

## Europe's fertility and partnership: selected developments during the last ten years

Miroslav Macura

Yumiko Mochizuki Sternberg

Jose Lara Garcia

... there can be no serious doubt that in the late 1980s and early 1990s an era in world history ended and a new one began.  
(Hobsbawm, 1994, p.5)

### *Introduction*

Nineteen-eighty-nine marked a beginning of the last episodes of what Hobsbawm calls “the Short Twentieth Century, that is to say of the years from the outbreak of the First World War to the collapse of the USSR...” Today, just ten years later, evidence abounds showing that the fall of the east European socialism during 1989-1991, arriving unexpectedly and occurring mostly peacefully ushered a new beginning for Europe, particularly central and eastern Europe. With the fall came down the barriers separating the two parts of the continent, a building of free-market democracies on the ruins of the centrally-planned one-party states and the hope that one day Europe will be one and whole again. In the meantime, eastern and western Europe – this is how we shall refer to the two parts for the sake of simplicity of expression – have grown closer to each other, however, becoming in certain respects increasingly distant. The renaissance under way in eastern Europe could not in a short time span erase legacies of the past, particularly those of the failed experiment.

---

The authors wish to thank the Advisory Group of the FFS programme of comparative research for its permission, granted under identification number 45, to use the FFS data on which this study is based.

Many differences that grew larger during the past decade, including those pertaining to the economy and living standards, will probably in many cases begin to shrink only after a while. In brief, eastern and western Europe, reconciled after decades of divisions, have been and will for some time remain distinct. It is against this backdrop of shrinking as well as growing differences, that we shall consider some of the developments in fertility and partnership behaviour in Europe. As it will presently become obvious, the present overview of these developments will be one of east-west diversity and contrasts. As much as this approach to presenting variations within Europe may at first sight appear anachronistic, it will eventually prove not only useful, but also essential.

An attempt at a brief overview of fertility and partnership change over a very recent time period across the continent made up of a mosaic of economically, socially and culturally diverse countries faces the issue of where to place its focus. This is so even though comparable data available for such an overview are limited, partly because they necessarily come from vital statistics sources and since most of the FFS information pertains to earlier times. Although data limitations did place constraints, a fair degree of freedom to select what to address has existed. The choices made have, as the reader will presently see, resulted in a collage of topics, some of which are often discussed in the literature while others are not. We will begin with a broad view of overall fertility and first marriage trends over the past ten years as presented by vital statistics and briefly look into what combinations of quantum and tempo shifts have been behind the trends. Then, we will consider how cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing have continued to evolve during the decade. As some of these developments have been influenced by choices that the young adults have been making, such as those regarding cohabitation and marriage, we will consider some of these choices by resorting to current FFS data. Recent contraception and induced-abortion practices will also be examined. This will be done in part with the view to considering the question as to whether similar patterns of fertility and partnership behaviour are compatible with different approaches to birth control. Finally, the issue of major forces behind a recent sharp drop in fertility in eastern Europe, by far the most dramatic of the changes considered here is addressed. While considering these various issues, primarily due to data limitations, the period under consideration will not be the 1990s, that is 1991-2000, but rather the last ten years for which the data are available, starting in 1987 or 1988. One advantage of focusing on this period is that it straddles the onset of the rapid fertility and partnership change in eastern Europe.

Before turning to the subject at hand, let us quickly contrast the societies of the 1990s in the two parts of Europe. In eastern Europe, the abdication of the communist regimes went hand in hand with multi-party elections, in some instances first ever, ushering parliamentary democracy and civil society. In countries that had had a pre-Second World War experience with democracy, the shift to the new political order was smooth, in others the political scene was unsettled for a while, remaining such until to date in a few. The transformation from central planning to markets, accompanied with numerous institutional and legislative reforms proved easier for the former countries, much harder for the latter. Overall, the pace of the transformation to the new political and economic order varied enormously across the countries. In some instances the process has been held back by international and civil wars, in others by a mere resistance to change. Economic decline, contraction in social programmes and safety nets, and general declines in living standards have been the norm everywhere. However, these trends have been relatively short-lived in some countries, particularly those at the western flank of the region, after which improvements began; elsewhere they persisted throughout the 1990s. Never a homogenous region, eastern Europe grew even more diverse, so much so that many nowadays distinguish among two or even three tiers of countries spreading from the westernmost ones to the south and east. In brief, the 1990s have been a period of major discontinuities and a growing differentiation in this part of Europe.

The western half saw no reasons for course corrections during the last ten years, continuing to enjoy the decades-long economic prosperity, a major dividend of half a century of peace on the continent. The continued economic integration has helped the least economically developed of these societies to start to close the gulf separating them from the more affluent ones. The western welfare state, differing in form and scope, has been perceived in some countries as an obstacle to international competitiveness at the time of the spreading globalisation. Nevertheless, it remained largely intact in many countries as it appears to be regarded by parties over much of the political spectrum as a *sine qua non* of social equity, solidarity, cohesion and stability. The living standards of west Europeans consequently continued to climb to unprecedented heights, opening new opportunities for pursuit of material well-being and own gratification. This continued prosperity at the time of the economic malaise in the east further widened the lead of western Europe, exacerbating the east-west economic and social disparities inherited from the past.<sup>1</sup> Emboldened by

---

<sup>1</sup> Economic disparities are well documented, while those pertaining to the social sphere are less well understood. As the 1990s drew to a close, average per capita GDP at purchasing power parities in the five central European transition economies (the Visegrad countries plus Slovenia), the most prosperous group in eastern Europe, approached one half of the European Union average, declining from close to three-fourths in 1990. The average for the Balkan countries fell from about one-third of the EU average in 1990 to less than a fourth in 1998 (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1999: 4). Social disparities have probably grown even greater.

successes of integration, particularly in the economic sphere, the European Union pursued the twin goal of widening and deepening of the Union. It is now poised to bring into its membership the immediate neighbours to the east, a powerful signal to the others in eastern Europe to increase efforts at political and economic transformation as a precondition to accession to the membership. In brief, the 1990s have been a period of continuity and further integration in western Europe.

*Fertility and first marriage: continuities and discontinuities*

*A prelude.* It was just about twenty years since the large-scale shifts in childbearing and union formation and dissolution and, by implication, in the family, had started in western Europe when Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (1986), impressed by their magnitude and novelty concluded that Europe (they meant western Europe) has been undergoing its second demographic transition.<sup>2</sup> Irrespective of whether the term has been well chosen, it has experienced growing currency since its introduction, reminding the reader whenever encountering it that the subject is one of the radical departure from the childbearing and marriage patterns typical of western Europe of the baby-boom era in its multiple forms and guises. It comprised, among other developments, an advent of cohabitation, a retreat of marriage, a postponement of entry into parenthood and a spread of voluntary childlessness, and occurred at the time when highly effective modern contraceptives began to be widely available, quickly spreading in some countries. By the time of the publication of their piece, this great departure has been well under way in the Nordic countries and parts of western Europe that we shall call here the Atlantic and Germanic countries.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, in particular in the Mediterranean countries it still did not take root although its certain aspects, such as the postponement of the entry into motherhood were under way. In other words, these shifts in the behaviour of individuals and couples in different parts of western Europe have not moved in step: some countries emerged as leaders, others as half-hearted followers and yet others have been bent on pursuing their own brand of the second demographic transition, where some of the defining characteristics of the process, such as cohabitational as opposed to marital childbearing, were missing. This resulted in what more than ten years later was branded “an almost bewildering variability, ...a harlequin’s mantle of experience” (Van de Kaa, 1997:23) and the statement that the “premarital cohabitation as a distinctive trait of the second demographic transition has so far stopped at the Alps” (Lesthaeghe and Moors, 2000:21).

---

<sup>2</sup> It was a subsequent paper by van de Kaa (1987) rather than the joint paper that made the notion of the second demographic transition accessible to English-reading audiences.

<sup>3</sup> See Annex for the information on the grouping of the European countries used in this paper.

During this same period, eastern Europe, save for the former Yugoslavia to an extent, has lived in isolation. There, people married and had children in ways that were not fundamentally different from those of the baby-boom western Europe. By implication, the “socialist family” has not been essentially different from the “bourgeois family” of the baby-boom era. Of course, marriage and parenthood would start earlier in the east than in the west, divorce has been relatively more frequent, voluntary childlessness was uncommon, and two children became the preferred number of the majority of parents. In a minority of these countries, the use of modern, including hormonal contraceptives, has grown at a respectable pace in spite of governments' misgivings, even discouragement. Elsewhere, however, the readily available induced abortion on demand became the method of birth control; as it is well known, Romania was an exception. Importantly, more often than not, the state was actively involved in helping couples form marriages and have children. Yet, the average family size in eastern Europe has been smaller than that in western Europe during the baby-boom era. The pronatalist efforts, where it has been pursued when slippages occurred, resulted in a large degree of uniformity in period fertility levels and a lesser degree of uniformity in period first-marriage levels by the beginning of the 1980s. Then, signs of divergence occurred, with the countries that will later become known as the Visegrad group and the former Yugoslavia departing from the rest of eastern Europe. Nevertheless, at the time when the second demographic transition was announced, eastern Europe in general had ample room for shifts similar to those that have been under way for more than two decades in western Europe. And these shifts were by no means imminent.

*Overall fertility.* The overriding impression one gets from examining basic fertility trends during the 1990s is one continuity in western Europe and discontinuity in eastern Europe. The postponement of entry into motherhood in western Europe, under way for some time continued, causing the mean age of women at the time of first birth to rise everywhere, in a number of instances by two years or more (figure 1, panel A). Significantly, the push toward even later onset of motherhood has been the strongest in the Mediterranean countries, with the mean age in Italy and Spain along with that in France catching up with that of the leader, The Netherlands and, in the process, approaching age 30. The concomitant shifts in period fertility, measured by the period total fertility rate, amounted in many instances to the extension of the changes that preceded them (figure 1, panel B). Including the atypical Ireland and Sweden, fertility in much of western Europe showed the propensity to remain still or continued to moderately lose ground. Denmark was the only country that experienced a moderate recovery since the 1980s before losing the momentum after the middle of the 1990s. Norway maintained the next to the highest rate, while Spain set the new record

low and, in the process, the differences across this part of Europe, particularly between the Nordic and Mediterranean countries grew larger. In the face of continued postponement of motherhood there were hardly any signs of fertility recovery. A recovery driven by fertility recuperation at higher childbearing ages, if it is to take place, still lies in the future.

(figure 1, panels A and B, about here)

In eastern Europe, the rupture in what have been mostly moderate shifts in period fertility during the 1980s, some of which had been upward, at least for a while, whereas others had been downward, occurred as of 1989. In many former socialist countries or republic of the now defunct federal states period TFR took on a sharp downward trend. The exceptions have been the former Yugoslav republics, where no break with the past moderate downward trends has occurred as the country began to disintegrate.<sup>4</sup> The year when the steep fall began could be easily established for the Visegrad counties and Bulgaria, while this is more difficult to do in the case of the former European Soviet Republics and Romania. The Soviet Union introduced a package of enhanced family policy measures during 1981-1983 while Romania strengthened its coercive pronatalist measures around 1984. This sent period rates in both countries up before they began to descent toward the late 1980s, thus making it difficult to pinpoint the beginning of what became a subsequent sharp decline that permeated almost the entire region. The break towards low fertility occurred in East Germany in 1990, in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1992 and in Slovakia in 1994. In the former European Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Romania, it occurred earlier, mostly in 1989 or 1990 (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1999: 183-184). By 1997, the majority of the former socialist countries and republics saw the decline decelerating or coming to an end. The result has been Europe's new record lows, period TFRs that in a few, admittedly relatively small countries (Bulgaria and Latvia) were on par with that of Spain (1.12), (figure 1, panel B). The mean period TFR for eastern Europe (excluding Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina) was 1.37 in 1997, a level that was by one-third lower than in 1988. The mean for western Europe in 1997 was 1.55, only slightly lower as that about ten years earlier. Eastern Europe became a leader in what over the past few decades became a pan-European slide toward ever-lower fertility levels.

The former socialist countries have been well known for their relatively youthful onset of motherhood and childbearing in general.<sup>5</sup> Along with the abrupt fertility drop as of 1989 occurred a

---

<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, almost certainly, this does not apply to Bosnia and Herzegovina for which the data are unavailable and where fertility must have collapsed as the war got under way.

<sup>5</sup> In some of the most prosperous among them - some of the former Baltic Republics, the former Czechoslovakia

departure from the early entry into motherhood. The rise in the mean age of women at the time of first birth has been more limited than that observed in western Europe during the 1990s, except in the former German Democratic Republic, that is East Germany and Slovenia. It was mostly confined to the Visegrad countries as well as to Croatia and the present-day Yugoslavia, where like the fertility decline, the rise in the age of entry into motherhood began during the 1980s. Limited information on the Baltic states and the European CIS countries reveals that there initially occurred a drop in the mean age at first birth, a decline that was followed by a more than a full recovery in the Baltic region and only a partial recovery within the European CIS group. Thus, with respect to the onset of motherhood eastern Europe has grown more heterogeneous. Moreover, on average, in the 1990s, the entry into motherhood in eastern Europe lagged behind that of western Europe more than it did ten years ago.

Clearly, the magnitude and the pace of the abrupt recent fertility decline in eastern Europe has shifted the centre of gravity of fertility change in Europe to the east. As the decline has resulted in levels that are generally lower than those prevailing in western Europe, the question on how low fertility can get appears to apply now with greater force to eastern Europe than to western Europe. If we were, however, to reach beyond the east-west contrasts, then parallels between the Mediterranean and east European countries would come into a sharp focus. The two groups of countries, looked just from the vantage point of levels, have so much in common. In 1997, the levels in Russia and Italy were almost identical and so were the levels in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, on the one hand, and in Spain, on the other. As a result of the recent east European fertility decline a host of new questions have arisen, both for research and policy making. For the former, in addition to the enduring questions as to what has been behind the post-baby boom fertility fall in western Europe, the question now is as to what have been the main forces behind the east European decline. We will address the question toward the end of the paper.

*Overall first marriage.* The image that the first-marriage trends portray is very similar to that projected by the fertility trends: continuity in western Europe, discontinuity in the eastern part of the continent. The continuity of the rise in the mean age of entry into first marriage in western Europe has been particularly striking. The gains in the mean age from 1987 to 1997, almost always very steady, ranged between two and three years in the majority of the west European societies. Greece, Italy and Spain along with a few others have experienced among the largest gains (figure 2, panel B). This is a striking development as it is precisely in these countries that premarital

---

and Hungary - motherhood in the late 1980s started on average around 23, in Bulgaria and Romania ever earlier, that is

cohabitation, which has contributed to late marriage elsewhere, is rare. Denmark and Sweden remained in the lead, with their means approaching 30, while Switzerland and West Germany saw some of the smallest rises. The trend to ever-older onset of marriage has been accompanied by a further, sometimes unperturbed drop in the period total first marriage rate (for example, in the United Kingdom). In many instances, a moderate tendency for the period TFMR to recover during the 1980s was followed by a further decline in the 1990s, resulting in lower, but not much lower rates in 1997. Sweden's rate was the only one to reach below 0.5 in 1997. Significantly, in West Germany and the Nordic countries, for about two decades or longer, the period TFMRs have hovered around 0.6 or have shifted back and forth between 0.5 and 0.6. It is known that drawing conclusions from period TFMRs of this order of magnitude regarding the ultimate proportions of women marrying are prone to exaggeration; life-table first marriage measures provide better indications as to the proportions ultimately marrying (Toulemon and de Guilbert-Lantoine, 1998, 13). Nevertheless, these low TFMRs do suggest that sizeable shares of women will never marry.

(figure 2, panels A and B, about here)

Incomplete evidence for eastern Europe, including the republics of the former federal states suggests a picture of some diversity of first marriage patterns as early as the 1970s. The diversity increased over time, creating a degree of heterogeneity as the socialist era was drawing to a close. For example, parts of the former Yugoslavia, led by Slovenia, and the former GDR and Hungary already had relatively low period first-marriage rates at the time; Slovenia's rate, sliding down since the late 1970s fell below 0.6 after 1987. On top of this heterogeneity, as the former regimes have been yielding power, came a turbulence at the early 1990s, characterised by upward one-time jolts in the period TFMRs in a number of instances, followed by steep drops. It appears as if in these cases - for example, in Lithuania, the former Czechoslovakia and Romania - there was a surge in optimism among the young in 1991, which after a year or two of uncertainties made marriage less risky a step. In other cases, precipitous drops occurred in 1991 or soon after it. The story of what followed is fairly complex and could not be briefly told. The result of the highly diverse trends, the information on which, particularly that for the European CIS countries is incomplete, has been the period total first-marriage rates below 0.5 in a number of "old" and "new" countries along the Hajnal line. From Trieste towards St. Petersburg, these are Slovenia, Hungary, Latvia and Estonia; also in this group is East Germany.

The sudden and sharp retreat from marriage as portrayed by the shifts in TFRs has been accompanied by a postponement of entry into first marriage, however, this has not happened throughout the region. The rise in the age at first marriage has been under way during the 1980s in parts of the former Yugoslavia, particularly Slovenia, and in the former GDR and Hungary, but not elsewhere. There, the trend continued after the late 1980s and other countries from the Visegrad group and the Balkans joined to share in the experience. The trend has been particularly strong once it started among the Czechs, however, the upturn occurred only 3-4 years after the change of government. The Baltic countries and the European CIS group have placed themselves into classes of their own. As the former Soviet Union has been heading towards the dissolution and immediately after it, the young in the Baltics have begun marrying even earlier than before; the mean age at first marriage fell towards 22 years. The trend was first reversed in Estonia, but the subsequent rise appears to have stalled in the late 1990s somewhere between 24 and 25 years. Lithuania did not climb out from the depression to achieve the late 1980s levels. The same trend towards earlier marriage occurred in the European CIS countries, bringing the mean age to 22 years and lower. The limited data suggest that Russia has experienced a reversal, but Belarus and Moldova are stuck at around age 22. By 1997, Slovenia was four years ahead of these two countries, while Denmark and Sweden almost eight years. This illustrates how big the Europe's "harlequin's mantle of experience" has recently grown.

*Quantum and tempo shifts.* Looking now jointly at fertility and first-marriage changes, we observe that in western Europe substantial across-the-board postponements of entry into both motherhood and marriage have been combined with limited changes, dominated by declines, in the period total fertility and first-marriage rates. In eastern Europe, the changes in the age at entry into motherhood and marriage have fanned out, ranging from a shift towards somewhat earlier entry, particularly noticeable in the European CIS group, to a trend towards later entry, especially in the Visegrad group, and among these particularly in East Germany and Slovenia. The associated declines in fertility and first-marriage rates, everywhere larger than those in western Europe, appear to have been the largest where only limited shifts in the age at onset of motherhood and marriage occurred (figure 3). This suggests that in western Europe, tempo shifts have dominated the fertility and first-marriage changes. In eastern Europe, quantum shifts, that is the declines have been primarily responsible for the changes in the Baltic and European CIS countries while elsewhere, among the Visegrad and Balkan countries, a mix of quantum and tempo shifts have been behind

them.<sup>6</sup> Due to data limitations, the results pertaining to first marriage in eastern Europe are less robust than the other ones.

