

ANNEX 7:

Rural-urban population trends in Europe, 1960-2011

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1 Introduction

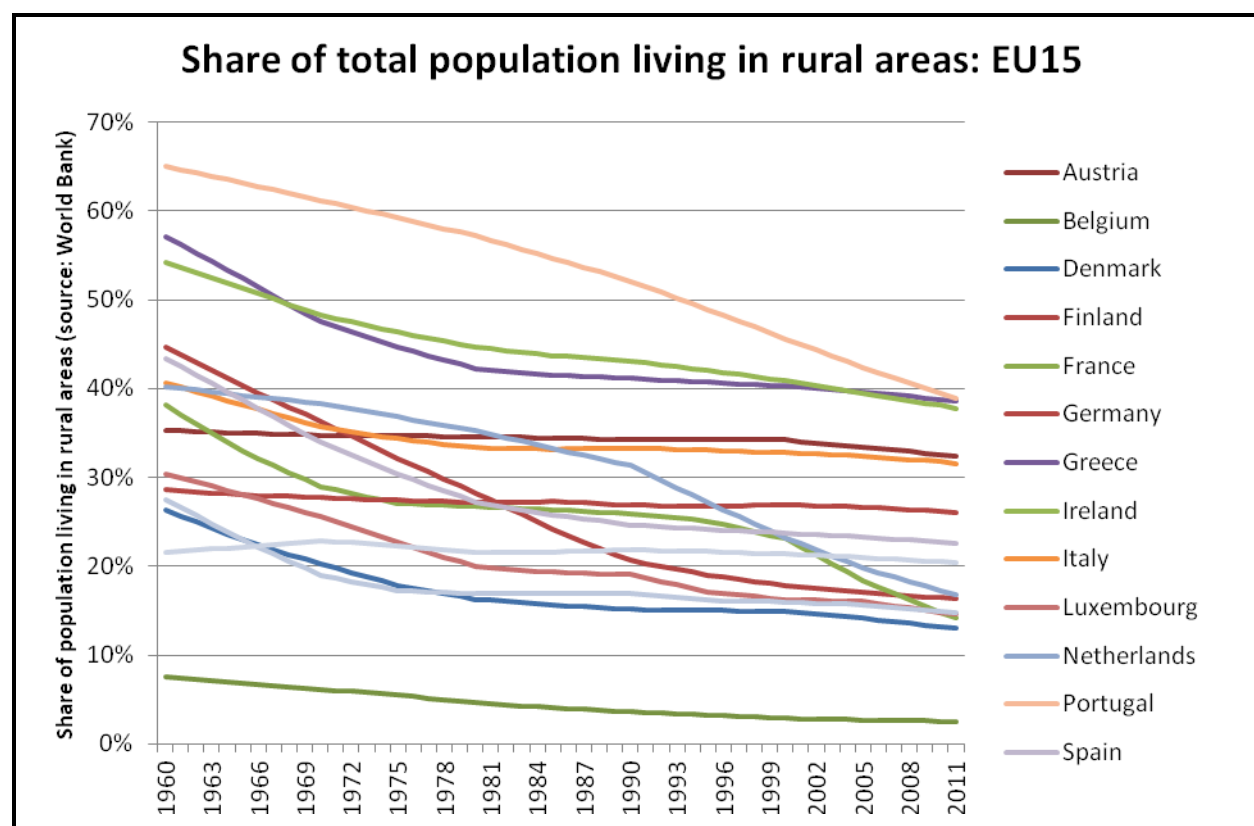
This annex analyses how the rural-urban population balance has varied in different parts of Europe from 1960 to 2011. Data are from the World Bank website¹, which explains that *“Rural population refers to people living in rural areas as defined by national statistical offices. It is calculated as the difference between total population and urban population.”*

Although many different definitions of “rural” are in common use, this “settlement definition” is closest to the original meaning of the words “urban” and “rural”, and this is probably the most comprehensive long-term dataset on rural populations available.

¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

2 Trends in the EU-15

The following chart shows the trends in those 15 countries that formed the EU prior to its 2004 enlargement:



From 1960 to 2011 the average share of population living in rural areas dropped by almost 40 %, from 37.4 % to 22.7 % (simple average of all 15 countries).

In 1988 the European Commission, in its communication on *"The Future of Rural Society"*², stated that:

"Following a general drift from the land in the 1960s, consisting mainly in inter-regional and international migrations towards the large conurbations and industrial areas, there has been a gradual reversal in the tendency for people to leave the countryside. Exceptions to this new general trend are found only in Greece and some areas of the Mezzogiorno, Spain, Portugal and the Massif Central in France, where the drift from the land continues. In other regions, the number of inhabitants in rural areas is in fact increasing, average ages are lower, and social diversification is quite marked."

