# Introduction

The issue of immigration, and in particular of irregular migration, including both voluntary and forced movements, is among the hottest political and social topics on the European scene currently. During the past twenty years, the reasons for and consequences of international migration flows towards European Union member states have been increasingly attracting the attention of a variety of parties including the broader public, political figures, and the scientific community. The major reason for this augmented sensitivity in all types of immigration related issues stems from the fact that Western European countries that used to recruit a foreign working force have never defined themselves as countries of immigration and respectively have not foreseen the social and political consequences of migrant populations remaining on their territories. The de facto immigration countries have not adjusted their legal, political, and social structures to reflect long term settlement and, as an outcome, not only is the presence of "old" migrants from non-European origin often viewed as problematic but newer migration flows towards Europe also cannot be accommodated, since EU[1] countries lack both the experience of responding to spontaneous migration influxes and the adequate policies for integrating the new arrivals.

After the official termination of the recruitment of foreign workers in Western Europe during the 1970s, migration waves to Europe did not cease to exist as expected, but instead, not only did the guest workers not return to their home countries but also family members started joining them, second generations of children from foreign decent were born in Europe, and the numbers of asylum seekers from all around the world were steadily rising. The same trend was observed among the populations of foreign students who tend to remain in the host countries after completing their studies.

The European response to the ever-increasing numbers of immigrants since the late seventies was and presently is one of closing borders and a goal of reducing to a minimum the possibilities for legal settlement on EU territory. With some minor exceptions,

[1] A full list of the abbreviations used in the text can be consulted in Appendix 1.

including limited provisions for short-term temporary work abroad under the frameworks of bilateral agreements or through establishing small businesses if complying with rigorous criteria, the possibilities for legal economic migration to any of the EU member states are practically nonexistent. The creation of "Fortress Europe" however does not reduce the migration pressures and the attempts to keep the potential new immigrants "outside" are unsuccessful. Instead of diminishing the immigrant flows, the anti-immigrant policies created a new category of immigrants – undocumented immigrants. The lack of provisions for legal migration has also brought into existence numerous criminal networks, exploiting the profitable situation of migration pressures and closed borders. As an outcome, all forms of irregular migration flows, including undocumented workers, pendular migrants, trafficked persons, smuggled persons, false asylum seekers, false students, and "white" marriages have reached a level and magnitude never observed in the past.

Simultaneously, during the past fifteen years Europe has witnessed an intensive political, economic and geographical restructuring in its vast Eastern region. The transitional processes towards democracy and market economy in Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter CEE) and the political liberalization in the region had a large-scale impact on reshaping of the European map and creating new types of East-West political, economic and cultural relations. One major consequence of the global transformations in Central and Eastern Europe was the removal of all restrictions on traveling abroad, which the citizens of the former Soviet Block had to endure for over 40 years. Opening the borders of former communist countries was feared to result in overflowing of Western societies with newly liberated people looking for jobs in the West and enjoying the provisions of unrestricted exit from their home countries. Despite all fears of emerging waves of Eastern European migrants, the increased migration rates observed in the beginning of the transition period diminished and the predicted Eastern invasion never took place. Whether this is a result of the immediately introduced policy of restricting the provisions for legal entry and creating rigorous visa regimes for Central and Eastern Europeans in Western Europe is still not certain and probably never will be. What is certain

though is that during the years of transition huge proportions of the population of CEE remained impoverished, levels of corruption and crime in the region increased, perspectives for the future were rather vague, ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were on the rise, political situations in some parts of the former USSR were deteriorating, and the incidence of human rights violations and even genocide in CEE became a common everyday companion of the local populations. At the same time, former communist countries were pronounced as "safe" countries of origin and asylum applications from their nationals are rejected by default. Logically the irregular migrations from CEE increased. Ironically, looking at the official statistics one would indeed conclude that no massive migration from CEE took place while certain indicators suggest that the actual situation is quite different. Since we speak about irregular migrations, the reader should bear in mind that no exact figures could be provided, but some well-observed tendencies are still worth mentioning. For example the trafficking of Eastern European women is reaching higher proportions than the trafficking of woman from South-East Asia (IOM, 1999; IOM, 2001); in Spain, illegally working Eastern Europeans started to outnumber the traditional seasonal workers from Morocco at such a pace that the Spanish government had to opt for bilateral agreements in order to manage the undocumented flows (EC, 2004; Redondo, 2004); the word is that the cleaning sector in Brussels will collapse if the undocumented Poles decide to leave; during two consecutive years, the Dutch government organized numerous police raids aimed at removing the "dangerously" increasing Bulgarian and Romanian undocumented populations from Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague (Dutch Ministry of Justice: Press Releases, 2001-2003); undocumented Poles are the primary working force in Dutch greenhouses (de Waard & Westering, 2002); the same is true about the building and reconstruction sector in Benelux.

