as a state and society, as functioning systems and so on....All these aspects, socio-political, economic and so on, of public life, they are in my opinion in a very bad state. (Bulgarian woman, prospective migrant, aged 32)

Similarly, for a young Romanian pharmacist planning on moving to the UK:

I like the natural landscape of my country; but I don't like the laws. I don't like the policy there...[What] I've seen in Romania [is] that things are based on the connections one has, including at the hospital [where she works] and other places where I went. This is unfair. (Romanian woman, prospective migrant, aged 24)

Italian and Spanish respondents resemble Bulgarian and Romanian informants in this respect. Although less inclined to target state institutions as a reason to leave as their CEE counterparts, they nevertheless also display strong negative reactions to deeply engrained traits of the home society and labour market that are seen as pre-dating the effects of the economic crisis. Indeed, there is a great deal of convergence across country-cases when

it comes to perceptions of widespread nepotism and discrimination in sending-country labour markets, as the three following examples illustrate:

[In Italy, effort or talent] is not recognised. I do not know why. In the end, those who make progress are the friends, the brothers of that guy, the friend of the other, the cousin of the other....It is a pity, because in Italy there are intelligent people, people of great value who no longer want to live there. And, it is very sad. (Italian woman in Germany, aged 28)

But alas, we are after all in Bulgaria, after all everything gets down to this: either connections or money if you want to succeed in your career. Nobody cares if you could do it well or not. Individual qualities are not praised but rather things such as whose son you are, whom do you know and who is able to promote you. (Bulgarian man, prospective migrant, aged 21)

Access to employment in Spain has nothing to do with meritocracy. There's constant wheeling and dealing, the boss hiring his cousin, the cousin hiring his friend. Whenever you propose a good idea, if it's not endorsed by one of the bosses, it will go nowhere. That is not the kind of [work] environment I want to dedicate my life to. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 32)

Non-identification with behaviours and mentalities of the political elite and national societies in general are also often articulated by respondents, both from CEE and SE countries. For instance, a Spaniard active in leftist Spanish expatriate circles in Berlin makes multiple references to his non-identification with the political class in Spain as well as with the citizens who sustain it:

Spain is a disaster of a country. No, I didn't leave for political reasons, but for thinking differently [than others], yes. The fact that people think it's OK to vote for corrupt politicians makes me feel terrible as a citizen of this country [Spain]. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 50)

Similarly, for a Romanian man planning on emigrating in the near future:

We are going to have a baby...and we would prefer that he live in a much more open environment, more democratic and more civilised as compared to what we foresee will exist in Romania in the next five, ten years. (Romanian man, prospective migrant, aged 35)

Bygnes and Flipo (2017) noted a great deal of distrust in Romania's politicians and institutions in their research on Romanian emigrants in Spain. Disillusionment may also be grounded in a long-term dissatisfaction in the direction of the post-communist transition, as a 2017 report by the Romanian Institute for Quality of Life Research

(2017) confirms in its findings that 61% of Romanians believed their country was embarked in the wrong direction following the transition period.

By contrast, disillusionment about the future of crisis-stricken SE countries tends to be expressed in more specific terms by Spanish and Italian respondents. This tendency has also been identified by researchers of Spanish crisis-era migration, underscoring that Spaniards targeted specific political actors, parties and policies as bearing responsibility for the poor management of the economic crisis (Díaz-Hernández & Parreño Castellano, 2017). In their comparative study of the political motivations of Romanian and Spanish emigrants, Bygnes and Flipo (2017) have also emphasised that Spanish citizens benefit from stronger political outlets to express their discontent, even while abroad, compared to Romanian emigrants. Through groups that emerged around the so-called *Indignados* movement, self-declared 'political exiles' of the economic crisis period have become highly vocal in Spanish public debate (Padilla Estrada & Bienzobas, 2013). The fact that the Romanian political arena has remained permeable to economic and social justice grievances of its citizens until relatively recently leads Bygnes and Flipo (2017) to conclude that Romanian emigrants may be less inclined to clearly articulate the political dimension of their migration decision than Spaniards are.

This Spanish nurse's account of a political shift that shaped his decision to look for work in his profession in Germany is particularly telling in this respect:

In 2011, the Partido Popular came to power...that's when I was looking for work....When Rajoy was elected, I told myself that I would have to leave, running, because I knew what was in store: more social cuts. Before, I had only been thinking about leaving Spain whereas after the election, I started thinking about it more seriously. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 26)

A second dimension I address in this section on 'non-economic' accounts has more to do with the search for individualised or 'alternative' lifestyles that are difficult to achieve in the local contexts of origin. As mentioned at the outset of this section, these overwhelmingly concerned young and single people as well as those who disclosed being homosexuals during interviews. Regardless of the form that the desired independence and 'self-liberation' would take, it was generally articulated in terms of perceived traditional local environments and family structures in the sending-country.

