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Introduction
Mapping the Shifts in Russian and European Welfare Polities

Linda J. Cook[1,2] and **Mike Titterton**[2]*

[1]Political Science and Slavic Studies, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States
[2]International Laboratory for Social Integration Research, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia
*E-mail: expertinclusion@gmail.com

Despite large economic and political differences, contemporary Russia, the seven Central-East European states that joined the EU in 2004 (EU8)[1] and the older EU15[2] states share broadly inclusive welfare systems. During the post-WWII decades, all these states consolidated comprehensive systems of social provision; although, in Russia and to a lesser extent in Central-East Europe (hereafter CEE), welfare was much more basic and lower in quality than in Western Europe. In all cases, construction of welfare states entailed costly social commitments and created norms of state responsibility for societal well-being. When the post-war 'Golden Age' of welfare ended, beginning in the 1980s in the EU15 and accelerating during the 1990s in post-communist states, social expenditures fell to varying extents across the region. The 1998 recession, and especially the 2008 financial crisis brought further welfare retrenchment and contraction, along with austerity, liberalisation and dramatic changes in demographic and labour market structures throughout the region.

By the early 2000s, Russian and European welfare states confronted a set of 'new social risks,' including ageing populations, destabilised labour markets and family structures, large-scale immigration and accumulated welfare commitments (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Cerami, 2008; Hemerijck, 2013). New risks in turn produced broadly convergent social policy challenges and agendas in labour market policies, pension and demographic reforms (Cook, 2007; Toots and Bachmann, 2010; Aidukaite, 2011). In 2019, a new social crisis, COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts, also confronted these states simultaneously (Béland *et al.*, 2021). In responding to these shared challenges, Russia, EU8 and EU15 governments adopted approaches that converged around liberalisation and privatization in some policy areas, though in other areas they diverged.

Despite their parallel broad trajectories of post-war expansion and contraction, and the shared challenges of 'new social risks', these welfare states are rarely studied within a single comparative framework. Most research has remained 'within sub-region', comparing groups of EU15 democracies or CEE post-communist states, with Russia, when included, treated mostly as an outlier (for exceptions see Cook, 2007; Cerami, 2008; Kuitto, 2016; Sokhey, 2017). The main contribution of our themed section is to integrate study of these welfare states within the common framework of 'new social risks'. Contributors compare Russia and EU states' responses to key challenges that derive from these new risks: specifically, maintaining social security provision; addressing demographic decline; and responding to social and economic effects of the COVID pandemic.

Whilst they share features as mature welfare states and face common challenges in the present, Russian and European cases do have quite different welfare histories and legacies. Until 1990, Russia and the communist cases maintained state-bureaucratic monopolies over welfare systems that had been created top-down to serve the interests of the state and communist parties. The Western European welfare states, by contrast, were shaped by democratic political bargaining to meet the perceived needs and interests of societies and were characterised by both Beveridgian and Bismarckian institutional features (George, 1996; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Such divergent pasts have produced different historical-institutional welfare legacies that influence policy-makers' responses to challenges and construction of reforms. Contributors analyse how historical legacies have interacted with new risks to produce convergences and divergences in contemporary welfare policies.

Contemporary EU8 and Russian welfare states are, like their Western counterparts, now embedded in domestic and global market or mixed state-market economies, but they have never fitted into Esping-Andersen's worlds of welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990) or variants of those models. (Polese *et al.*, 2014; Kuitto, 2016). Rather, post-communist states have usually been classified as awkward 'hybrids' of various types (Cerami and Vanhuysse, 2009; Offe, 2009; Cook, 2010). EU15 welfare states are in the contemporary period no longer characterised by the stable constellations of institutions and political processes implied in Esping-Andersen's 'regime typologies' (Ellison, 2006; Danforth, 2014; Seeleib-Kaiser, 2016). Instead, we propose the use of the concept 'welfare polities' to structure comparisons. 'Welfare polity' is a more fluid concept than welfare regime, including the normative framework, policy capability, institutional capacity, legacies, and social and political movements that shape and constrain welfare state change (Joerges *et al.*, 2005; Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, 2012). The concept offers the potential for re-examining the interaction of state and market, associated political philosophies, and opportunities for political and institutional renewal in a comparative manner.

Contributions to this themed section compare Russian and European responses to shared challenges that have been at the centre of policy-makers' attention across cases. These challenges include: the financial viability of pension systems; low birth rates and shrinking family size; and the effects of COVID on families and businesses. Each contribution presents a structured set of case studies that compares risks and responses in one of these policy areas for Russia and one or two selected EU states. The themed section begins with a 'State of the Art' article by co-editors Linda J. Cook and Mike Titterton that expands on the comparative context and conceptual framework for the case studies that follow. As EU welfare states are more researched and better known (Hemerjick and Huguenot-Noël, 2022), we focus on the Russian case and bring it into comparison with the others. Drawing on literature from the 'new social risks' agendas, we then highlight common challenges with which policy makers across the continent grapple and briefly compare their responses, setting the stage for the case study chapters. Finally, we elaborate the 'welfare polity' framework. The welfare polity approach, it is contended, allows for considerably greater scope and flexibility when comparatively analysing political economies that defy easy categorisation across a region as varied as Europe.