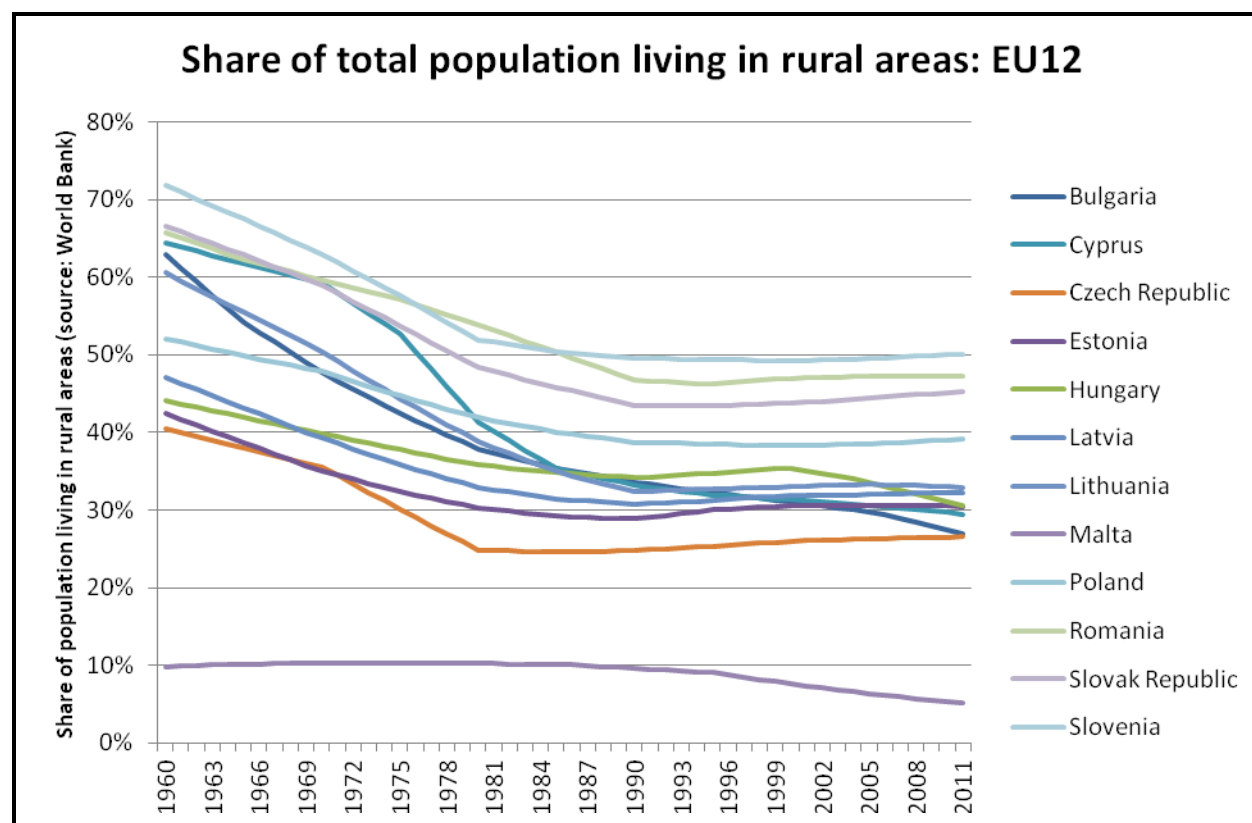
Whilst this may have been true according to the area definitions then in use by the European Commission, it is not supported by these data, which show that the proportion of total population living in rural areas fell from 1960 to 1988 in all of these countries but one (the UK). The implication that the "drift from the land" had now halted has not been borne out by subsequent experience: every one of these countries (including Austria, Finland and

² Commission Communication Transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament on 29 July 1988: COM(88)371 Final

Sweden, which did not join the EU until 1995) saw their share of rural population fall from 1988 to 2011. This trend continues to the present day, with all of these countries seeing a fall from 2010 to 2011³.

3 Trends in the EU-12

The following chart shows the trends in those 12 countries that joined the EU in 2004 or 2007:



Here the picture is rather different: a rapid fall in the rural population share from 1960 to around 1980 (with the average dropping by more than a third from 52.3 % to 33.8 %), followed by a much slower rate of overall decline and an increase in the rural share in some countries.

Nine of these 12 countries were under strong Soviet influence until the end of the 1980s, with three being states of the Soviet Union and six being members of COMECON. The economic decline that hit the Soviet bloc around 1979 brought an abrupt halt to the process of urbanisation, which has not yet re-started.