In terms of feeling 'trapped' in stifling and conservative societies, there are similar accounts from Bulgarian and Spanish individuals:

It wasn't so much that I was attracted to the British capital but more that I wanted to escape from Bulgaria....I liked the freedom, everything....And



I had accumulated so much disappointment toward Bulgaria....It turns out you cannot change anything....Actually, for me, the biggest thing that pushed me out of Bulgaria was this type of *mutra-chalgagian* [low-brow] culture. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 47)

I've known from the age of eighteen that I wanted to leave Seville. It's a beautiful city...but if you want to see the world, Seville isn't the place to [be]. Also, the mentality there is very closed, very conservative. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 28)

Several SE respondents specifically detail their frustrations at not being able to achieve desired levels of independence due to traditional Mediterranean family structures combined with the effects of the economic crisis. Indeed, they allude to a 'double curse' related to traditional structures in which parents deter children from leaving the family home before marriage (Reher, 1998) and not being able to achieve financial independence as a result of the shrinking job opportunities and increasingly precarious work arrangements in their home countries. It is notable that CEE respondents do not mention the desire for independence from the family to the extent that several informants from Italy and Spain, although, as mentioned earlier, the number of Romanian and Bulgarian youth living in the parental home has increased in recent years as a result of growing youth unemployment and the decline in state measures to facilitate the transition into adulthood (Castiglioni et al., 2016).

Finally, several respondents reinforce Favell's (2008a, p. 164) observations that homosexuals may "use free movement in Europe as a way of making sense of their own personal life choices—indeed, as their own way of 'coming out' of the mainstream". In the Bulgarian case, intolerance to homosexuals was mentioned once as a motivation for migration to the UK, expressed through the individual's belief that British society is much more open-minded than the Bulgarian one:

Well, I am gay. Generally, I don't like the attitude to gay people [in Bulgaria]. Discrimination, inequality in general....Oh yes. [I] definitely [felt discriminated against in Bulgaria]...so, these were the biggest reasons [why I moved to London]: professional development and tolerance. (Bulgarian man in the UK, aged 36)

In contrast to the case of Bulgaria, Spanish homosexual respondents tend to praise the generally high levels of tolerance toward homosexuality and same-sex partnerships and marriages in their country of origin. Still, Catholicism and the lack of opportunities to explore personal life-choices in the midst of tight-knit Mediterranean family structures is seen as a considerable obstacle in the case of a woman from Southern Spain:

I needed to 'find myself'....I actually came out of the closet while I was here [Great Britain]....But I came here already questioning [my sexual identity]....I needed to know what I was and where I was [in my life] without all the morality. I come from a very Catholic family, which, although they have supported me a great deal and they haven't had any problems [with my homosexuality], [there was this understanding] that I should do what one is supposed to do. This means getting married, have children, etcetera. So, this is what I needed, to find myself, I mean, what I needed was to stop and say: where am I and where am I going and what do I want to do with my life, because I was twenty-eight and I still had my life in front of me. (Spanish woman in the UK, aged 33)

#### 4.4. Previous Mobility Experiences and the Desire for Renewed Cultural Exploration

This section concludes the discussion of the findings by shedding some light on an additional 'motivational type' that may be particularly relevant to the rise of 'new' European mobilities. These are accounts that are articulated with strong agentic tones emphasising the search for self-realisation in new cultural environments. In contrast to the frequent negative framing of accounts developed above (e.g., getting away from or reacting to certain situations and environments in the sending-country), the self-realisation and cultural exploration frame is articulated as a positive action (with or without the existence of unpleasant 'push' factors).

Though the desire to experience different cultural environments was more frequent across SE cases than Eastern European ones, the desire for change and novelty, expressed more as an 'end' than as a means was not altogether absent among CEE respondents, especially those under the age of 40. Perhaps a clue to better understanding the higher prevalence of these 'adventure' narratives among Italians and Spanish respondents has to do with their prolonged EU freedom of movement rights compared to their Bulgarian and Romanian counterparts. Specifically, a striking number of SE informants drew on positive experiences of past international mobility, through the Erasmus exchange programme or leisure tourism when reflecting on their recent migration decision. Thus, respondents who reached adulthood as part of the 'Erasmus generation' may have become socialised in a culture of European mobility at a relatively young age, providing the basis for future migration aspirations. The following quotes from Italian and Spanish participants are good illustrations of the 'adventure' motif connected to the culture of European mobility and subsequent migration decisions:

I was born, grew up and studied in Trento, so I wanted to change environment a little, to see something new; and, the participation in Erasmus gave me that possibility...of leaving home and seeing another country,

another city, so I seized both of them, let's say. (Italian man in Germany, aged 29)

And also, there was the 'adventure' factor [in my decision to leave Spain]. I've always wanted to live abroad, to really get to know other cultures. Even though I've travelled a lot, you don't really learn about a culture and its people through tourism. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 35)

[To understand why I moved to Berlin,] we have to go back to 2003, [when I went on Erasmus Exchange], because I didn't get enough [of Berlin] over one year of Erasmus, I wanted to extend [the experience of living there]. (Spanish woman in Germany, aged 35)