(figure 3, panels A and B, about here)

The use of the mean age at first birth as a proxy for tempo shifts may be associated with difficulties as there are no assurances that the mean ages of women at birth of children of different parities move in step. Therefore, in order to shed additional light on the contribution of quantum and tempo effects to fertility decline in east European countries, results obtained by the Bongaarts-Feeny procedure (1998) for several of these countries were calculated (table 1). The results are, in most instances, for 1991-1995, the time of the most rapid fertility declines in the majority of these countries. They lend support to the conclusions suggested by relying on the mean age at first birth as a proxy. The tempo effects are the strongest in the Visegrad group, in particular in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, while the quantum effects dominate in the European CIS countries. Estonia and Latvia lean toward the former group and Bulgaria and Lithuania towards the latter one.

(table 1)

This picture can be complemented by considering patterns in the shifts in age-specific fertility and first-marriage schedules over the last ten years in the manner recently used by Lesthaeghe and Moors (2000) in connection with the changes in the fertility schedules for the industrialised countries for the period since the middle of the 1960. The analysis decomposes the changes in period TFRs and TFMRs over a specified time period into changes in the components of these rates below age 30 and at age 30 and above. When the shifts in the period fertility and first marriage rates below 30 and at 30+ are contrasted for the ten-year period after the late 1980s, the following emerges. Through much of western Europe, the components of the total fertility and first-marriage rates below 30 have fallen, while those at 30+ have risen. The majority of the countries have, however, experienced the declines in below-30 rates that in absolute terms have been greater than the increases in the rates at 30+ (figure 4). That is, the recuperation of fertility and first marriage at higher ages has been too weak to offset the decline at younger ages. In some of these countries, the drop below 30 in absolute terms was smaller than the increase at 30+, resulting in period total fertility and first-marriage rate recovery. It was only in Denmark that the double recovery occurred. In eastern Europe, where the picture is somewhat more mixed, all countries witnessed declines in below-30 components. The majority have seen their fertility rates both below

---

<sup>6</sup> See Lesthaeghe and Moors (2000) for the analysis of the quantum and tempo shifts behind the changes in fertility levels in Europe during 1965-1980 and 1980-1996/97, on which the analysis here is patterned. Lesthaeghe's conclusions for the 1980-1996/97 are broadly the same as our findings for the 1987-1997 period.

30 and at 30+ falling in tandem, while a half of the countries have experienced a fall in first-marriage rates below 30 but increases in 30+ rates. Everywhere, however, the below-30 declines dominated.

(figure 4, panels A and B, about here)

*Cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing: a persistent diversity*

The fertility decline and the retreat from marriage since the 1960s have been accompanied by the rise of non-marital cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing, however, to different degrees in the various parts of western Europe. By the late 1980s, the two processes have spread like a brushfire in the Nordic countries and in France and the United Kingdom, advanced at a pace that was much faster for cohabitation than extra-marital childbearing in most of the Germanic countries, particularly Switzerland, while they have hardly begun taking root in the Mediterranean countries. What happened with respect to these developments during the past decade is less well understood and the main reason for this is that the Fertility and Family Surveys taken during the 1990s are of limited use here. Nevertheless, if one were willing to stretch the value of these data by engaging in “informed speculation” as well as examine crude but readily available current data on non-marital childbearing, the past decade would be much less enigmatic.

The FFS data reveal enormous variations in the choice of cohabitation as opposed to marriage as first union among the west European young women in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. This is suggested by the proportions of women, who were born in the second half of the 1960s and who had opted for cohabitation by age 25 (figure 5). Shown in the figure are also proportions for the cohorts born earlier and thereby the shift away from marriage as first union across the cohorts and over time. If one were to hazard guesses for the cohorts born in the first half of the 1970s, a picture, certainly blurred, would be one showing some 9 out of 10 young women choosing cohabitation as first union in the Nordic countries versus 7 to 9 out of 10 such women opting for marriage in the Mediterranean countries; Greece is a notable exception. Between these two far ends of the spectrum are the other west European countries, the majority of which are closer to the Nordics; Belgium (Flanders plus Brussels) is toward the lower end of the spectrum. It is possible, of course not certain, that in the last ten years this swing away from marriage has run its course in the Nordic countries, continued while decelerating in the Atlantic and Germanic countries and possibly accelerated in the Mediterranean group. Even though the gap between the Nordic and the Mediterranean countries might have begun to narrow, the two parts of Europe are probably still

a world apart. Only new data can indicate with certainty how cohabitation developed during the 1990s and how differentials, particularly the south-north ones changed.

(figure 5 about here)

The advance in extra-marital childbearing in some parts of western Europe and the lack of it in the others since the middle of the 1960s reinforces the picture of the north-south divergence in the key distinctive traits of the second demographic transition. As fertility fell during the post baby-boom period, extra-marital childbearing exploded in the Nordic countries, while remaining rare in the Mediterranean and most Germanic countries (figure 6). Since the late 1980s, extra-marital childbearing has advanced throughout western Europe, however, the increases in different groups of countries have been of different orders of magnitude, starting from equally different levels (figure 7). As a rule, the gains in the share of extra-marital births have been the largest where the late-1980s levels have been intermediate. This was the case in two Nordic and all Atlantic countries. The gains from far lower initial levels have been smaller in the Mediterranean and the Germanic groups. Greece, Italy and Switzerland did not cross the 10 per cent line, a level that can be taken as an upper limit of the low prevalence of extra-marital childbearing. In brief the gap between the lowest and the highest levels on record did not begin to close, if anything it grew wider. While in the Nordic and some Atlantic countries the out-of-wedlock childbearing remains widely accepted, in the Mediterranean and some Germanic countries it is still widely shunned. As we shall see later, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, cohabitation is acceptable but not as a type of union in which to bear children.

(figure 6 about here)

(figure 7, panels A and B, about here)

Trends in cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing in eastern Europe during the socialist era have had more in common with those in western Europe than was widely believed until a few years ago. Some of the westernmost of the former socialist countries and republics experienced the substitution of marriage by cohabitation at entry into first union and saw their share of births taking place out-of-wedlock rising as the socialist era was coming to an end. The fact that these developments took place along the swath bordering the west suggests that a form of an eastward diffusion of new forms of partnership and childbearing behaviour was at work. The borders, except those of the former Yugoslavia, might have been tightly controlled, however, in retrospect they appear to have been more porous than the authorities manning them believed. Other factors within those countries have been at work, such as policies in the former GDR, which inadvertently

encouraged out-of-wedlock childbearing and possible leanings towards cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing in Latvia and particularly in Estonia that were not stamped out during the Soviet rule.

The substitution of marriage by cohabitation as first union among the cohorts born in the late 1960s have approached in some of the east European countries along the Hajnal line and in East Germany the intermediate level (figure 5). Estonia has greatly surpassed this level, almost becoming indistinguishable from the Nordic neighbours; the Estonian data, however, pertain only to “native” Estonians rather than the entire population of the country, including the Russian-speaking minority. The Czech Republic and even more so Hungary, Latvia and Poland, in that order, were closer to the low end of the spectrum depicted by the south-north differences within western Europe. As no retrospective FFS data on entry to and exit from consensual unions are available for the Balkans and the European CIS countries, we can not tell how cohabitation might have displaced marriage there in recent times. Although many constraints on behaviour of individuals and couples that had existed during the socialist era disappeared during the 1990s, the conditions conducive to cohabitation, such as the availability of housing, access to employment and income among the young and the income levels of their parents deteriorated. This could have held the spread of cohabitation in check.

As the end of the 1980s approached, the majority of the future so-called transition countries had one or more out of 10 children born by unwed mothers (figure 7, panel B). However, it was only in the former GDR and the two small former republics - Estonia and Slovenia - that the proportions of births occurring to these women exceeded 2 out of 10. The next ten years saw a radical upward shift: close to half of the countries approached or surpassed this level. Estonia and East Germany experienced large shifts, almost catching up with Sweden and Denmark, respectively. In absolute terms, the surge has been particularly large in Bulgaria, where the proportion trebled, and in Latvia, while it has been somewhat smaller in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Along with Romania and Russia, these countries had between one-fifth and one-third of babies born to unwed mothers in the late 1990s. An interesting question pertaining to these countries for which no information on cohabitation is available and that cannot be answered at this time is whether this increase is a result of a quick spread of cohabitation, which as just suggested might not have been the case, a growth of a new social pathology whereby an increasing share of babies are born by women without a partner or some combination of the two. Only once new data

becomes available shall we know whether for some of these countries the 1990s have been a season of unwanted children brought to life by lone mothers.

*Choices and practices of younger women: more bewildering differences*

The above overview leads to the question on choices and practices of women that have been associated and in some instances resulted in the recent fertility and partnership developments. Information needed to respond to the question is lacking, or to put it differently, the available data, primarily from vital statistics sources, are by many standards uninformative, particularly for comparative analysis purposes. They shed no light on a variety of important questions, that can only be addressed by having, among other things, types of information that have been collected through the FFS surveys.<sup>7</sup> As such data are lacking for the 1990s, it is not possible to delve into a variety of questions, such as: How progressions to first, second and higher order births might have changed? and How those progressions might have differed for the different categories of women - married, cohabiting and those without a partner? However, in spite of this, selected FFS data can help to shed light on some of the beneath-the-surface processes that occurred in the early part of the period under observation. In particular, these data make it possible to consider what choices the young adults, in particular women, have been making when confronted with alternative fertility and partnership options as well as what practices they have adhered to, particularly as they pertain to birth control.

*Alternative choices.* The choices of the young women pertaining to living and partnership arrangements as well as those concerning whether or not to have a child outside of marriage vary enormously across western Europe. Let us consider some of these variations in detail. The Nordic and Mediterranean countries are the opposites, however, the Nordics are far from being a homogenous group (figure 8, table 2). Norway aside, hardly any young Nordic woman aged 20-24 lives with parents, while a substantially larger minority - these proportions vary considerably across the three countries - live alone. The spread of the shares cohabiting and living in marital unions is even greater, where Sweden's young women overwhelmingly favour cohabitation to marriage, while the preference for marriage in Finland is twice as strong as that for cohabitation. A significant fraction - around 10 per cent - of these cohabiting women have children, however, the share of the Finnish young married women who have children is four times as high as that of their cohabiting counterparts. The proportions childless among cohabiting women are roughly equal to the

proportions childless among married women. At 25-29, hardly any woman resides any longer with parents, considerably smaller proportions live alone, about the same proportions who cohabit have children, except in Sweden, where this proportion at this age is higher than that at age 20-24, while the proportions of women who are married and have children are considerably larger, ranging between below 40 per cent and under 60 per cent.

(figure 8, panels A, B, C and D, about here)

(table 2 about here)

A vast majority of the Mediterranean women aged 20-24 live with parents, while only a tiny 2 per cent live alone; Greece is an exception, where over 50 per cent live in the parental home, while close to one in 10 reside alone. Between one and two in 10 are married and these proportions are similar to those in Norway and Sweden, however, only five per cent cohabit. The proportion of married women with children is below 10 per cent, while virtually no cohabiting women have children. The shares of those who are married or cohabiting and do not have children are also generally small. At 25-29, the proportion residing with parents remains significant - in the neighbourhood of 40 per cent, while lone living is somewhat more prevalent, yet still below 5 per cent; Greece is again somewhat different. Every other woman at this age is married, however, only around five per cent of them or less cohabit. Around 40 per cent of the married women have children, while only a tiny fraction of the small group of cohabiting women are in the same situation. The data also suggest that co-residence of young women and their parents is rare.

The countries of the Atlantic and Germanic groups fall between the two ends of this wide spectrum. In certain respects, a number of them are similar to the Mediterranean countries. For example, in Belgium (Flanders and Brussels combined) very few young women live alone, in which respect this part of the country is similar to the Mediterranean countries. The proportion living in the parental home is less than those in these countries as a larger share of them cohabit. However, very few among the cohabiting women have children. The proportion of 20-24 year old Belgian women that are married but have no children is the highest in Europe. Elsewhere, although cohabitation in the Germanic countries is also relatively common, very small proportions of young cohabiting women there have children. In this respect, these countries are more similar to the Mediterranean than to the Nordic countries. Austria is an exception, where the proportion of cohabiting women having children is closer to that of France than the rest of the Germanic countries. In addition, the proportion of the cohabiting women without children at 20-24 in Austria

along with that in Switzerland is next to Europe's highest proportion, that found in Sweden. These same observations largely apply to the 25-29 old women.

The differences in the choices made by the young women in different parts of western Europe, particularly in the countries at its north and south ends are so large that the question arises as to whether the gulf that has opened between them will ever close? Put differently, is it possible that since the 1960s these societies have travelled along increasingly divergent paths that will never converge in spite of the fact that there is so much that they have in common? Are the ways in which the young in different societies arrange their lives as they approach their prime years of age likely to remain permanently different, at least to an extent, in spite of the fact that there are so many forces at work that tend to make western Europe increasingly homogenous. Of course, there are no answers to these questions: only time will tell. In the meantime, however, opinions continue to fill the knowledge void. According to one, which was recently expressed, we surmise, after a decade or more of reflections, it is illusory to expect a convergence (van de Kaa, 1997:23-25). In this view, it is the cultural diversity that "introduces the element of inertia in the European setting which is easy to forget, but remains very real." Indeed, it appears to us highly plausible that in the foreseeable future, say, within the next decade or two, the European Union will not turn into a melting pot for demographic behaviour.

The relevant FFS data are unavailable for the European CIS countries and the Balkans, except Bulgaria and, therefore, the picture for this part of Europe is incomplete. It is possible that the region is more homogenous than western Europe, however, Slovenia, East Germany, Latvia and Estonia greatly contributing to the variations. The defining feature of many of these countries is that the proportions of women aged 20-24 living with parents are relatively low. In this respect, these countries are more similar to the Germanic countries, than to any other west European group. Living alone there is rare except in East Germany, where it is as prevalent as in West Germany. The reason behind this is the traditionally early marriage: relatively large proportions of east European women - ranging in many instances between 40 per cent and 60 per cent - are married, while the proportions cohabiting are relatively low. Among the statistical outliers, Slovenia and East Germany have considerably lower proportions married and higher shares cohabiting. Estonia has both of these proportions high, resulting in close to 80 per cent of women living in a union. As a rule, small proportions of cohabiting women have children, while up to one-third of those who are married have them. In Slovenia and East Germany, the proportions of cohabiting women with

children are similar to those in Austria while Estonia's proportion is the highest in Europe. Among women aged 25-29, the diversity is greater, in part as a result of the fact that the atypical east European countries depart even more from the rest.<sup>8</sup>

*Birth control practices.* Modern contraceptives, particularly the hormonal pill, have been considered as and, in some instances, found to be a catalyst of change in partnership and fertility behaviour (see, for example, van de Kaa, 1997; Murphy, 1993; Bracher and Santow, 1999). As suggested above, the behaviour has changed enormously in the recent times and in ways that brought about a great degree of diversity. The data used here - aggregate vital statistics and FFS standard tables - cannot shed light on the relationship between the behaviour and birth control practices, however, the use of the FFS information on contraceptive use can provide a picture on contraceptive practices across a considerable part of Europe. Furthermore, if combined with abortion data, these FFS data provide suggestive evidence on how contraception and induced abortion practices might have been associated with the recent change in partnership and fertility behaviour, particularly among the young women.

The young sexually active women at risk of conceiving who are neither married nor are cohabiting are the most avid contraceptive users. In half of the dozen of the countries for which the relevant FFS information is available and was used here, 9 or more out of 10 women in this category, irrespective of whether they are 20-24 or 25-29 years old use modern methods, among which we include condom. The countries belong to the Atlantic and Mediterranean groups and two of them - Czech Republic and Hungary - are in the Visegrad group (figure 9). In Belgium and France, practically all women in this category who are 20-24 years old use modern methods. In the remaining half dozen countries, most of which belong to eastern Europe, the contraceptive prevalence rates among these women are all lower, dropping in some instances to 7 out of 10.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the reliance on the traditional methods is greater. The overall impression is that the western European women of this category are considerably more sophisticated contraceptive users than their east European counterparts, except those in the Czech Republic and Hungary.

(figure 9, panels A and B, about here)

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, in East Germany and Slovenia, the proportions of cohabiting women aged 25-29 with children are around 10 per cent, higher than the Finnish proportion, close to that in Austria and approaching the proportions in France and Norway.

<sup>9</sup> The data for Greece and Estonia were not available at the time this analysis was performed.

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, the rates for Poland are not to be trusted, confirming that the contraceptive use data collected for this country are inadequate. In particular, it appears that the young sexually active women in Poland were not telling the truth about their contraceptive habits.

The young sexually active women at risk who live in unions have somewhat lower prevalence rates (figure 10). Some of them, of course, are not contracepting, hoping to conceive, while others might be less apprehensive about accidental pregnancies, especially if married. The prevalence rates of the majority in these countries are within the range between 70 and 90 percent and only Bulgaria and Poland are below 70. The reliance on modern methods is particularly widespread in Belgium and France, however, a mix of countries from the various parts of Europe (Spain and Switzerland, Czech Republic and Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia) do not fall much behind the two. Italy is an interesting case, where, as we know, the vast majority of women in unions are married - one in 10 and every other one, respectively, in age groups 20-24 and 25-29. While their prevalence rates are similar to those in the majority of the other countries, one-third of them resort to traditional methods. Hence, as we shall see below, the relatively high incidence of induced abortion in Italy.

(figure 10, panels A and B, about here)

Poor contraceptive practices go hand in hand with increased dependence on induced abortion: the higher the proportions of women using traditional methods or not using any contraceptives, the higher the recourse to induced abortion, legal or illegal (figure 11).<sup>11</sup> This relationship, confirmed with the information for a handful of countries, must hold throughout Europe. In the populations with sub-replacement fertility, barring widespread abstinence, which can safely be ruled out as highly unlikely, few births can only be consistent with a mix of contraceptive and induced-abortion practices. And this mix spreads over a wide continuum in Europe, one of whose extremes, where contraception is particularly poor and induced abortions abound, cannot be revealed due to lack of data. In particular, we know that the incidence of abortion in the European CIS countries continued to be very high through the second half of the 1990s, however, we lack information on contraceptive use for these countries.<sup>12</sup> It appears that in this part of Europe induced abortion remains the primary means of birth control. In brief, the spectrum of birth control practices in Europe ranges between a “perfect contraceptive setting,” typical for parts of western Europe, to a enduring “induced abortion culture,” characterising the European CIS countries.

(figure 11 about here)

---

<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the Polish data fail to provide adequate information on the prevalence of induced abortion in the country.

<sup>12</sup> See United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (forthcoming), where the abortion ratios (the number of induced abortions per one hundred live births) were reported to had been between 150 and 200 for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in 1998.

The pill is the most widely used method in western Europe and the reliance on it is somewhat larger among the women who do not live in unions than among those who are in one type of union or the other. Belgium, West Germany and France, in this order, lead the other countries (figure 12). The next most widely used method, again more often relied upon by women not in unions is condom and the use of it is relatively widespread in the Nordic and Mediterranean countries as well as in Austria and Switzerland. IUD, more often used in unions than outside of them is the third most often used method. Here, Norway is a particular case, where some one-quarter of 25-29 year old women that contracept irrespectively of union status rely on it. Traditional methods, as pointed out earlier, are also important in a few cases, in Switzerland and especially in Italy, particularly among the women in unions.