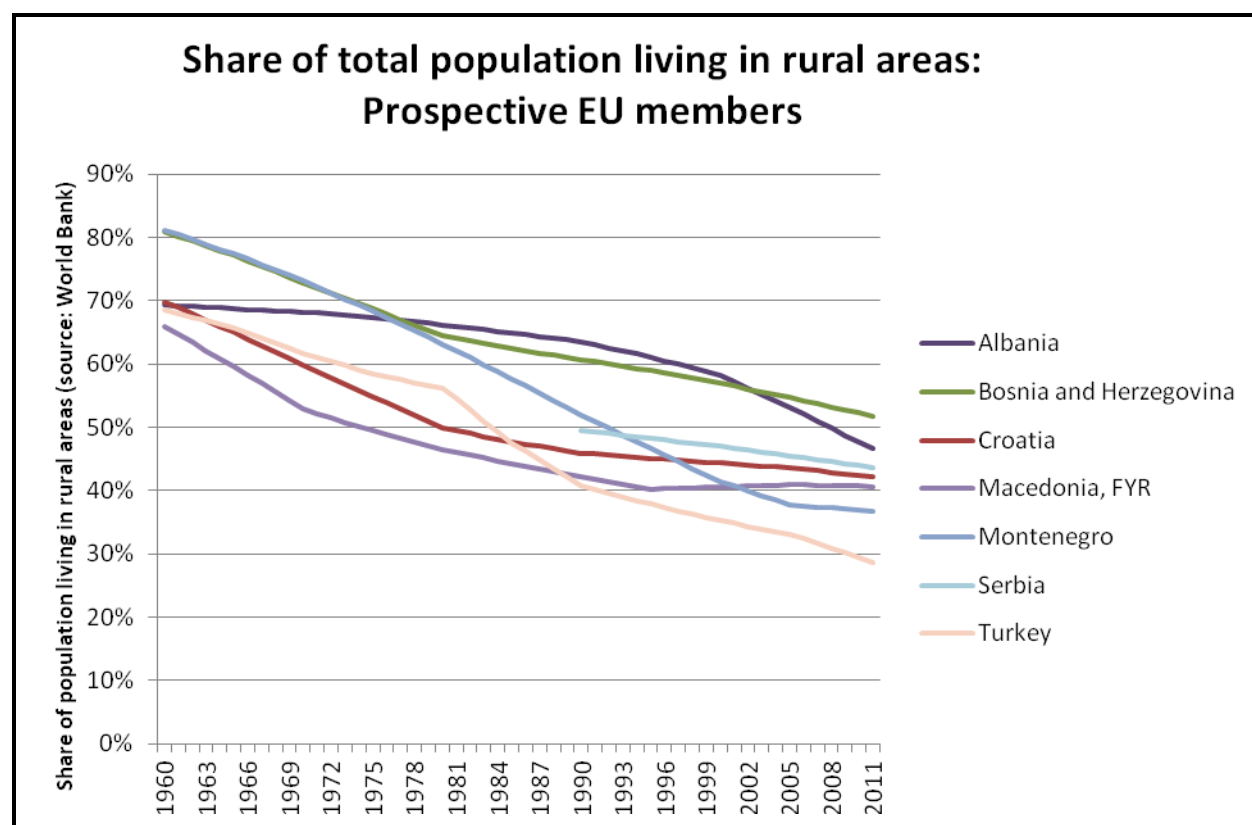
Two countries that were not within the Soviet sphere of influence – Malta and Cyprus – show a totally different pattern, with Cyprus' urbanisation continuing unabated over the whole period and Malta's only beginning in the mid-1980s.

³ The figure for Belgium was constant at 2.5 % in both 2010 and 2011; with rurality as low as this, the recent data show a drop of one tenth of a percentage point about every three years.

The only non-aligned country to buck the urbanisation trend was Slovenia, whose rate of urbanisation slowed markedly around 1990 and began to reverse after it joined the EU in 2004. However, it is also unique in having deliberately adopted a policy of “polycentric development” in 1964, which supported economic and administrative activity in around 15 larger towns and cities, backed by considerable funding of local municipalities (see box in section 1.4 of the main report).

4 Trends in prospective EU Member States

The following chart shows the trends in seven countries that aspire to join the EU, including “Candidate Countries”, “Pre-candidate Countries” and Croatia, which has just joined.



Each of these countries (five of which are former Yugoslav republics) shows a relatively rapid and continuing fall in the share of their population living in rural areas, dropping from an average of 72.6 % in 1960 to 41.4 % by 2011 – the sharpest drop of the three country groupings examined here.

5 Conclusion: Will BiH’s rural population continue to fall?

The trend shown by all the former Yugoslav republics except Slovenia strongly suggests that the share of rural population in BiH will continue to fall for some time. The experience of Slovenia, and arguably also of the other new Member States, suggests that urbanisation may decrease after its accession to the EU – though the trend in the original EU-15 shows that this may not necessarily follow. The experience of Croatia will be something to watch

closely, but since EU accession is not yet an imminent prospect for Bosnia and Herzegovina, a continuing rural-urban population shift would seem to be the most realistic scenario on which planners should base their medium-term projections. The European Commission predicted the end of urbanisation 25 years ago, and were proved remarkably wrong; it would be unwise to repeat the same mistake for Bosnia and Herzegovina.