By contrast, there are remarkably few references to the influence of previous academic mobility, such as through the Erasmus programme in shaping the more recent migration decision among informants from CEE countries, with the exception of individuals who became migrants directly following graduation from a foreign university. This aspect of the findings can be better understood if considered against the fact that Italian and Spanish students have had some of the highest Erasmus programme participation rates in the EU for several years, while students from post-socialist CEE countries have some of the lowest participation rates in the exchange programme (Bothwell, 2016; Dabasi-Halász et al., 2019). That such a significant proportion of SE research participants had previous experiences of international mobility (whether student exchange or travel) on the one hand, and that many of them explicitly connected positive past experiences of international mobility with the desire for renewed mobility is not surprising given that previous mobility experience has been identified in the literature as one of the major determining factors in future or current individual mobility behaviour (van Mol, 2016).

The absence of a 'previous mobility' frame in CEE respondents' narratives, along with the stronger emphasis on economic and material motivations among lower-skilled Bulgarian and Romanian interviewees over the age of forty (compared to lower-skilled SE participants) is the basis of the most significant regional (CEE versus SE) divergence observed in the study. I proceed to take stock of the diverging and converging accounts discussed in the above sections both from a regional/national and individual-level perspective.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has emphasised the diversity of motivations that both Eastern and Southern EU migrants mobilise to account for their decision to move. It specifically seeks to connect these justifications to broader socio-economic and political contexts as well as individual-level factors. Though the findings are organized in separate sections on 'motivational types' in order to better illustrate the

variation in the accounts obtained in the study, it is important not to lose sight of the relevance of 'mixed-mode' migration in contemporary EU mobility dynamics. For example, though the desire to experience new cultural environments, especially on the part of young migrants, was seldom expressed as a stand-alone reason for moving, it was often articulated in conjunction with one or more of the motivational categories related to economic, political and societal discontent or to specific professional aspirations as discussed in the findings. Indeed, even individuals whose reasons for moving had more to do with the inability to make ends meet or with the frustration with declining wages and quality of employment frequently offered multi-dimensional accounts of the migration decision.

In terms of the regional and national-level comparison, we find a stronger emphasis on narrowly defined economic motivations among CEE respondents compared to SE participants, even where the latter were in precarious work or unemployment at the time of migration. These differences may be related to the class position and support networks of our CEE and SE respondents, or to differences in the 'selection' patterns of migrants in the different regional contexts. On the other extreme, we find a stronger emphasis on cultural motives for migration, including individual, lifestyle and existential considerations among SE respondents, articulated in conjunction with other motivations discussed in the findings. While it could have been reasonable to expect that the Great Recession and record levels of unemployment that hit SE countries particularly hard might have led to more converging economic motivations for migration among SE and CEE respondents, this was not the case. By contrast to media portrayals across Europe that represent young SE migrants as 'desperately escaping' the lack of jobs and prospects in their countries, few SE respondents seemed to identify with these images, though they certainly expressed discontent with the labour markets in their societies of origin.

A significant common pattern across both regions, however, is connecting the desire to leave the country of origin with an individual's societal and political discontent. Interestingly, the narratives of Bulgarian and Romanian interviewees indicate a long-term/historical basis for discontent related to the post-socialist transition, whereas SE respondents were more inclined to develop accounts that blamed specific political parties, policies and events as contributing to the societal, economic and political decline in a relatively recent time-frame (often connected to the economic crisis). As a result, one way of understanding this difference may be through the more 'extended' experiences of deprivation in the CEE context and through the concept of relative deprivation in the SE context.

In terms of the individual-level comparison, we find the most converging accounts across younger professionals from the two regions, whose desire for career development is either frustrated by country of origin pro-

professional structures and labour markets or whose professional identities and goals rest on acquiring international experience. With respect to the relative lack of previous international mobility experience of CEE respondents prior to migration compared to SE individuals, for whom migration was often an opportunity to 'relive' a positive experience of cultural exploration, it is notable just how different the nature of the migration decision is from each perspective. Indeed, the stronger emphasis on cultural motivations on the part of SE participants may not be altogether surprising given that the latter group could more clearly imagine and articulate what the 'lived experience' of migration would entail.

Together, these findings reinforce our understanding that country-level contexts such as high unemployment rates on their own cannot sufficiently explain aspirations for mobility and actual migration behaviour. Though both cases of migration can be understood in terms of current core-periphery dynamics in the EU, it appears that SE migrants, socialised to a larger extent in European cultures of mobility, evoke multiple and intersecting desires and aspirations that span a range of labour-market, professional, as well political, societal and quality of life considerations to a greater extent than CEE respondents. However, as East-West mobility processes become more integrated in broader cultures of European mobility (including travel and academic/training exchanges), more overlapping and diverse considerations are likely to shape the migration decision-making processes of CEE movers and potential movers.

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The author declares no conflict of interests.

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