(figure 12, panels A and B, about here)

Viewed from the contraceptive-mix perspective, eastern Europe presents a truly mixed picture (figure 13). East Germany, in spite of the fact that it was separated from West Germany until very close to the time when the FFS data were collected is practically identical to it. Well over 80 per cent of the young East German women irrespectively of union status who contracept use the pill. Disregarding Poland, the data for which, as suggested earlier, are suspect, at the other end of the spectrum are Bulgaria and the two Baltic countries – Latvia and Lithuania, where the pill is relatively unimportant. Condom, particularly among the young women not in unions is the most prevalent method, while women in unions in Bulgaria and Latvia heavily rely, respectively, upon traditional methods and IUDs. Judged by the reliance on modern methods, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, after East Germany are the most advanced countries, with the most widespread use of the pill, followed by condom. Again, some of the countries along the Hajnal line stand out.

(figure 13, panels A and B, about here)

The question worth posing now is whether modern contraceptives, first and foremost the pill, have been a corollary, even a prerequisite, for the spread of fertility and partnership behaviour subsumed under the term second demographic transition. Juxtaposing the information on contraceptive and induced-abortion use with that portraying the manifestations of the second demographic transition suggests a broad affirmative answer. Yes, the conditions needed for the break of the intimate relationship between sex, marriage and parenthood - a prerequisite for the spread of the new partnership and fertility behaviour - have been achieved everywhere where the manifestations have been present by the widespread use of modern contraceptives. This appears to

have been the case everywhere in western Europe, including the Mediterranean countries. In this latter group, however, particularly in Italy, the modern contraceptives have failed to act as a catalyst of the changing behaviour, especially the spread of cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing. In addition, the pill was highly instrumental only in some countries considered here (Belgium, France and West Germany). Elsewhere, in the Nordics and some Germanic countries, condom was also probably important, however, we cannot be sure about this as the FFS data pertain mostly to the 1990s. The contraceptive-use patterns might have well evolved since the 1960s and 1970s, possibly making the use of the condom more prevalent than before as the HIV/AIDS began to spread.

The group of east European countries for which the FFS contraceptive use information is available is not representative of the region. It is, however, representative of the string of countries bordering the west, where the spread of the second demographic transition behaviour patterns have been most obvious. And in many of these countries, from Slovenia to Latvia, but not in Poland and Lithuania, both the contraceptive prevalence and the method-mix have been recently similar to those in the west European countries where the modern methods have probably acted as the catalyst. As regards the rest of the region, the situation in Bulgaria provides a glimpse. In this country, a very low prevalence of cohabitation among the young women and a high proportion of births occurring to unwed mothers are combined with relatively low contraceptive prevalence, a comparatively heavy reliance on traditional methods and a very high induced abortion incidence. This mix does not appear to have much to do with the second demographic transition and the same might have been the case in large areas of eastern Europe beyond the “first tier” of countries. Needless to say, only new data can throw light on the situation there.

#### *Fertility decline in eastern Europe: an economic and social crisis hypothesis*

As the above analysis sought to establish, in the 1980s, eastern Europe, in particular some of its populations inhabiting the lands bordering the west began to embrace fertility and partnership behaviour patterns that have spread through parts of western Europe since the middle of the 1960s. Those have been the populations of some of the westernmost republics of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, which ethnically and culturally differed and, over time, increasingly distanced themselves from their compatriots to the east. Among them were also East Germans, however, not so much the Czechs, the Poles and the Latvians; the Hungarians were somewhere in the middle. Later, starting in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, it appears as if the floodgates opened. Not only that period fertility and first marriage rates dropped, often precipitously, but also

extra-marital fertility spread rapidly in a number of instances; the same is true of cohabitation in a number of countries for which the relevant information is available. Some of these shifts have been more consistent among the Visegrad countries than elsewhere. This led to the conclusions that the second demographic transition has been making inroads into eastern Europe (van de Kaa, 1997, Lesthaeghe and Moors, 2000).

In the words of one of the proponents of the second demographic transition, “[t]he story of the Second Demographic Transition as told by its proponents, is the quintessential narrative of ideational and cultural change. What distinguishes the second from the first transition is precisely the overwhelming preoccupation with self-fulfilment, personal freedom of choice, personal development and lifestyle, and emancipation, as reflected in family formation, attitude towards fertility regulation and the motivation for parenthood. Rising incomes and the economic and political security which democratic welfare states offered their populations, have helped trigger a ‘silent revolution’; a shift in a ‘Maslowian post-materialist’ direction where an individual’s sexual preference are accepted for what they are, and decisions on cohabitation, divorce, abortion, sterilisation and voluntary childlessness are largely left to the discretion of the individuals and couples involved” (van de Kaa, 1995)<sup>13</sup>

As suggested early in this paper, the economic, social and political conditions in eastern Europe during the 1990s differed greatly from those in western Europe during the same period. Moreover, the conditions in eastern Europe of the 1990s have also been radically different from those that western Europe enjoyed since the 1960s. For more than two decades before the first oil shock hit in 1973, real GDP of the OECD countries, many of which include west European economies, grew at the historically unprecedented 5 per cent per annum.<sup>14</sup> Later, through 1990, the pace of growth was almost halved and unemployment eventually reached double-digit levels. Nevertheless, the populations of the west European countries enjoyed unparalleled increases in living standards and these have taken place at the time of peace and political stability. In contrast to this, eastern Europe during the last ten years has seen declines in living standards, some countries have experienced armed conflicts of various proportions and political instability has been the norm

---

<sup>13</sup> In another paper, van de Kaa (1997) adds: “The demographic differences between the various parts of Europe now observed cannot be understood fully if the structural changes in the societies concerned are not taken into account. Hobcraft and Kiernan (1995: 59) see great difference in this regard between the generous Northwestern countries and the countries of Southeastern Europe. In the latter region the opportunity costs of motherhood tend to be greater than in the Northwest, while establishing economic security is more difficult. In their view this makes committing oneself to marriage - let alone a consensual union - childbearing, a much more hazardous undertaking in the Southeast than in the Northwest.”

<sup>14</sup> See Macura (1994: 1-2).

in a number of the new democracies. It is for these reasons that one should look for factors other than those that have driven the changes in western Europe in the recent times in order to explain some of the similar changes that occurred in eastern Europe during the 1990s. In the explanation that follows, to which we refer as “the economic and social crisis hypothesis,” we will focus on the forces that, in our view, have been first and foremost behind the rapid fertility decline in eastern Europe during the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> As it will become evident, the hypothesis is based on facts, analysis as well as conjecture.

An economic restructuring and decline have accompanied the economic and political transformation in eastern Europe during the 1990s. The restructuring has been faster and the loss in output smaller in some of these economies, particularly those belonging to the Visegrad group, than in others. The reduction in economic activity has led to a fall in employment and this has happened everywhere, even in countries, such as the European CIS countries, where efforts have been made to keep workers employed, although sometimes only nominally so. Employment losses have resulted in increases in unemployment – unemployment rates in the late 1990s approached or surpassed 10 per cent - as well as in declines in activity rates, resulting from withdrawal from the labour force. The available evidence suggests that women have grown more “discouraged” than men as the labour markets deteriorated and, therefore, have left the labour force in larger relative numbers. Concurrently, real wages have fallen everywhere and the declines have been particularly large where both economic decline and resistance to employment declines have been larger. The combined effect of the job losses and the wage reductions has seen declines in incomes of households, including those headed by individuals and couples in their childbearing years. These have caused drops in living standards and the spread of poverty. These trends have been more marked in the countries to the east and south of the Visegrad group, that is in the Balkans, the Baltics and the European CIS countries. This is what the data recently analysed reveal.

Governments shared the experience of households, in that their incomes fell as well. Consequently, public spending declined and a variety of public transfers to families have been scaled down or completely phased out. In particular, data indicate that the various family policy benefits, for example, childcare benefits and child allowances have declined not only in real terms but also relative to the reduced real wages. In the Balkans and Visegrad countries, many financial benefits to families with children became income-tested. Benefits to two-child families have declined more than those for the one-child families and this has happened everywhere but in

---

<sup>15</sup> What follows draws on the analysis reported in United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Slovenia and Romania, where the support to the family in general increased. This retrenchment of the state support to families with children has further contributed to the reduction of household incomes and living standards and consequently to the spread of poverty. Moreover, we surmise, the scaling down or elimination of public subsidies in support of the delivery of free or nominally priced services, such as institutionalised childcare or public housing, has imposed extra costs on families, thereby further contributing to the decline in living standards.

In eastern Europe, as it is the case throughout the industrialised world, children cost money but do not contribute to family income. Adding a child to the family in this setting is probably one of the shortest ways to reducing the *economic* well being of its existing members. And the effect is not just a short-term one; bringing a child into the world amounts to taking a long-term financial commitment, impacting on the living standard of the family for up to two decades or longer. In view of this, it can be hypothesised that the decline in incomes and the increasing costs of maintaining a family, including children, in the east European countries since 1989 have induced many individuals and couples to postpone or altogether forgo births. A recent multivariate analysis lends support to this hypothesis; it indicated that the fall in incomes indeed has had a depressing effect on overall fertility. By refraining from childbearing people have prevented their living standards from falling even lower. Moreover, they have avoided bringing children into a world where, at least, for some time to come, they would have to share in falling or low living standards. If anything, their reproductive behaviour has been highly rational.

The retrenchment of the state has also contributed to strains in the social fabric in the transition economies; in extreme cases, due to conflicts and wars, the fabric of society has been literally torn apart. In some instances, in particular in the Baltic countries, the dissolution of the federal states have created relatively large ethnic minorities in the newly independent countries, the status of which has been left unresolved for a while and, in some instances, is still unresolved today. Deviant social behaviour, including large-scale corruption and organised crime, has become commonplace in some of these societies. Although not necessarily directly affecting the vast majority of people, these various manifestations of social strains can be surmised to have shaken the confidence of people in society and in its future, thus further eroding the desire to have children during times of economic hardship.

The political and economic transformation have also paved the way for a return of civil

society to central and eastern Europe. Rights and freedoms long known to people in western democracies but in many instances denied to the citizens of the former socialist countries have been returned to them. At the same time, norms and values formed during the socialist era began to dissipate, giving way to norms and values consistent with the new political and economic order, many of which, having originated in the west, are often branded as “western”. As with the entire political and economic transformation, these changes have proceeded at a speed that has differed greatly among the increasingly heterogeneous region. The result of these changes, in many areas of behaviour, including fertility and partnership behaviour, has been to enlarge considerably the scope for individual choice and decision-making. In particular, the new forms of fertility and partnership behaviour, which have been taking root in large parts of western Europe since the middle of the 1960s, have spread rapidly, particularly into some of the Visegrad countries. A likely reason for this is that the west European “ideational and cultural changes” have been at play here as well in the recent years. However, they have not yet reached all countries, especially those in the outlying parts of the region, especially in the Balkans and the European CIS countries. It can be surmised that the spread of these new forms of behaviour has reinforced the impact of the social and economic crisis on fertility, in an independent and negative manner, particularly in the Visegrad group after living standards there have begun to improve.

### *Conclusions*

As the 1980s made way for the 1990s, Europe experienced the last of the momentous events of this turbulent century. The exit of the east European socialist regimes set in motion processes that are having profound consequences for this part of Europe and the entire continent. The consequences will be felt for decades to come. During the last ten years, the renaissance in the east have been painful everywhere, particularly in economic terms, but far more successful in the countries facing the west than those to the south and east. The transformation to the new political and economic order has caused major discontinuities and a growing differentiation within the region. On the other hand, as prosperity and stability remained, western Europe experienced a continuity and further integration.

Fertility and first marriage processes in the two parts of Europe largely reflected the features of those broader changes occurring there. In particular, in western Europe, the trend towards ever-later entry into motherhood and marriage continued while at the same time the overall fertility and first marriage moved along the trends set earlier. In the majority of cases, the recent trends have

been flat or downward, however, there were countries that experienced recovery. Tempo effects have dominated the changes. Eastern Europe became a centre of gravity of the new European profound declines in fertility and first marriage. Starting in 1989, the year the former regimes began to fall - and this cannot be a coincidence – fertility fell, in some cases immediately, in others after a delay, and the falls have by and large been precipitous. The period TFRs in some countries have been reduced by one child per woman or more and the declines decelerated or, it appears, came to a halt around 1998 in a number of countries. The end result were new European low levels, establishing eastern Europe as a largest contiguous area in the world with the currently lowest fertility on record. A drop in first marriage accompanied this trend, although the movements of the period TFMRs have been more capricious. Moreover, our knowledge of those movements for the very recent past in the easternmost countries is incomplete. Overall, simplifying somewhat, quantum and tempo effects combined to bring about declines in fertility and first marriage rates in the Visegrad countries and in some of the Balkan and Baltics countries. Elsewhere, particularly in the European CIS countries, the quantum effects dominated.

The last ten years appear to have been a period of persistent cross-country differences in cohabitation and extra-marital fertility patterns. By the late 1980s a large gap opened in western Europe along the north-south axis in the propensity to choose consensual union rather than marriage as first union and in the proportions of children born to unwed mothers. The evidence, although inconclusive, suggests that the gap pertaining to the choice of cohabitation rather than marriage began to shrink, while the one pertaining to extra-marital childbearing, if anything continued to open. The persistence of the large differences during the last ten years have called into question the universality of the second demographic transition and the acknowledgement of the possibility that the convergence in some key traits of the transition will not materialise. In eastern Europe, the picture of the spread of cohabitation is limited; it is confined exclusively to the Baltic and Visegrad countries. There, in some instances it has spread to levels that are intermediate to high, suggesting that several countries along the Hajnal line as well as East Germany were indeed following in the footsteps of their western neighbours. As regards extra-marital childbearing, it has spread through much of the region and in some instances has approached the Nordic levels. We cannot be certain about it, however, it appears possible that a part of the rise of extra-marital fertility has been driven by childbearing among women with no partners.

These developments since the late 1980s have been influenced by choices that the young women interviewed in the 1990s made early in their fertility and partnership careers. Not

surprisingly, these choices vary enormously across western Europe. The Nordic countries are profoundly different from the Mediterranean countries with respect to living with parents or alone, having a husband or a consensual-union partner and bearing children in such unions as opposed to marriages. The variations elsewhere in this part of Europe are also considerable and this raises the question as to whether such large variations are just due to the current social and economic differences between the societies in question or whether perhaps there are ingrained cultural distinctions that significantly reinforce the differences. In eastern Europe, which has its own features, the information is largely restricted to the Baltic and Visegrad countries and it suggests again that these societies, in spite of socialist-era heritage, such as early and universal marriage, are breaking out from the old mould. The rest of eastern Europe is shrouded in darkness and this is where new information is greatly needed.

Birth control patterns vary greatly across the continent, ranging from “perfect contraceptive settings” in the west to the enduring “induced-abortion culture” in the easternmost countries. Western Europe leads with respect to the levels of contraceptive prevalence and the reliance on modern methods. However, the pill is not necessarily an undisputed champion among the modern contraceptives. In a number of these countries, condom and IUD have a respectable place in the contraceptive-mix. So it is not the pill itself but a package of modern methods that probably acted as a catalyst of the behaviour change that brought about the second demographic transition. However, those same methods failed to play the catalytic role in much of the Mediterranean countries. As regards eastern Europe, some of the Visegrad countries do not fall much behind their western neighbours, neither if one judges them by the contraceptive prevalence levels nor by the method-mix. The Baltics and especially Bulgaria are different, however. The low contraceptive prevalence and a mix leaning towards a heavy use of traditional methods in the latter country may signal the conditions that exist elsewhere in eastern Europe, particularly in the European CIS countries.

During the last ten years, eastern Europe experienced a decline in overall fertility that seldom occurs over large geographical areas and within so short time spans. It has been suggested above that the explanations offered regarding the post-baby boom fertility decline in western Europe do not mostly apply to the east European experience. It has been also indicated that there is evidence, which should certainly be further scrutinised, suggesting that the declines in real incomes and living standards as well as the retrenchment of the state support to the family with children played an important role in bringing overall fertility down so decisively. Referring to the notion of economic security of Hobcraft and Kiernan (1995: ), we can say that it collapsed for the majority of

people and, therefore, that it made a perfect sense to many of them to adopt a “wait and see” attitude. Society around them afflicted with so many ills unknown during the socialist era did not inspire a confidence needed to bring children into this world. In our view, this has been the primary reason almost everywhere but in the Visegrad countries. The explanation for this group is different. These countries experienced a quick and clean break with the communist past, their economies began to recover relatively early although real incomes and living standards continued to decline through the second half of the 1990s. They also quickly embraced what they considered to have been their own all along, namely western values, norms and behaviour. And it is this rapid switch to the western ways that added to the fertility-reducing effects of the economic downturn.

## Annex

This annex contains information on the geographical groupings of the European countries used in this paper. Only countries with the populations above one million are included. Some of the group labels are more appropriate than others. It is for the convenience sake that certain countries are placed in the groups, the names of which do not apply to them. For example, East Germany and Slovenia are in the Visegrad group, which strictly speaking only includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

The country codes used in the figures are the standard two-letter ISO codes. The only exceptions are the codes for West Germany and East Germany, which are composed of the standard code for Germany, DE, plus additional letters, W and E, respectively, for the two parts of the country.

White and black markings are used to identify in some of the figures the countries that belong to the different groups. Due to lack of time, the markings have not been applied through the entire set of figures.

White Patterns	Western Europe	Code	Black Patterns	Eastern Europe	Code
◇	Nordic		◆	Visegrad	
	Denmark	DK		Czech Republic	CZ
	Finland	FI		Germany (E)	DEE
	Norway	NO		Hungary	HU
	Sweden	SW		Poland	PL
				Slovakia	SK
				Slovenia	SI
□	Atlantic		■	Balkans	
	Belgium	BE		Bulgaria	BU
	France	FR		Croatia	HR
	Ireland	IE		Macedonia	MK
	UK	GB		Romania	RO
○	Germanic		▲	Yugoslavia	YU
	Austria	AT		Baltics	
	Germany (W)	DEW		Estonia	EE
	Netherlands	NL		Latvia	LV
	Switzerland	CH		Lithuania	LT
△	Mediterranean		●	European CIS	
	Greece	GR		Belarus	BY
	Italy	IT		Moldova	MD
	Portugal	PT		Russian Fed.	RU
	Spain	ES		Ukraine	UA

## References

Bongaards, J. and Feeny, G. (1998), "On the Quantum and Tempo of Fertility," *Population and Development Review* 24(2):271-291.

Bracher, G. and Santow, B. (1999), "Demography, Serendipity, and Teenage Pregnancy in Sweden," in A. Kuijsten, H. de Gans and H. de Feijter (eds), *The Joy of Demography and other Disciplines*, Thela Thesis.

Hobcraft, J. and Kiernan, K. (1995), "Becoming a parent in Europe," *Evolution or Revolution in European Population, European Population Conference, Milano 1995*.

Hobsbawm, E. (1994), *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, Michael Joseph, London.

Lesthaeghe, R. and Van de Kaa, D. (1986), *Twee demografische transitie's? Groei en Krimp*. D. van de Kaa and R. Lesthaeghe, Deventer, Van Loghum-Slaterus: 9-24.

Lesthaeghe, R. and Moors, G. (2000), "Recent Trends in Fertility and Household Formation in the Industrialised World," *Interuniversity papers in demography*, Interface Demography, Department of Social Research (SOCO), Vrije University Brussels.