The article by Daria Prisiazhniuk and Sarah Sokhey, 'Cracking the nest egg: comparing pension politics in post-communist Russia and Hungary' (Prisiazhniuk and Sokhey, 2022), looks at issues related to social security reforms. The authors compare reforms designed to reduce the short-term burden of current pension payments and to improve long-term sustainability of pension systems in both states. Both Russia and Hungary have accumulated very expensive pension obligations, and their pension dependency ratios are worsening as smaller cohorts enter labour forces. Though normative frames in Russia and Hungary strongly favour state-public provision, both governments initiated liberal reforms, introducing private invested pension tiers and increasing age of pension eligibility. The authors hypothesized that reform would be more difficult because societal resistance and push-back would be stronger in pre-populist Hungary, while Russia's authoritarian government would be better-able to enact unpopular changes. They found instead that pension reforms succeeded more easily in Hungary. In Russia, similar reforms were slowed by bureaucratic infighting and leaders' poor information about popular expectations. In the end, the 2008 financial crisis forced both states to abandon private pension tiers.

In 'Trying to reverse demographic decline: pro-natalist and family policies in Russia, Poland and Hungary,' Cook, Iarskaia-Smirnova and Kozlov (Cook *et al*., 2022) focus on efforts by governments in Russia, Poland and Hungary to stem serious birth rate declines that have depleted labour resources and created existential threats to national survival. All three governments responded to these demographic threats with mixes of pro-natalist incentives, support for families, restrictions on women's reproductive rights, and re-traditionalising ideological pressures. The authors compare effects of flagship pro-natalist 'baby bonus' programmes across the three cases, Maternity Capital in Russia, Family 500+ in Poland and earned income family tax incentives in Hungary. While all three programmes are found to have raised birth rates only temporarily, they produced dramatically different effects on child and family poverty. The authors also compare data on parental leave compensation and provision of public pre-school childcare, finding insignificant effects on mothers' employment. All three post-communist states – Russia and EU members Poland and Hungary – combine incentives with restrictions on reproductive rights and pressures for neo-familialist models of childcare. The authors conclude that post-communist governments' flagship pronatalist incentives, family policies and traditionalist rhetoric have had limited effects in reversing demographic decline or in re-traditionalising contemporary women's lives. The SOTA compares these approaches to pro-natalist policies in the EU15, which avoid restrictions and seek to facilitate work-family reconciliation and gender equality. The authors connect these differences in policy approaches with historical legacies of communist versus democratic welfare states.

In the fourth article, Esuna Dugarova (2022) compares policy responses to economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Russia and Finland. The pandemic was an exogenous shock to welfare states across Europe and globally. Russian and Finnish governments responded with multi-faceted anti-crisis relief packages. Both allocated support to families, workers, businesses and vulnerable social groups, in addition to previously planned social expenditures. Dugarova emphasises the role of economic resources in determining the comparative scale of expenditures, while government capacities and priorities determined how relief funds were distributed differentially to benefit specific social groups and economic sectors. She found that Russia's government prioritised families and poverty relief in keeping with its demographic priorities.

The Finnish government, more concerned about labour resources, favoured workers and small businesses in allocating resources. Paying particular attention to the gender dimension, Dugarova concludes that, despite the Finnish government's strong normative support for gender equality, neither Finnish nor Russian governments prioritised women's needs.

Conclusion

The comparative case studies confirm the convergence in new risks and challenges faced by Russian and European welfare states. Ageing populations created similar strains on contemporary Russian and Hungarian pension systems, motivating both to adopt invested pension pillars (privatising reforms) and increase age of pension eligibility. Similar demographic shifts push governments in Poland, Hungary and Russia to adopt broadly similar pro-natalist policies and pro-family supports. COVID-19 disrupted social and economic life in similar ways in Russia and Finland, closing businesses and requiring quarantines; both responded with significant increases in GDP expenditure and government interventions. The case studies show that governments' responses to shared new risks converge in some respects and diverge in others. They do not share a single logic that is leading toward a coherent new welfare model (Esping-Andersen, 2010). At least for these cases, policy responses are crafted to solve problems, mixing liberal, statist/universalist, conservative/familialist and *ad hoc* approaches and principles.

In sum, broadly-shared new social risks are driving Russian and European welfare agendas in multiple directions. The COVID-19 crisis represented a departure of governments in all studied cases from earlier predominantly liberalizing approaches, leading them to adopt policies that have been characterised as 'Emergency Keynesianism'. The distributive policies and principles used during the pandemic hark back to aspects of Beveridge's welfare model, particularly universal distribution. We conclude the SOTA with a discussion of renewed attention to Beveridge welfare models (though often without the Beveridge label), including universal social payments and income floors, among welfare policy specialists and policy-makers as possible approaches to meet challenges of contemporary welfare states.

At the time of this writing (Autumn 2022), Russia's attack on Ukraine and the resulting military conflict involving Russian and Ukrainian armed forces is blighting countless lives in this region, destroying the resources and infrastructure for welfare provision in Ukraine for the present and medium-term future. The war has resulted in the exodus of several million refugees from Ukraine into Baltic, Central European and West European countries. These countries are providing refuge as well as essential social benefits and services, adding to pressures on their welfare systems from inflation, energy shortages and other sources. The effect on vulnerable populations, among both refugees and domestic welfare recipients, has been profound (Editorial, 2022). The environmental, social and fiscal consequences of the conflict have been wide reaching, creating turbulence in already weakened economies, threatening post-pandemic recovery with deepening recession on a global scale. Comparative research and international collaboration among scholars, both East and West, has rarely been more essential yet currently has such difficult obstacles to surmount. It is our hope that this themed section represents a useful contribution towards meeting this challenge.

Notes

1 The EU8 states that acceded to the Union in 2004 are: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

2 The EU15, the first fifteen members of the EU, are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

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