Macura, M. (1994), "Overview," in M. Macura and D. Coleman (eds.), *International Migration: Regional Processes and Responses*, United Nations, New York and Geneva.

Murphy, M. (1993), "The Contraceptive Pill and Women's Employment as Factors in Fertility Change in Britain 1963-1980: A Challenge to the Conventional View." *Population Studies*, 47, 221-243

Ní Brolcháin, M. (1993), Period Paramount? A critique of the Cohort Approach to Fertility. *Population and Development Review*, 18. No. 4 (December 1992).

Toulemon, L. and de Guibert-Lantoine, C. (1998), *Fertility and Family Surveys in Countries of the ECE Region, Standard Country Report, France*, United Nations, New York and Geneva.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (1999), "Fertility Decline in the Transition Economies, 1982-1997: Political, Economic and Social Factors," *Economic Survey of Europe*, 1999, No.1, New York and Geneva.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, (forthcoming), "Fertility Decline in the Transition Economies, 1988-1998: in Economic and Social Factors Revisited," *Economic Survey for Europe*, 2000 No. 1, New York and Geneva.

Van de Kaa, D.J. (1987), "Europe's second demographic transition" *Population Bulletin*, Population Reference Bureau. 42.

Van de Kaa, D.J. (1995), "Anchored Narratives: The Story and Findings of Half a Century of Research into the Determinants of Fertility," *PDOD* - Paper No. 35.

Van de Kaa, D. (1997), "Option and Sequences: Europe's Demographic Patterns," *Nethur-Demography Paper* No. 39.

**Table 1**

**Results obtained by the Bongaarts-Feeney model,  
selected east European countries, first half of the 1990s**

Region/Country	Period total fertility rates			$r_i$ values				
	Reference year	Observed	Adjusted		i=1	i=2	i=3	i=4+
<u>Visegrad</u>								
Czech Republic	1995	1.215	1.475	1991-1995	0.110	0.188	0.194	0.173
Hungary	1995	1.573	1.741	1991-1995	0.147	0.141	0.086	0.040
Poland	1995	1.611	1.706	1991-1995	0.116	0.082	0.127	0.142
Slovenia	1996	1.280	1.543	1992-1996	0.183	0.170	0.205	0.068
<u>Balkans</u>								
Bulgaria	1994	1.371	1.379	1990-1994	0.014	0.061	0.045	0.025
<u>Baltics</u>								
Estonia	1993	1.301	1.471	1993-1996	0.142	0.121	0.175	0.215
Latvia	1995	1.252	1.365	1991-1995	0.096	0.135	0.133	0.075
Lithuania	1995	1.491	1.444	1991-1995	-0.015	0.002	-0.012	-0.011
<u>European CIS</u>								
Russian Federation	1995	1.331	1.309	1991-1995	-0.019	0.018	0.060	0.019
Ukraine	1994	1.460	1.352	1990-1994	-0.052	-0.021	-0.016	-0.010

Table 2

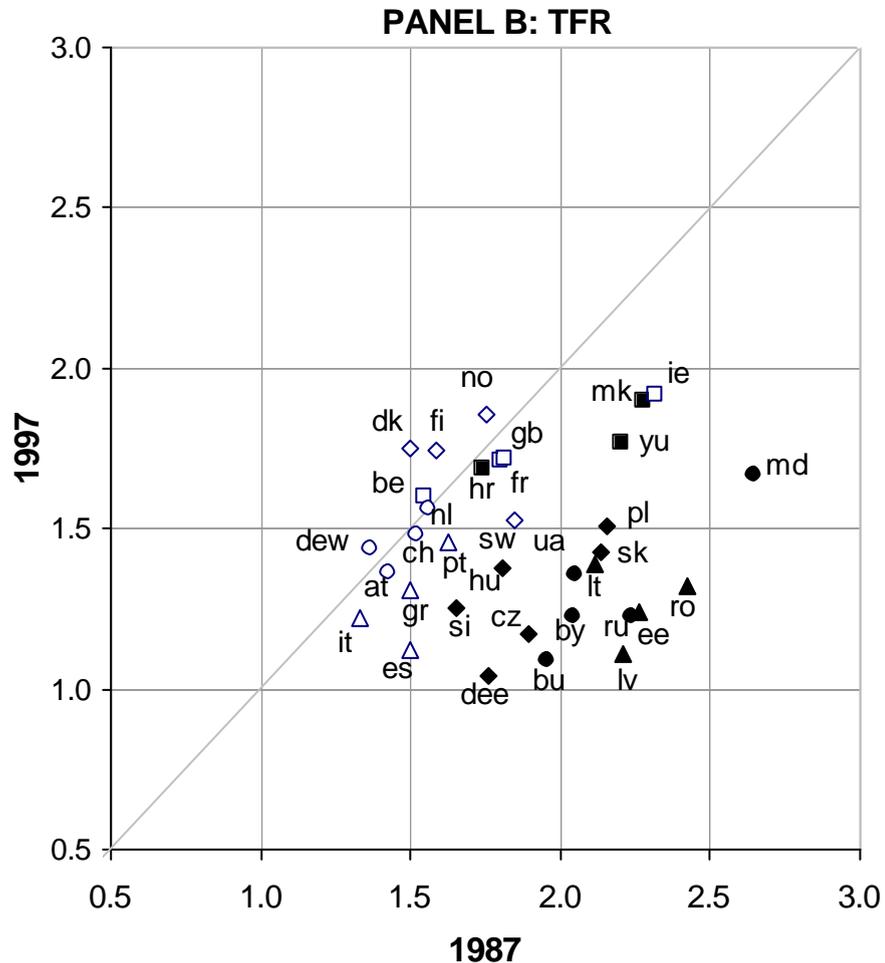
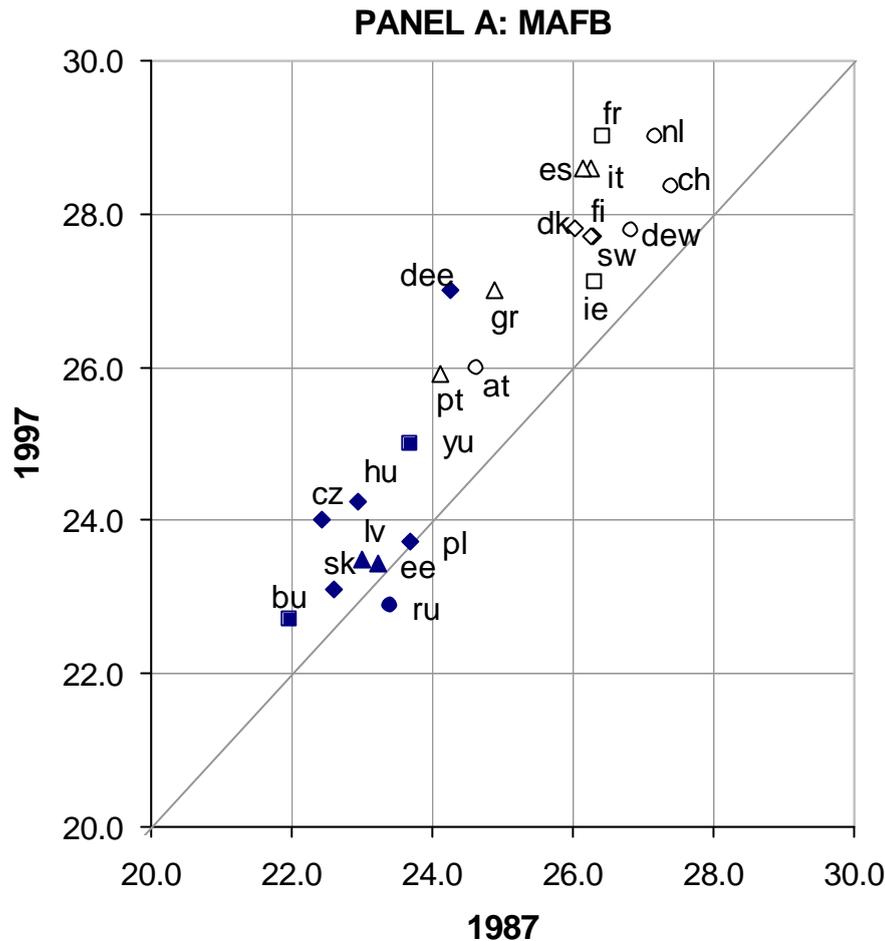
## Alternative choices of women aged 20-24 and 25-29, Europe, 1990's

Region/Country	<u>Living</u>				<u>With partner</u>				<u>With children</u>				<u>Without children</u>			
	<u>With Parents</u>		<u>Alone</u>		<u>Married</u>		<u>Cohabiting</u>		<u>Married</u>		<u>Cohabiting</u>		<u>Married</u>		<u>Cohabiting</u>	
	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29
<b><u>Nordic</u></b>	<b>9.60</b>	<b>2.20</b>	<b>20.97</b>	<b>12.30</b>	<b>28.80</b>	<b>55.47</b>	<b>34.07</b>	<b>22.43</b>	<b>20.47</b>	<b>47.97</b>	<b>10.57</b>	<b>12.03</b>	<b>8.33</b>	<b>7.50</b>	<b>23.50</b>	<b>10.40</b>
Finland	4.30	3.00	17.50	8.20	48.50	69.50	24.70	14.50	37.10	61.60	8.00	7.40	11.40	7.90	16.70	7.10
Norway	16.10	2.20	18.10	12.30	24.80	55.60	33.30	21.80	15.50	47.20	11.60	11.70	9.30	8.40	21.70	10.10
Sweden	8.40	1.40	27.30	16.40	13.10	41.30	44.20	31.00	8.80	35.10	12.10	17.00	4.30	6.20	32.10	14.00
<b><u>Atlantic</u></b>	<b>53.50</b>	<b>11.00</b>	<b>9.70</b>	<b>11.75</b>	<b>23.75</b>	<b>59.25</b>	<b>17.70</b>	<b>17.10</b>	<b>9.10</b>	<b>41.95</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>6.95</b>	<b>14.65</b>	<b>17.30</b>	<b>14.10</b>	<b>10.15</b>
Belgium	53.50	11.00	2.80	7.90	32.80	72.00	11.50	10.90	9.60	50.10	1.80	3.50	23.20	21.90	9.70	7.40
France	..	..	16.60	15.60	14.70	46.50	23.90	23.30	8.60	33.80	5.40	10.40	6.10	12.70	18.50	12.90
<b><u>Germanic</u></b>	<b>44.98</b>	<b>11.85</b>	<b>15.43</b>	<b>5.88</b>	<b>12.63</b>	<b>46.33</b>	<b>20.48</b>	<b>20.35</b>	<b>6.35</b>	<b>32.08</b>	<b>2.30</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>6.28</b>	<b>14.25</b>	<b>18.18</b>	<b>16.30</b>
Austria	37.80	10.10	11.60	8.60	12.60	45.60	27.50	22.80	8.40	37.90	6.60	9.70	4.20	7.70	20.90	13.10
Germany (W)	61.80	25.00	18.50	10.00	6.70	37.20	8.40	14.30	3.80	26.00	0.90	2.20	2.90	11.20	7.50	12.10
Netherlands	44.00	7.00	15.00	0.00	16.00	49.00	21.00	24.00	6.00	29.00	1.00	3.00	10.00	20.00	20.00	21.00
Switzerland	36.30	5.30	16.60	4.90	15.20	53.50	25.00	20.30	7.20	35.40	0.70	1.30	8.00	18.10	24.30	19.00
<b><u>Mediterranean</u></b>	<b>72.88</b>	<b>35.88</b>	<b>4.18</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>18.95</b>	<b>58.30</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>13.05</b>	<b>43.48</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>5.90</b>	<b>14.83</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>2.88</b>
Greece	54.40	24.30	13.50	7.80	17.90	59.40	4.90	5.80	13.60	45.20	0.00	0.20	4.30	14.20	4.90	5.60
Italy	86.80	44.80	1.10	2.80	11.00	50.10	0.90	2.70	6.80	34.70	0.20	0.60	4.20	15.40	0.70	2.10
Portugal	75.30	40.00	1.40	1.20	27.50	65.70	0.00	0.00	18.60	52.90	0.00	0.00	8.90	12.80	0.00	0.00
Spain	75.00	34.40	0.70	3.50	19.40	58.00	4.60	5.40	13.20	41.10	1.20	1.60	6.20	16.90	3.40	3.80

**Table 2 (cont.)**

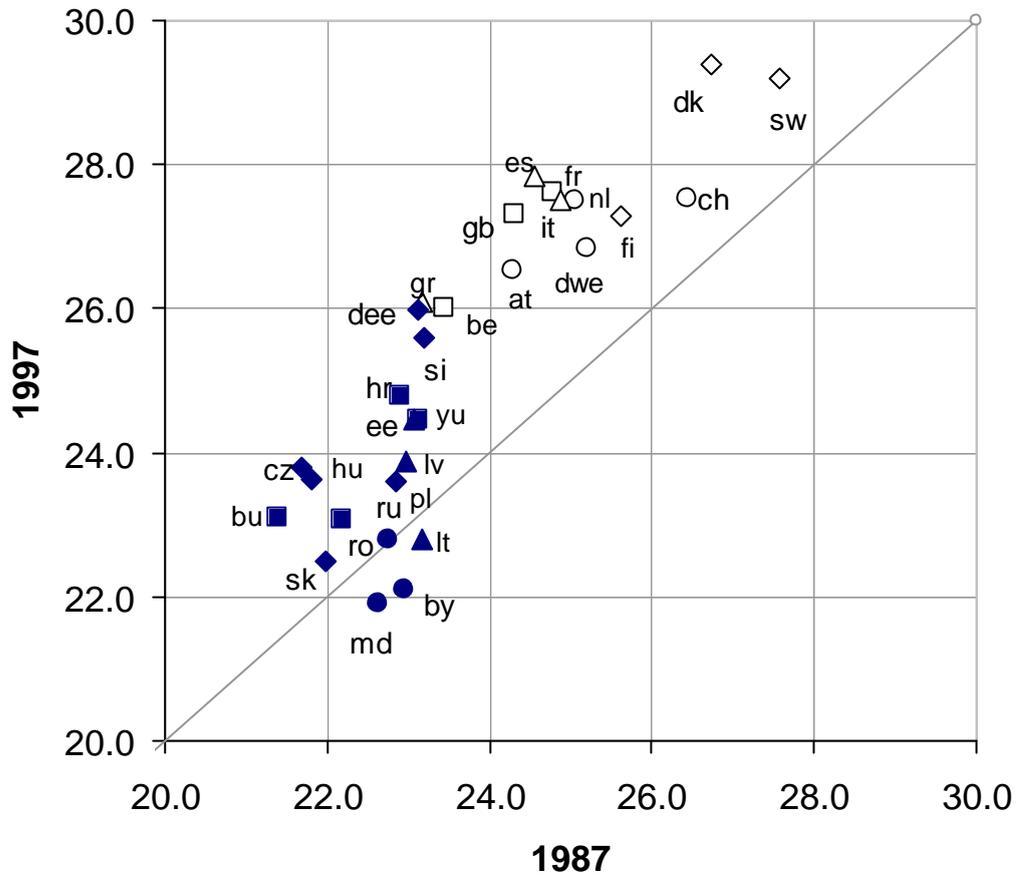
Region/Country	<u>Living</u>				<u>With partner</u>				<u>With children</u>				<u>Without children</u>			
	With Parents		Alone		Married		Cohabiting		Married		Cohabiting		Married		Cohabiting	
	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29
<b><u>Visegrad</u></b>	<b>49.54</b>	<b>19.70</b>	<b>6.42</b>	<b>9.76</b>	<b>37.46</b>	<b>72.30</b>	<b>10.12</b>	<b>8.62</b>	<b>27.94</b>	<b>65.30</b>	<b>4.06</b>	<b>5.80</b>	<b>9.52</b>	<b>7.00</b>	<b>6.06</b>	<b>2.82</b>
Czech Rep.	43.40	12.30	3.10	1.00	43.40	76.20	10.20	8.10	33.50	68.70	2.50	5.60	9.90	7.50	7.70	2.50
Germany (E)	43.40	14.40	21.50	3.60	13.70	54.00	17.00	15.40	8.50	45.70	6.10	9.20	5.20	8.30	10.90	6.20
Hungary	46.20	17.00	3.00	13.70	47.30	77.00	7.20	4.20	34.90	70.10	2.50	2.70	12.40	6.90	4.70	1.50
Poland	55.20	26.00	1.30	29.50	53.30	83.00	0.40	0.40	37.70	75.00	0.20	0.40	15.60	8.00	0.20	0.00
Slovenia	59.50	28.80	3.20	1.00	29.60	71.30	15.80	15.00	25.10	67.00	9.00	11.10	4.50	4.30	6.80	3.90
<b><u>Balkans</u></b>																
Bulgaria	50.30	22.40	0.80	28.80	44.60	78.70	4.20	2.70	33.90	68.90	2.10	1.00	10.70	9.80	2.10	1.70
<b><u>Baltics</u></b>	<b>24.17</b>	<b>13.47</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>6.37</b>	<b>48.73</b>	<b>65.63</b>	<b>10.27</b>	<b>9.83</b>	<b>40.20</b>	<b>60.73</b>	<b>6.37</b>	<b>8.27</b>	<b>8.53</b>	<b>4.90</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>1.57</b>
Estonia	21.90	12.50	6.90	3.40	57.10	62.60	18.90	15.20	53.20	60.70	14.40	14.60	3.90	1.90	4.50	0.60
Latvia	..	..	..	..	36.80	59.70	9.20	11.50	29.40	54.80	3.90	8.20	7.40	4.90	5.30	3.30
Lithuania	50.60	27.90	5.50	15.70	52.30	74.60	2.70	2.80	38.00	66.70	0.80	2.00	14.30	7.90	1.90	0.80

**Figure 1**  
**Change in the mean age at first birth, MAFB, and the total fertility rate, TFR, 1987-1997**



**Figure 2**  
**Change in the mean age at first marriage, MAFM, and total first marriage rate, TFMR,**  
**1987-1997**

**PANEL A: MAFM**



**PANEL B: TFMR**

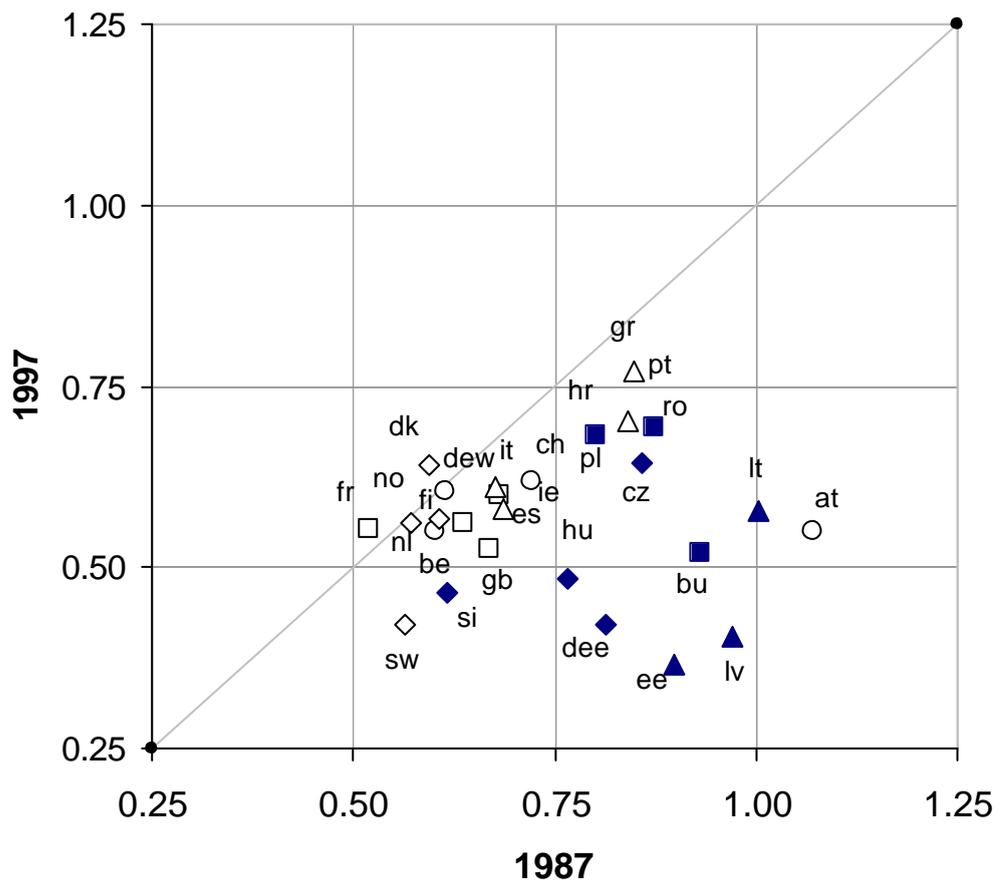


Figure 3

PANEL A: Changes in total fertility rate, TFR, and the mean age of women at birth of first child, MAFB, 1987-1997

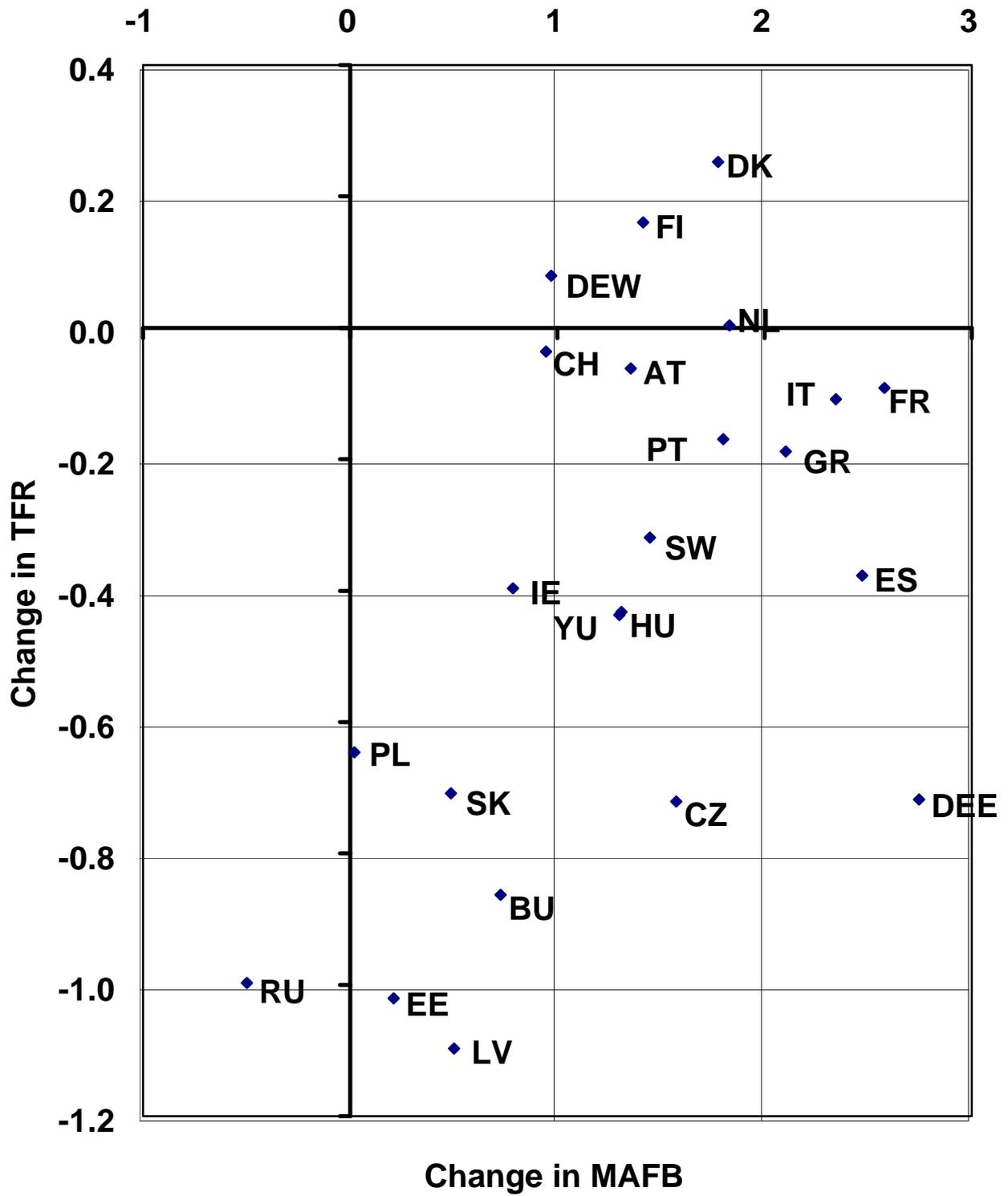


Figure 3

PANEL B: Changes in total first marriage rate, TFMR, and the mean age of first marriage, MAFM, 1987-1997

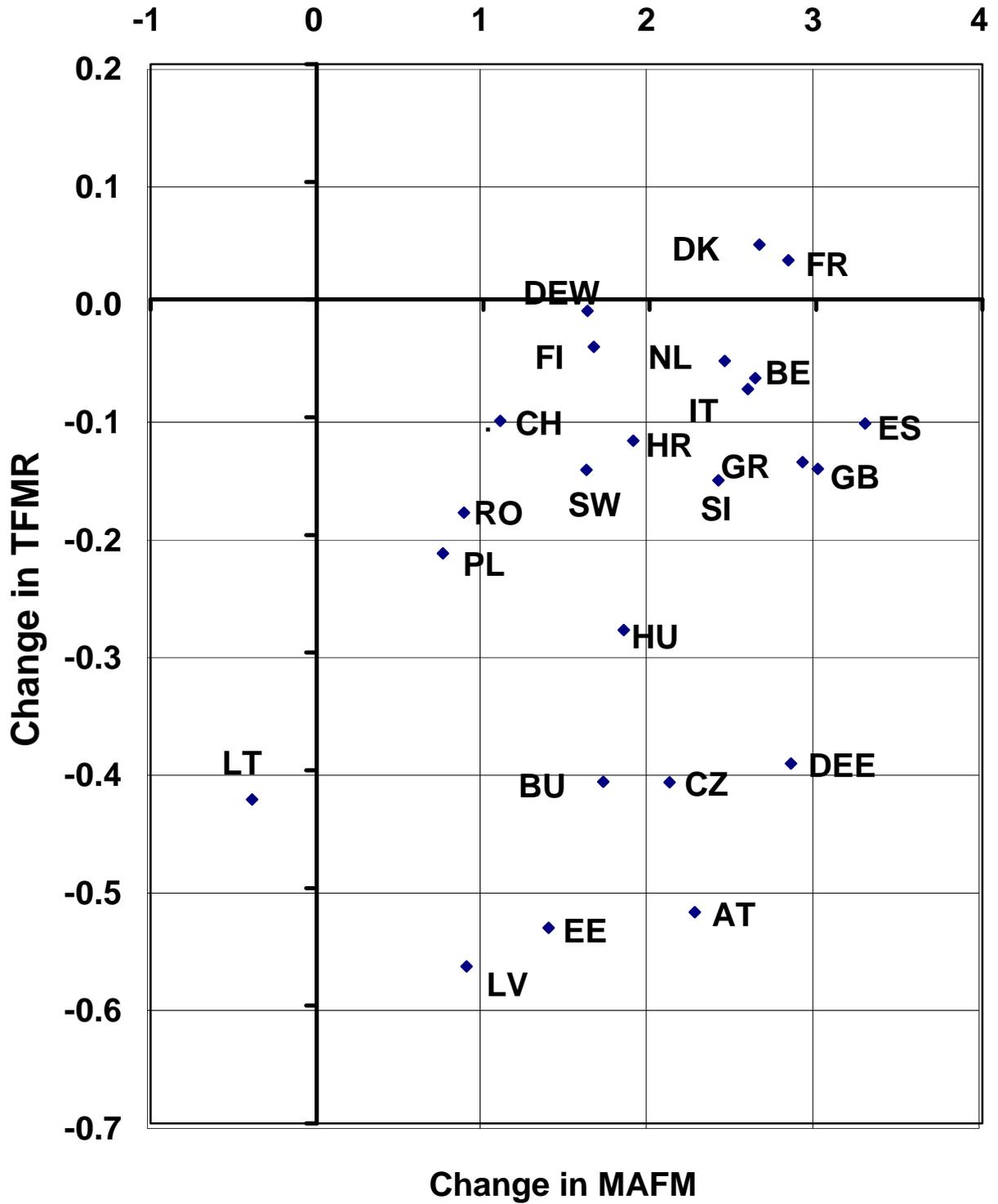


Figure 4

**PANEL A: Changes in the components of the total fertility rate below 30, B, and at 30+, A, 1988-1997/8**

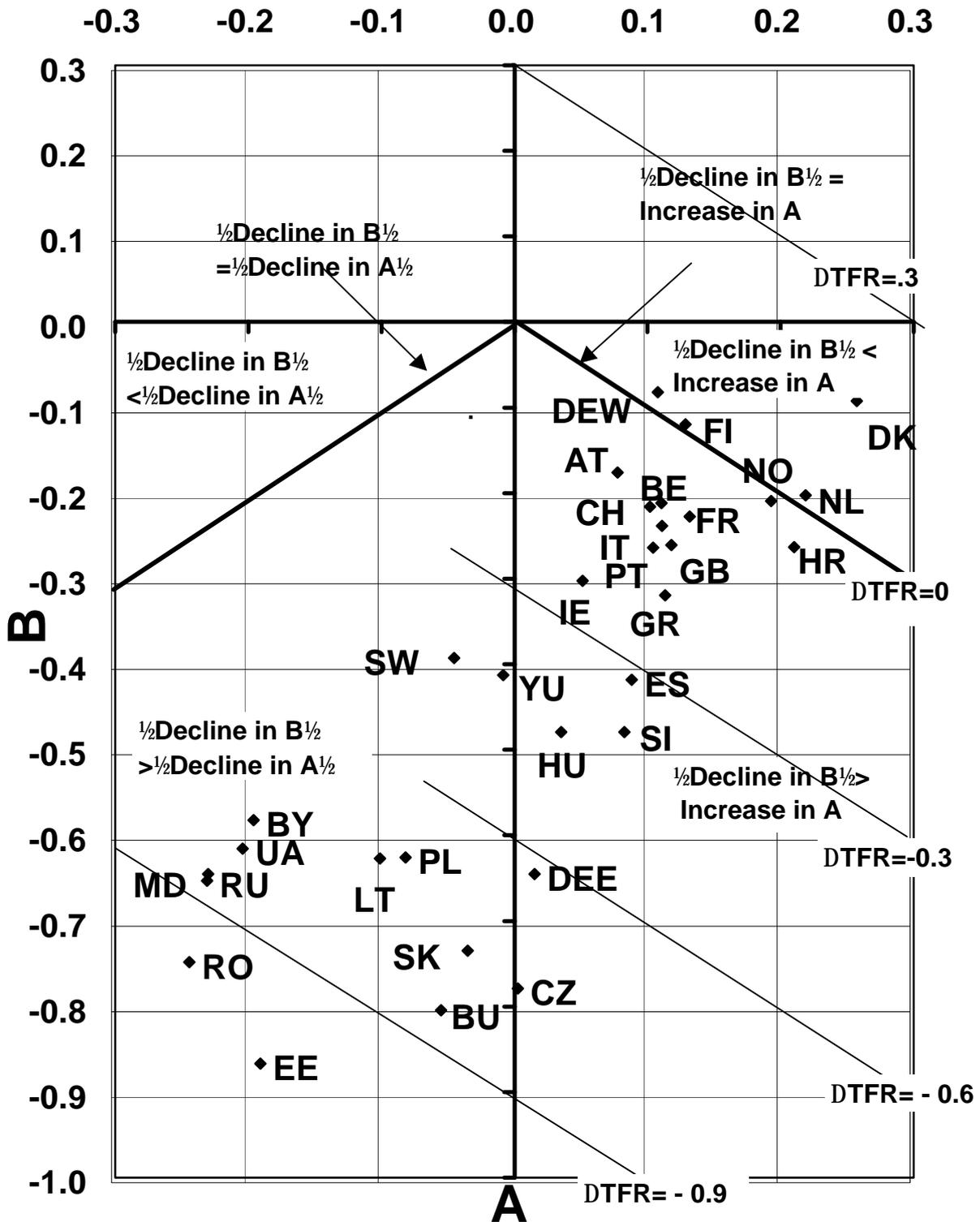
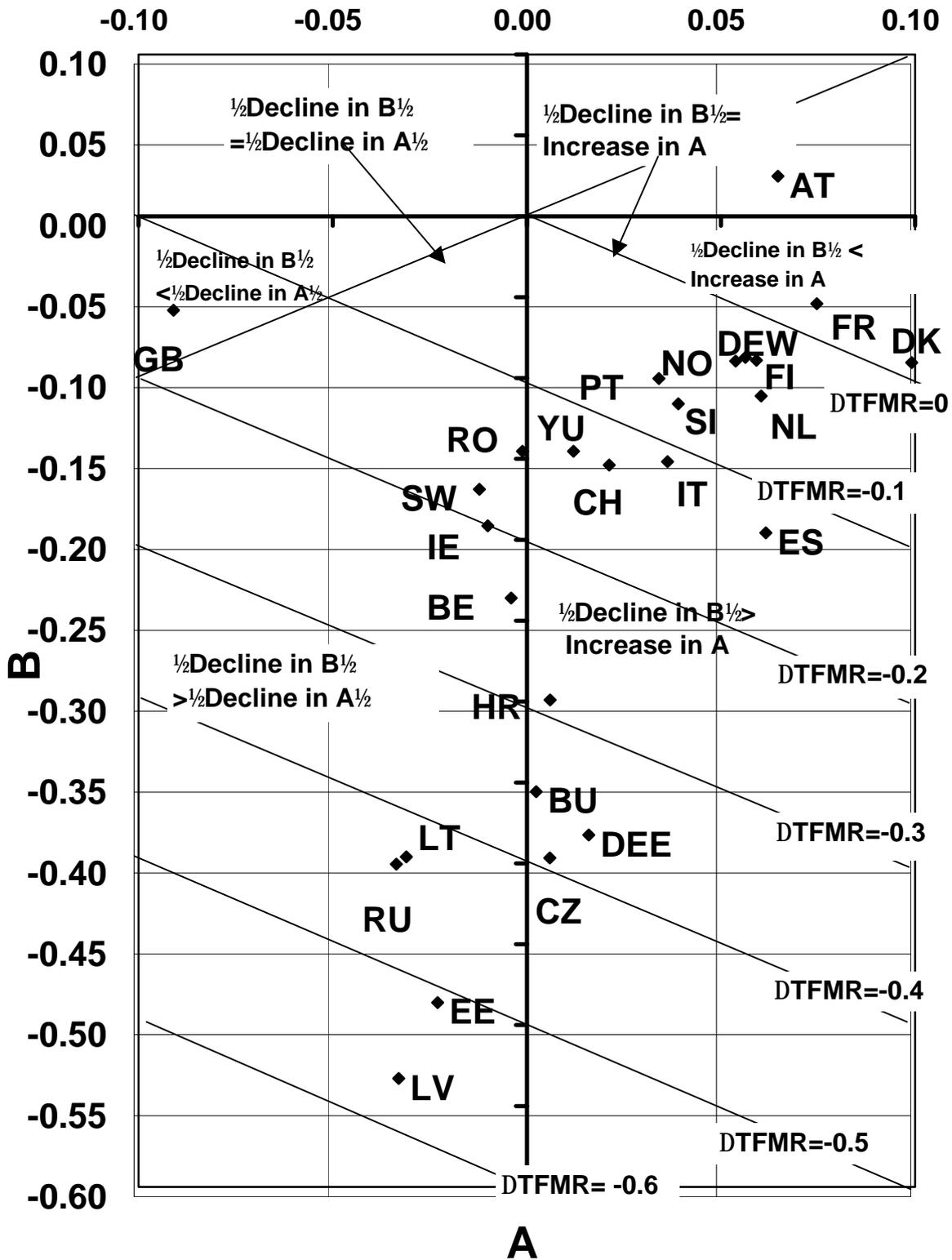
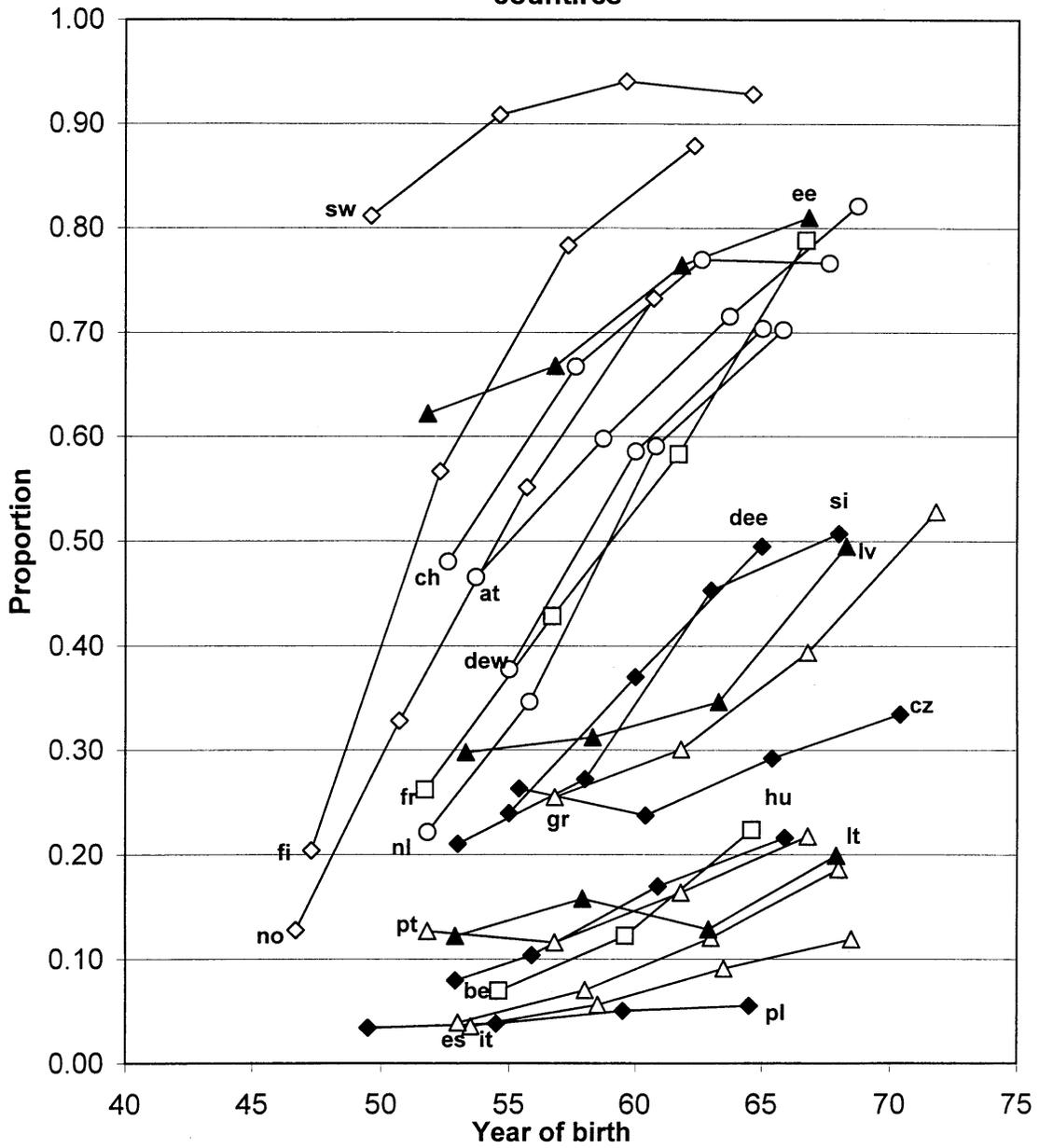


Figure 4

**PANEL B: Changes in the components of the total first marriage rate below 30, B and at 30+, A, 1988-1997/8**



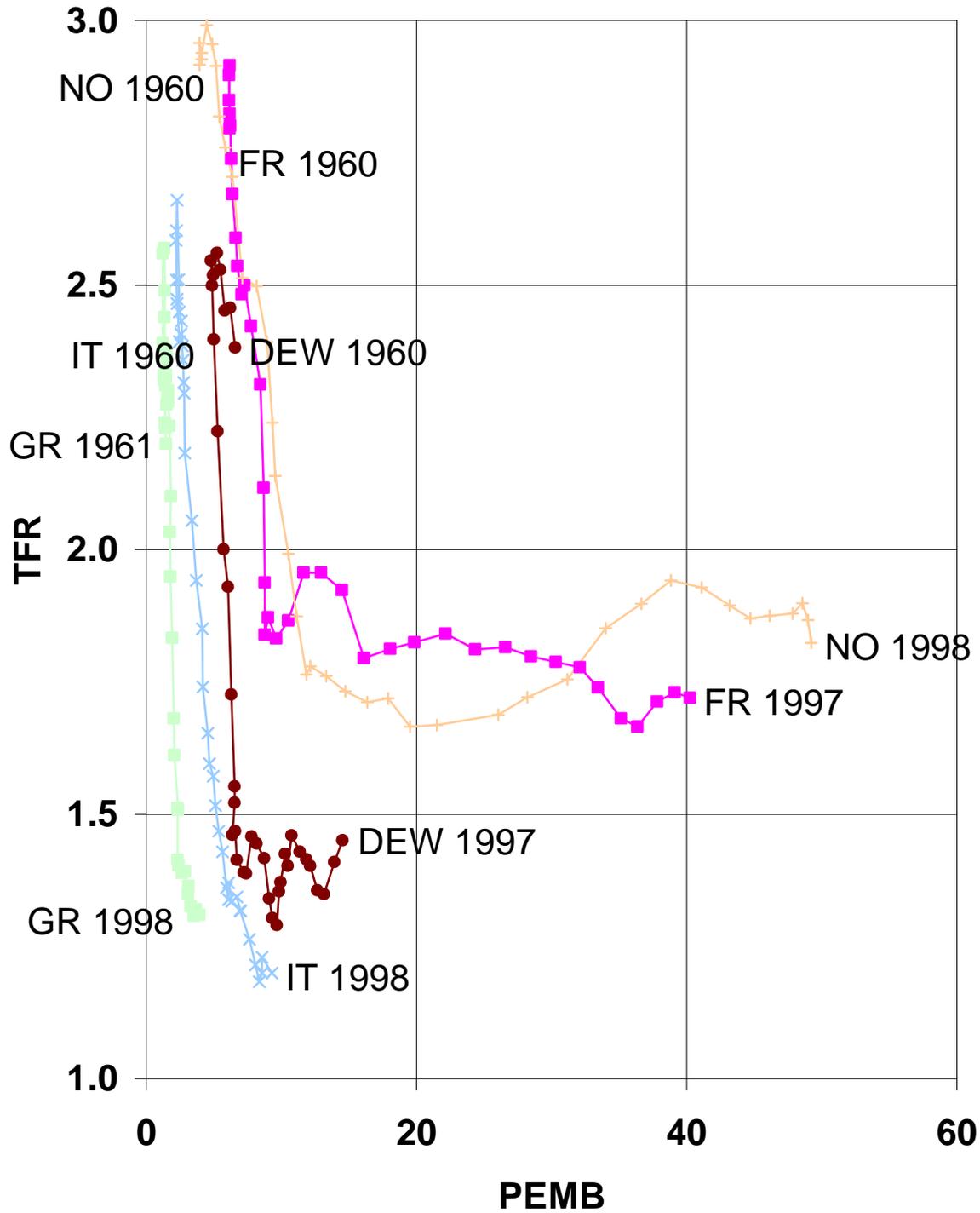
**Figure 5**  
**Proportion of women choosing cohabitation rather than marriage as first union by age 25, selected birth cohorts and countries**



Notes: a. Belgium stands for Flanders and Brussels.  
 b. Estonia stands for "native" Estonians.

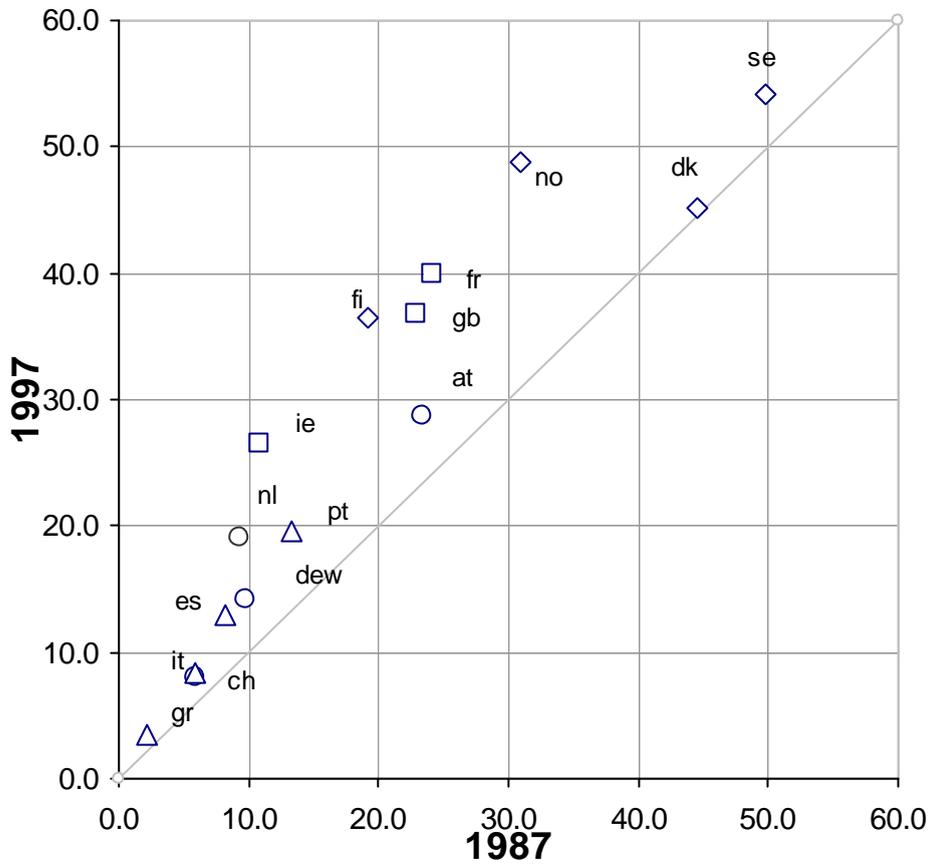
Figure 6

Shifts in total fertility rate, TFR, and the proportion of extra-marital births, PEMB, selected west European countries, 1960-1997/98



**Figure 7**  
**Proportion of extra-marital births, 1987-1997**  
**(in per cent)**

**PANEL A: Western Europe**



**PANEL B: Eastern Europe**

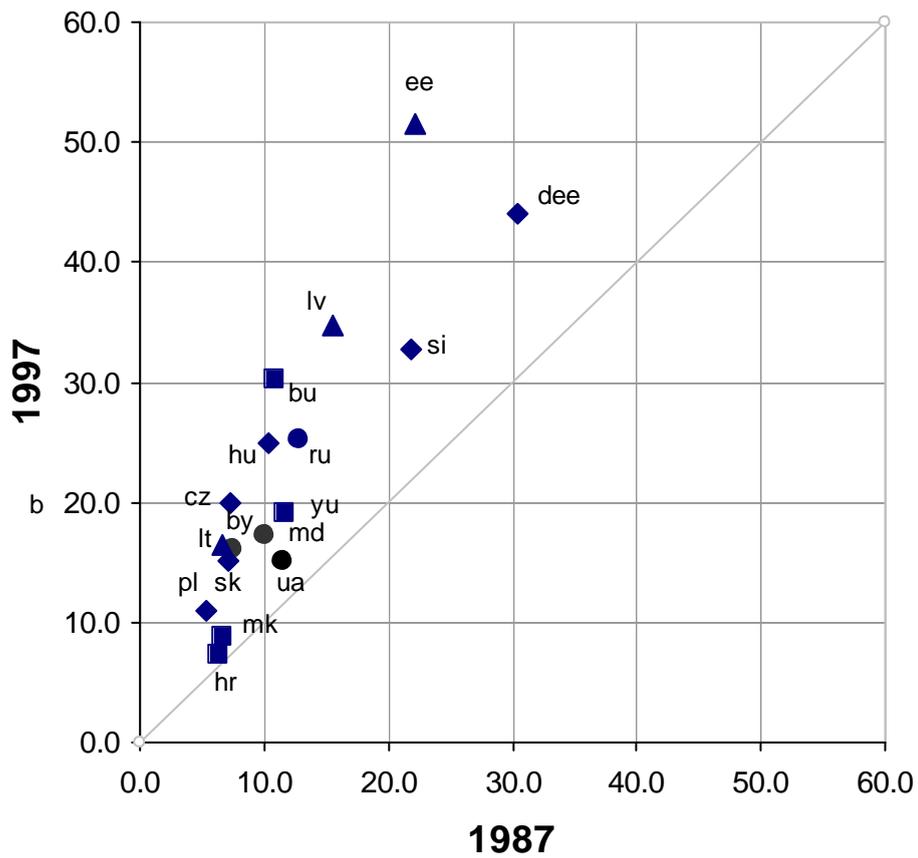


Figure 8

**PANEL A: Proportions of women aged 20-24 and 25-29 living alone and with parents, Nordic and Mediterranean countries (in per cent)**

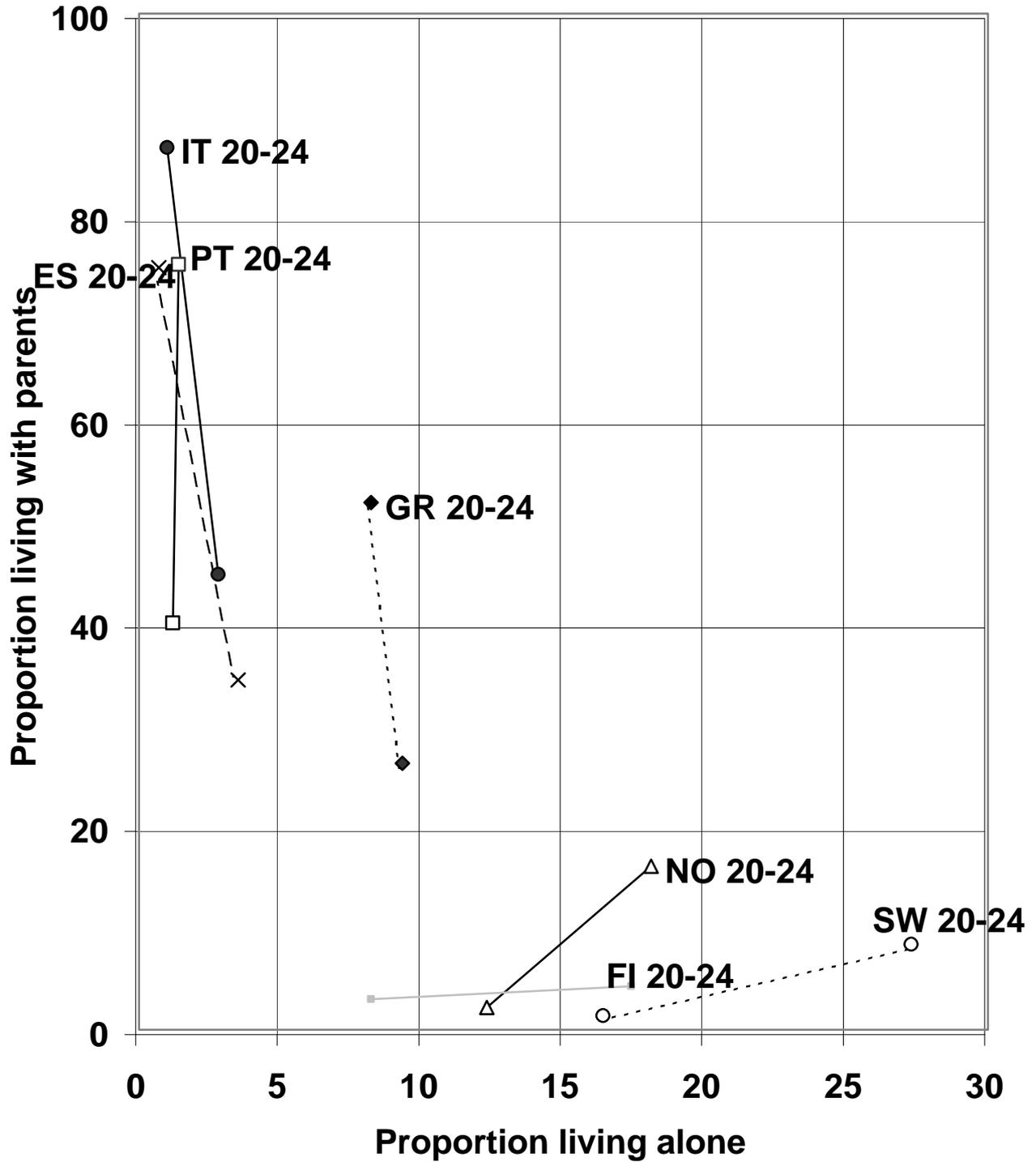


Figure 8

**PANEL B: Proportios of women aged 20-24  
and 25-29 cohabiting and married, Nordic  
and Mediterranean countries  
(in per cent)**

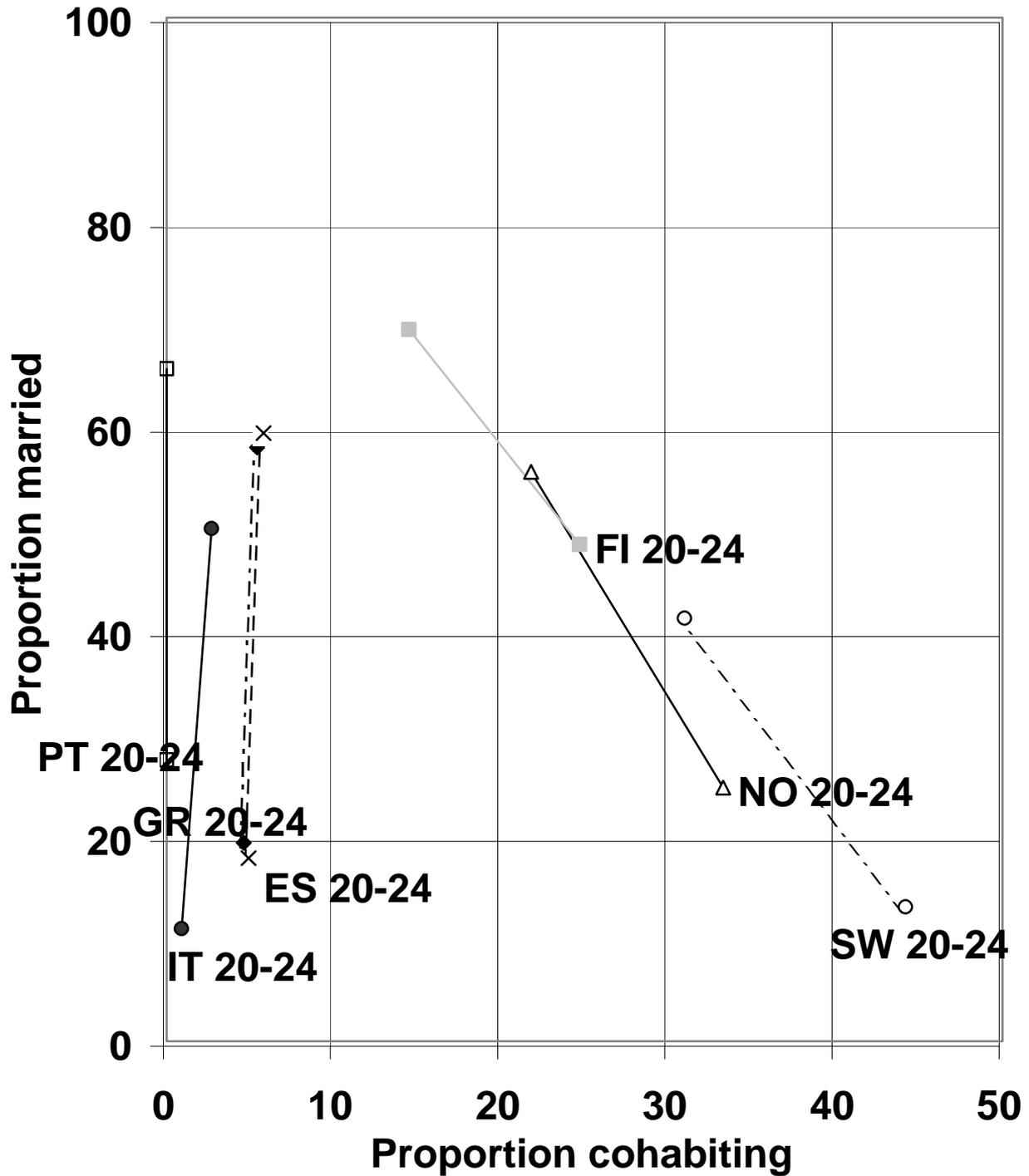


Figure 8

**PANEL C: Proportions of women aged 20-24 and 25-29 cohabiting and married, with children, Nordic and Mediterranean countries (in per cent)**

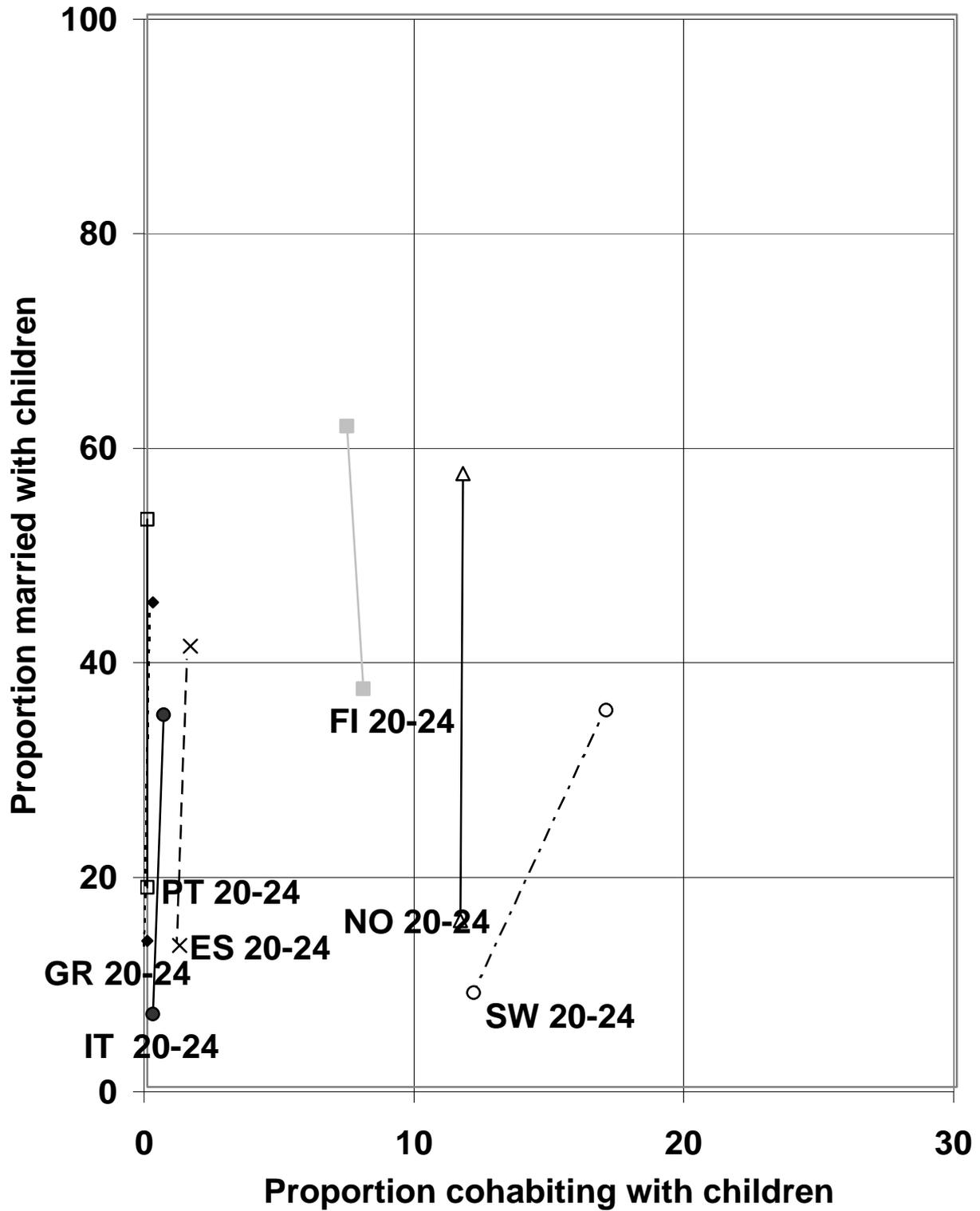


Figure 8

**PANEL D: Proportions of women aged 20-24 and 25-29 cohabiting and married, without children, Nordic and Mediterranean countries (in per cent)**

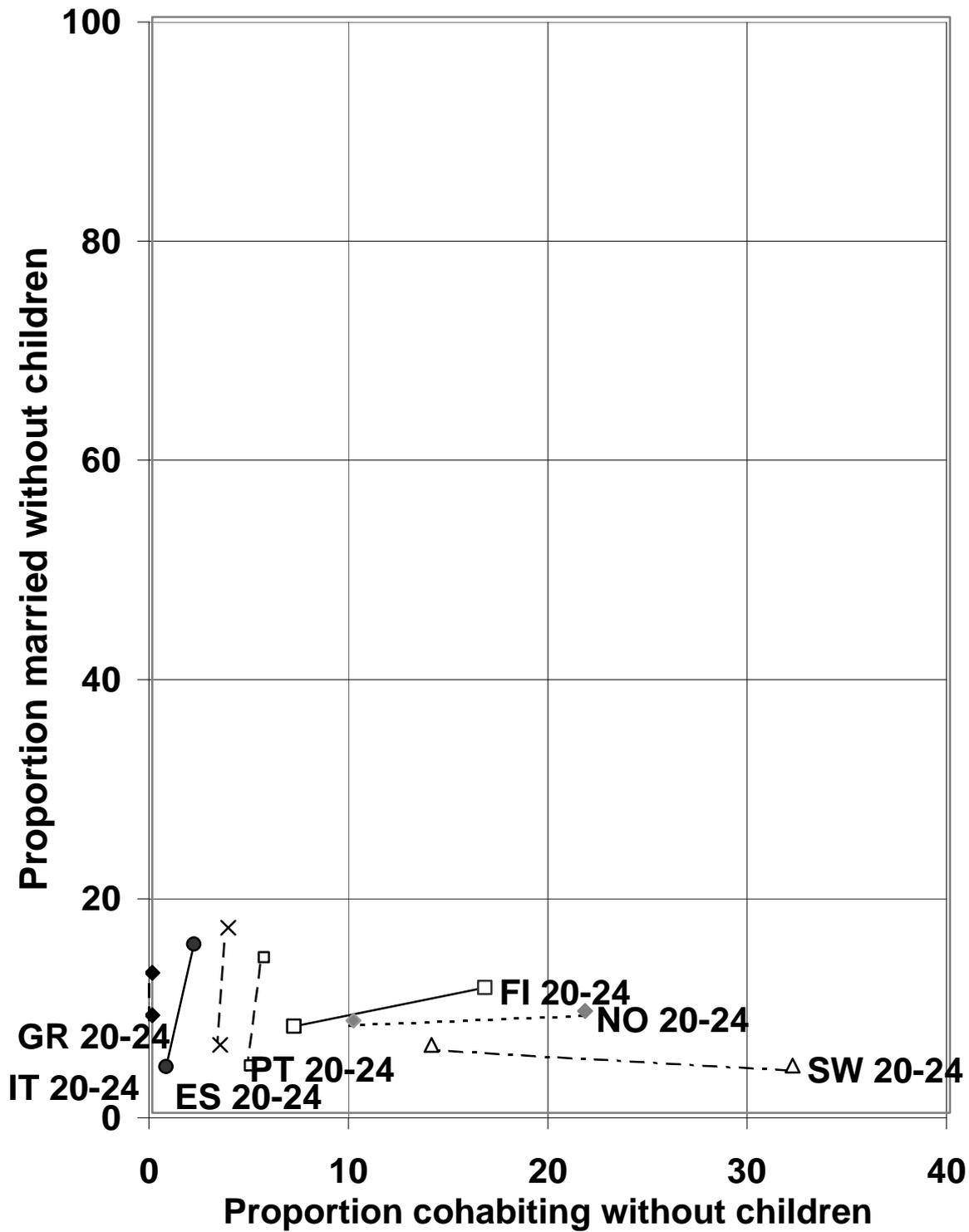


Figure 9

**PANEL A: Proportions of women at risk not living  
in unions using traditional and modern  
contraceptive methods, age 20-24  
(in per cent)**

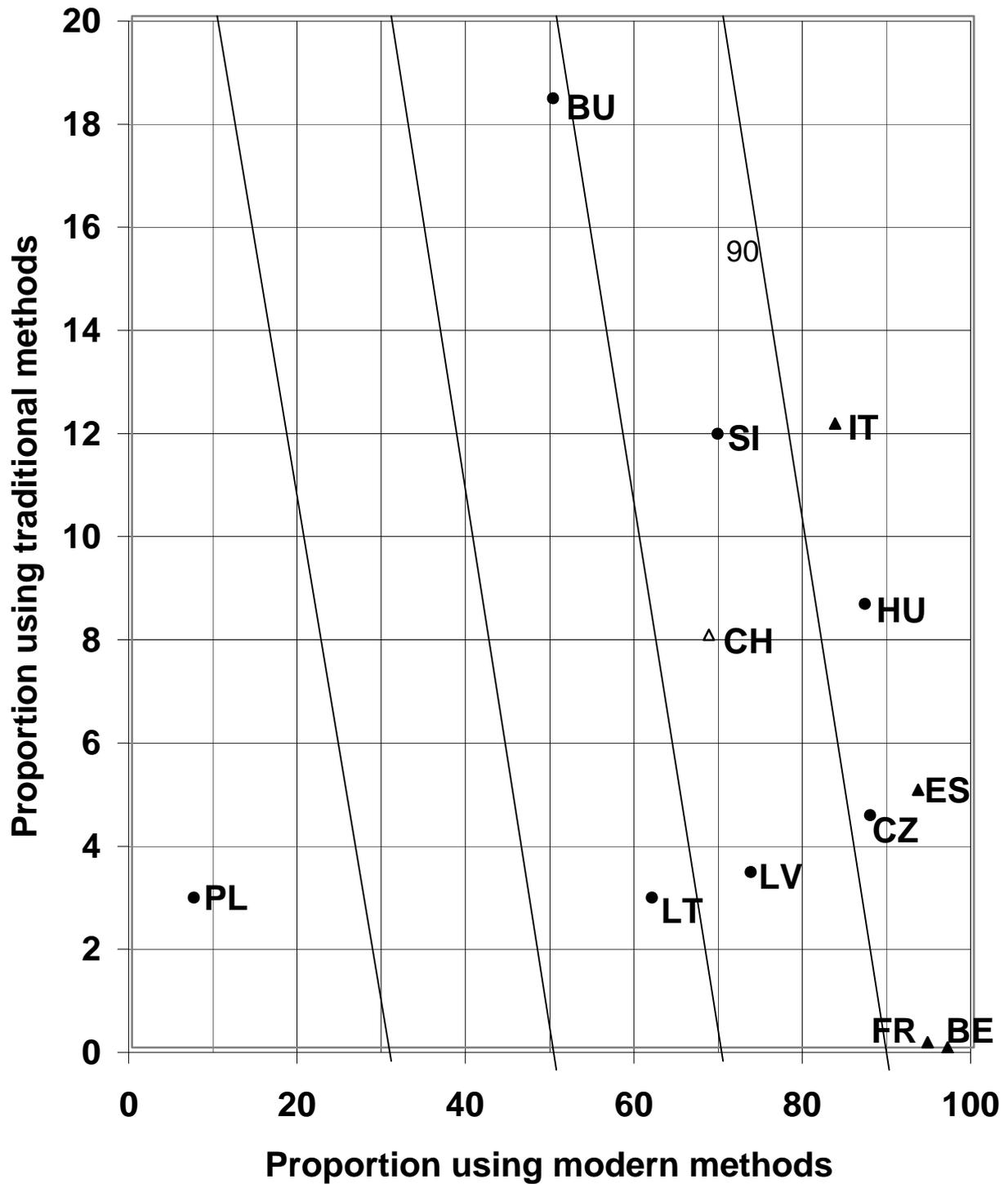


Figure 9

**PANEL B: Proportions of women at risk not living  
in unions using traditional and modern  
contraceptive methods, age 25-29  
(in per cent)**

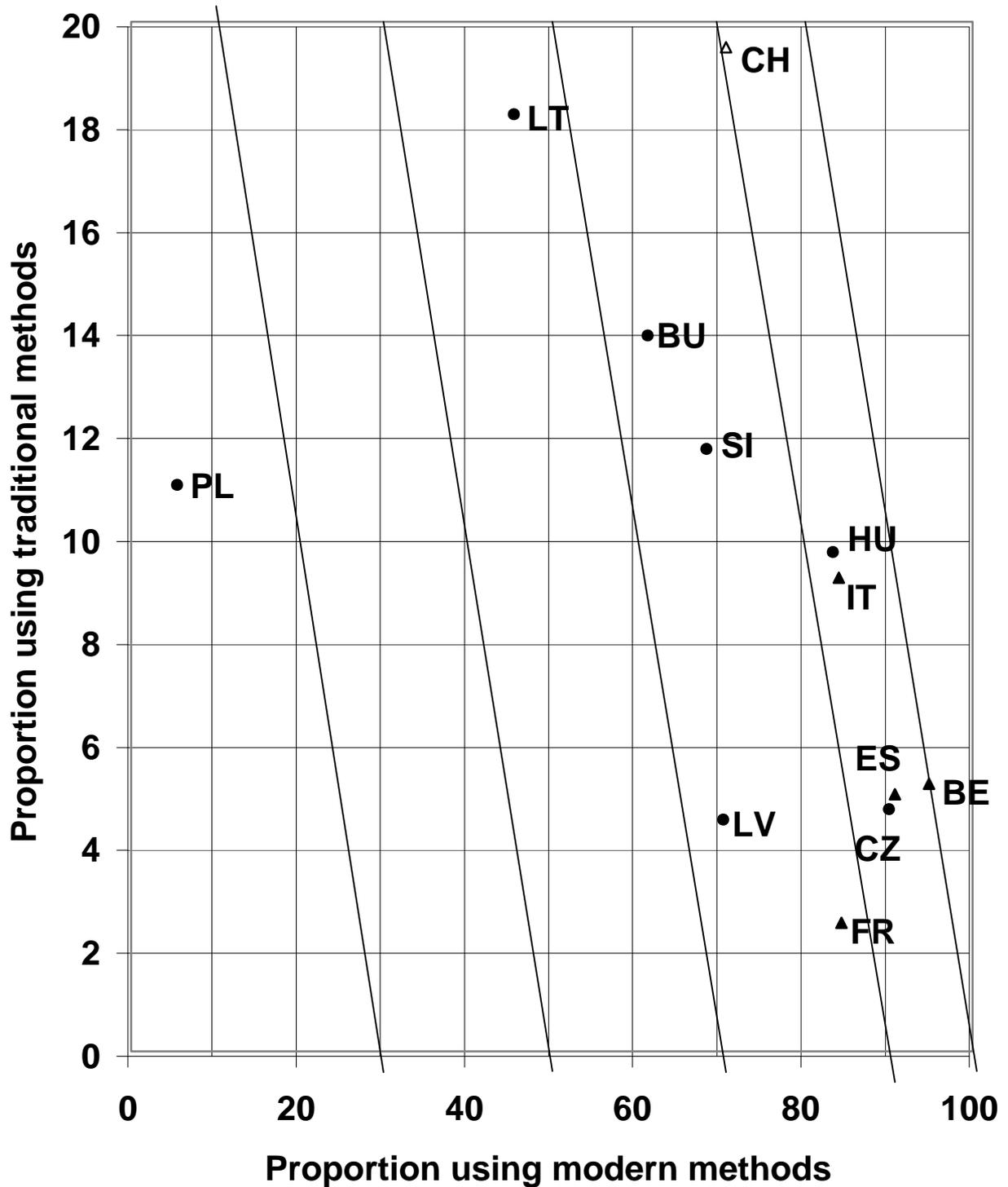


Figure 10

**PANEL A: Proportions of women at risk living in unions using traditional and modern contraceptive methods, age 20-24 (in per cent)**

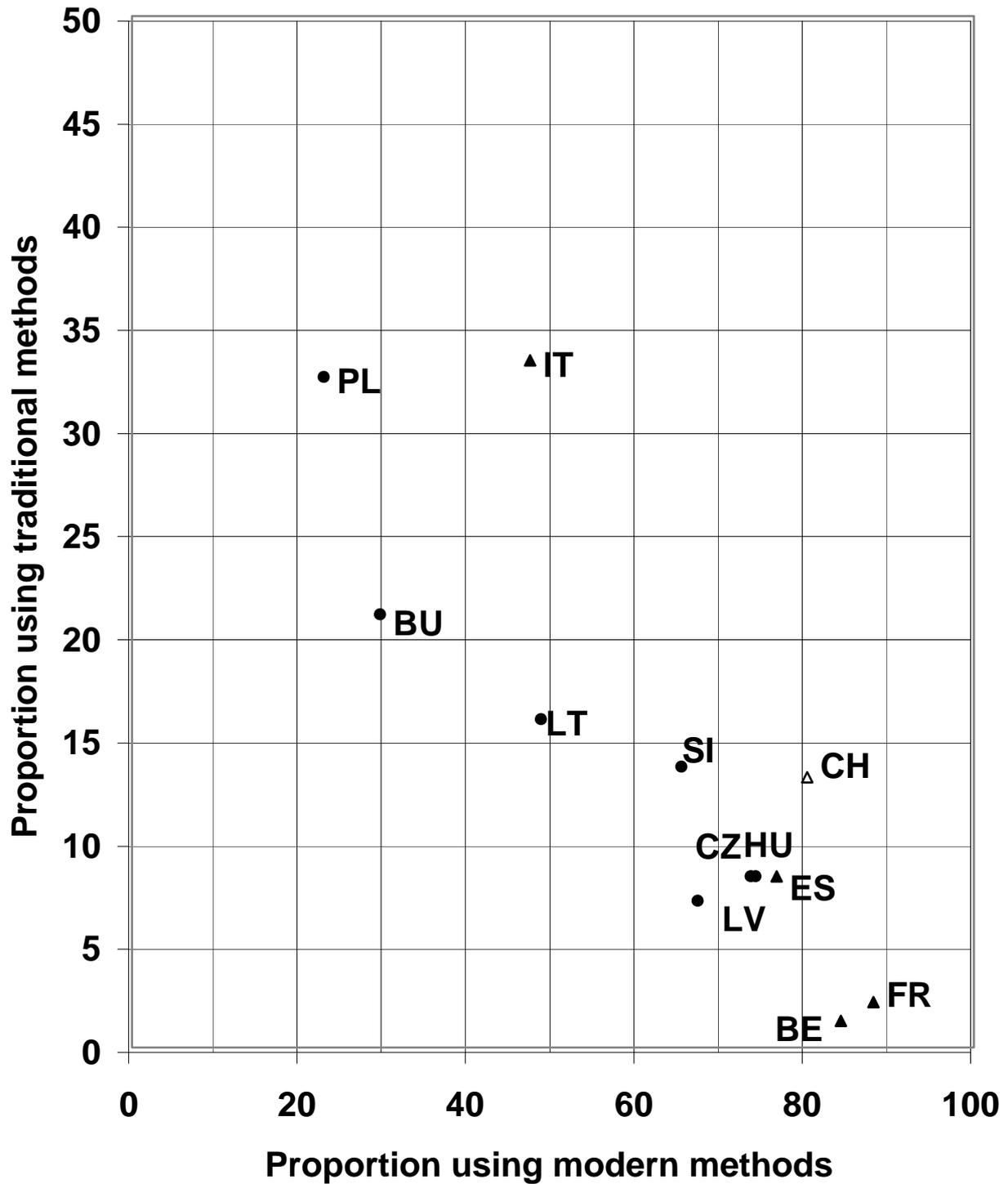


Figure 10

**PANEL B: Proportions of women at risk living in unions using traditional and modern contraceptive methods, age 25-29 (in per cent)**

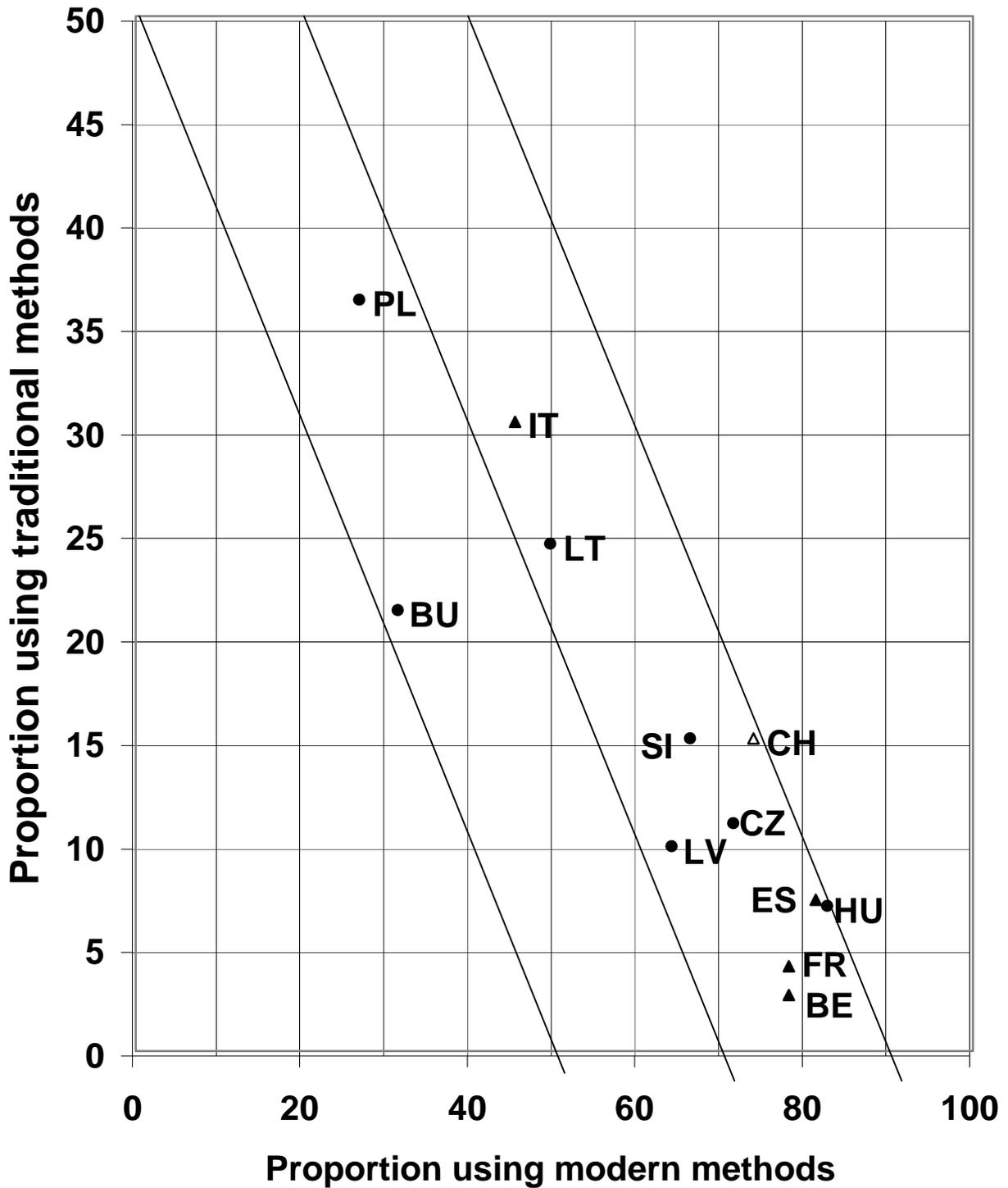


Figure 11

**Proportions of women aged 20-39 at risk using no method or using traditional method, P, versus the number of induced abortions per one hundred known conceptions, N**

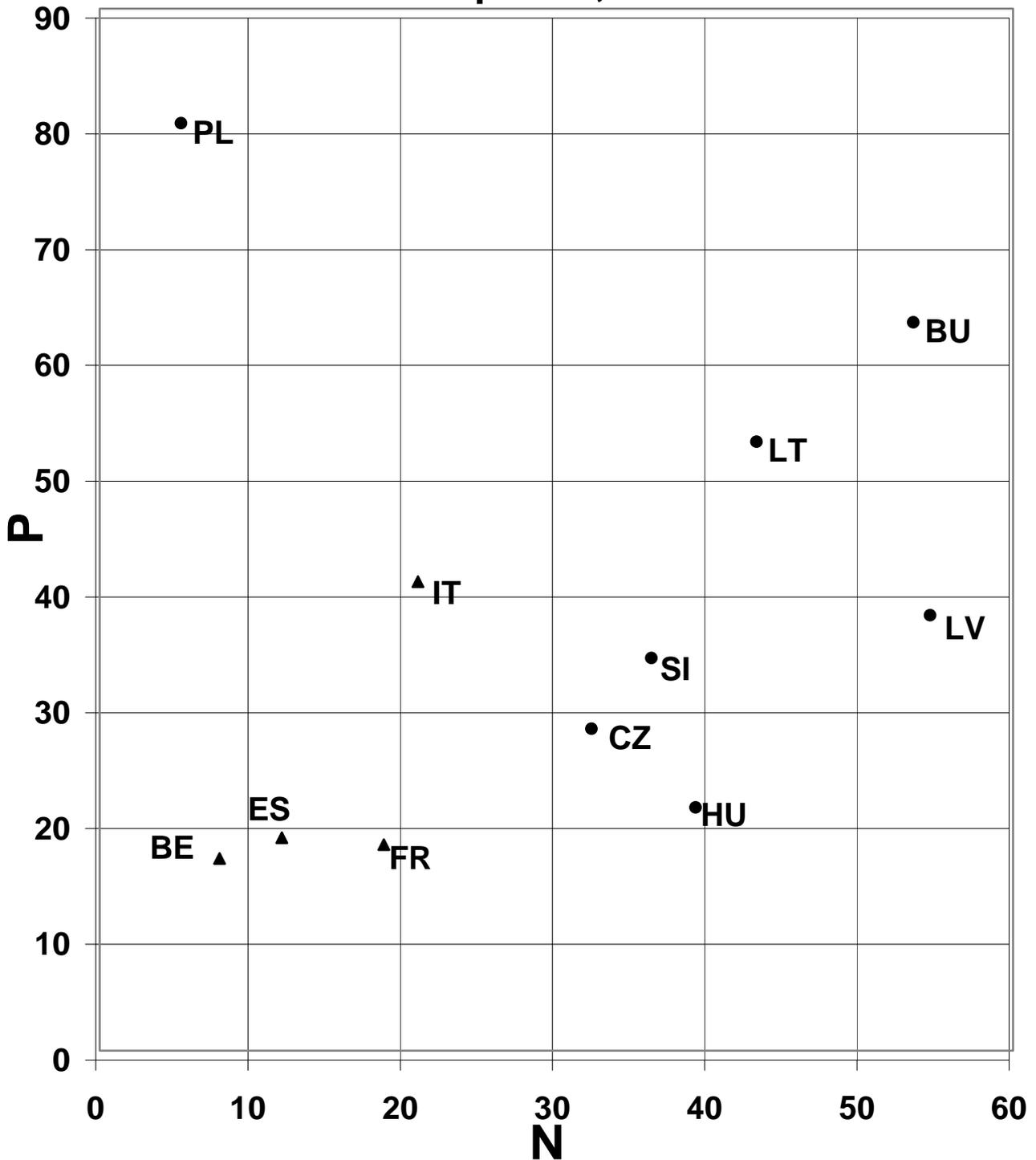


Figure 12

**PANEL A: Contraceptive mix of women not living in unions aged 20-24 and 25-29, western Europe (in per cent)**

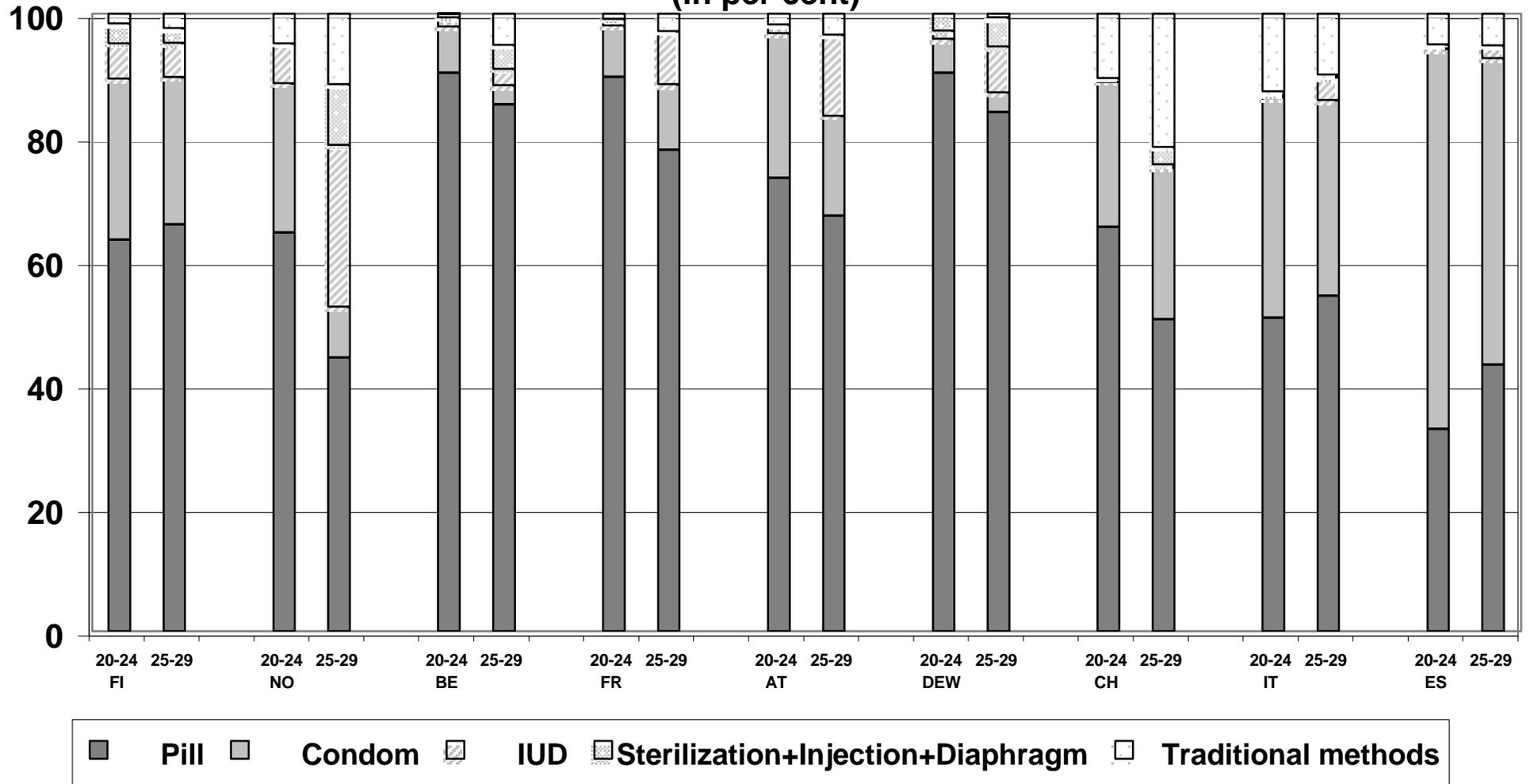


Figure 12

**PANEL B: Contraceptive mix of women living in unions aged 20-24 and 25-29, western Europe  
(in per cent)**

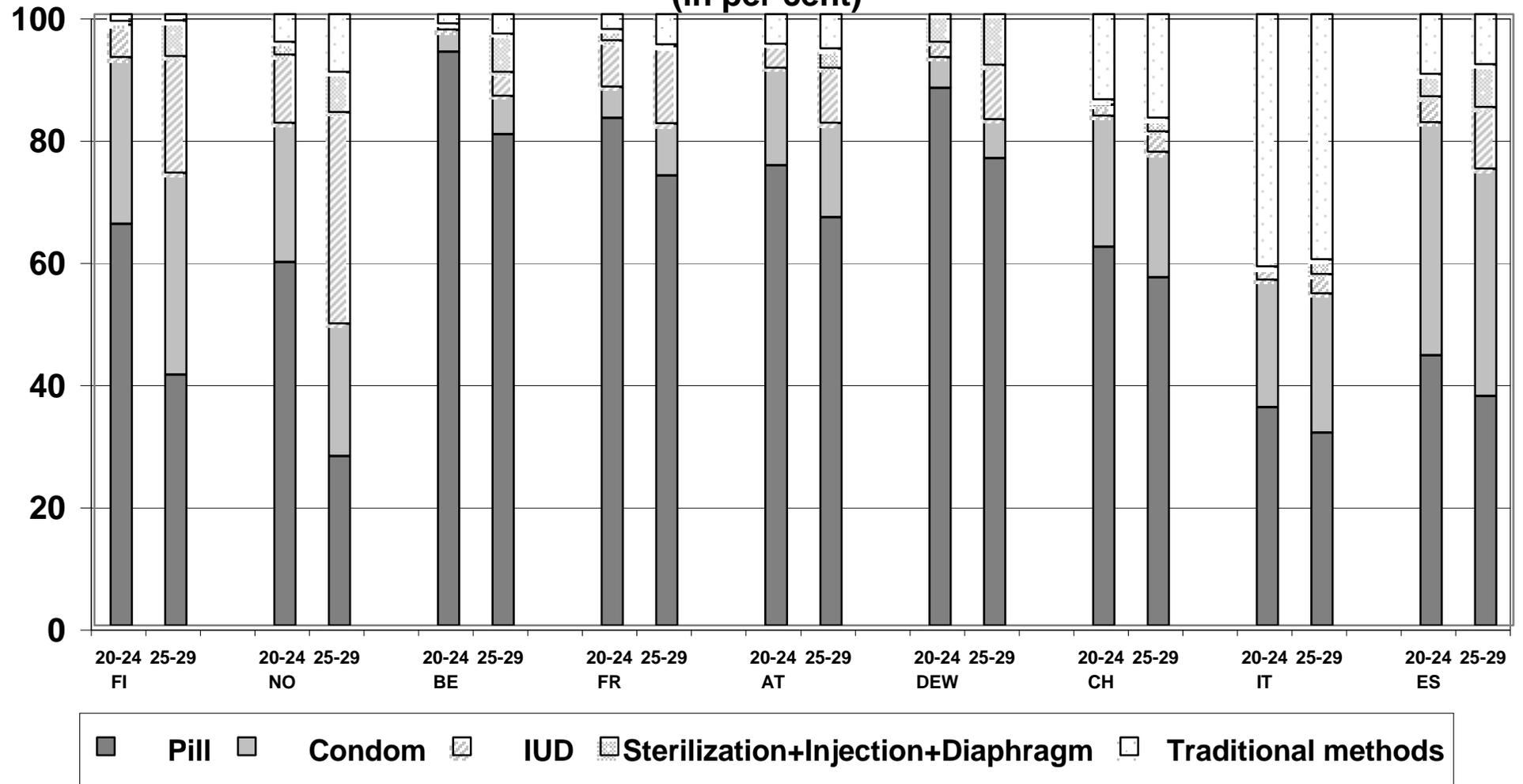


Figure 13

**PANEL A: Contraceptive mix of women not living in unions aged 20-24 and 25-29, eastern Europe (in per cent)**

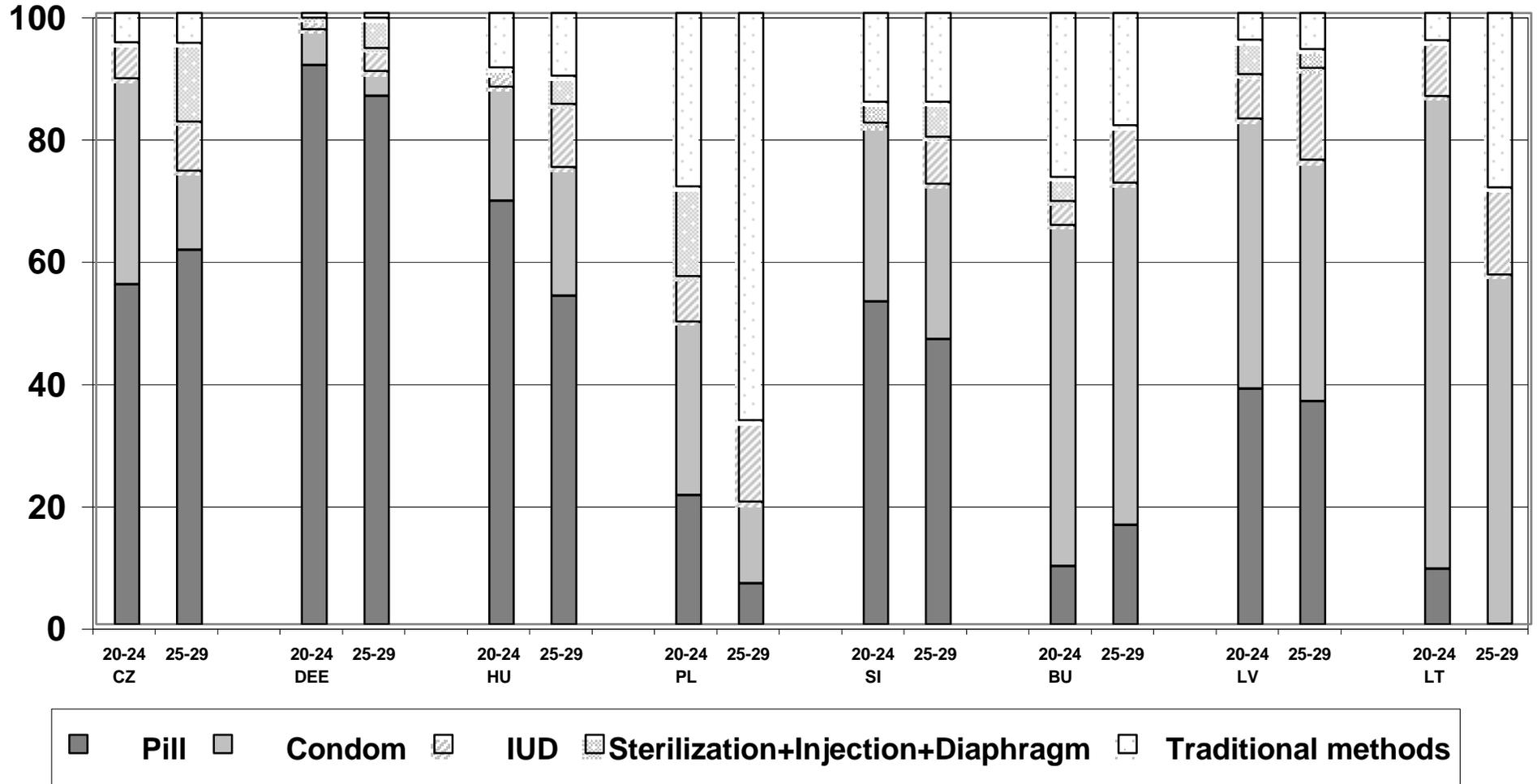


Figure 13

PANEL B: Contraceptive mix of women living in unions aged 20-24 and 25-29, eastern Europe  
(in per cent)