This concise presentation of the primary trend in the migration arena in Europe has not been made with the unique purpose of bringing to the surface the well known reality of undocumented populations working on the black market, experiencing multiple problems of exploitation, violations of basic human rights, life in precarious situations and limited chances for regularization. The purpose of this introduction is to pinpoint the fact that even

if general awareness about this reality is rather strong, the tradition in systematic research on undocumented migration is still in an initial stage of development in the European context. The same could be said about the knowledge of Eastern European migrations and more particularly about irregular migrations from post-totalitarian countries. The response to the post-1989 immigration phenomena was rather delayed and currently no established theoretical, methodological, and practical framework for research on irregular migrations from CEE can be identified. Knowledge about migrations from CEE in general and about undocumented migrations in particular is scarce and compartmentalized, aggregated, in many cases, on biased statistical data or as a response from a particular interest in a specific nationality group.

What hindered, in the first place, reliable research on new migrations from CEE was the lack of adequate data on Eastern European migrations. Before the political upheaval in former communist countries, there was no systematic research and analysis of any migration movement from the region. The pieces of available data turned out to be of doubtful quality because of inadequate systems of data collection and manipulation of the results for political purposes during the totalitarian past of CEE. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the term “immigration” was one of the taboo words in the Eastern Block, which could explain the lack of research on immigration and the incoherencies in the primary migration data. Another obstacle to the systematic research on Eastern European migrations is the predominantly undocumented character of the movements. The underground nature makes potential migration flows difficult to identify, hinders the location and the sampling of potential respondents, and makes extremely difficult any generalization of the data on undocumented migrations, thus discouraging many researchers to commence a study of such a population.

Looking at the traditions of migration research in Belgium reveals that the issue of international migration has been studied systematically and a wealth of knowledge of all facets of immigration presence in the country has been accumulated. The contributions on migration and migration related issues in Belgium are so diverse and numerous that a

summary of all trends of research and respectively major conclusions is a challenging task. Nevertheless, for outlining the research context, in which the current study over legal and undocumented Eastern Europeans will be positioned and respectively will seek to contribute, we will attempt to illustrate at least some of the primary areas of migration studies as addressed in Belgium.

One substantial volume of research has been in exploring the demographic and the social composition of the foreign population in Belgium – the historical roots for the development of immigrant populations. Among others, some of the authors who have discussed in detail these issues are Vranken & Martinello (1992); Eggerickx *et al.* (1999); Swyngedouw *et al*. (1999); Lesthaeghe (2000).

Housing conditions, access to housing, and geographical concentrations of foreign populations in Belgium are illustrated in Martens & Wolf (1974); Ketseloot & Cortie (1998); Kesteloot, (2005).

Another aspect of immigration studies in Belgium is the exploration of migrant employment: access to the labor market, the levels of discrimination against foreigners on the labor market, and the foreigners' self-employment activities. From the in-depth research in this area, we cannot fail to mention the contributions of Haex *et al*. (1976); Ouali & Rea (1995); Stoop & Booms (1997); Lambrecht *et al*. (2001); Martens & Verhoeven (2005).

Due to its social and political implications, the vastly problematic area of immigrant integration, ingroup-outgroup relations, social exclusion and discrimination against migrants, the formation and existence of negative attitudes towards migrants, and Belgian integration policy and migration managements, has continuously provoked research interest and has been extensively analyzed by Blommaert & Verscheuren (1992); Blommaert (1998); Phalet & Krekels (1998); Rea (2001); Phalet & Swyngedouw (2002); Gsir, Martiniello & Wets (2003); Phalet & Swyngedouw (2003); Boussetta (2005); Rea (2005).

The topics of political participation, ethnic mobilization, and self-organization of migrants have emerged as another field of research responding to the ever increasing numerical presence of migrants in Brussels. Some illustration of the particular social

scientific works in this area include, for example, Jacobs (1999); Bousetta (2001); Jacobs *et al*. (2002); Jacobs *et al*. (2004); Jacobs & Swyngedouw (2003); Martiniello (2005).

This concise presentation of one small facet of migration research in Belgium has been introduced to show that a tradition in migrations studies in Belgium was established over 30 years ago and has not overlooked any segment of the phenomenon of migration. Nevertheless, the body of literature has concentrated on the most numerous and prominent migrant groups legally present on the territory of Belgium, such as the migrants from Morocco and Turkey or of Moroccan and Turkish descent. In this context, the phenomenon of Eastern European migrations and more particularly of undocumented Eastern European Immigrants (hereafter EEI) has started to attracted academic attention only recently. The outcome of these contemporary research endeavors could be summarized as a collection of fragmentary insights about the national origins, motivations for coming to Belgium, and the primary working sectors of undocumented migrants. Knowledge about particular groups of Eastern European immigrants in the country is even more limited and as a rule focuses only on Polish migrants. In the latter case, however the authors rarely reveal the methods for data collection and the techniques for sampling of respondents. The accumulated information is indeed broad but has not been collected to test any theoretical assumption or to provide even minor predictions for future migration or residence plans of undocumented Poles.

In the presented framework, the current research on Eastern European immigrants in Brussels is designed be one of the studies contributing to the understanding of the migration history of the Eastern Europeans, the process of making migratory decisions, and, broadly, the life histories of immigrants after immigration. The research has also the ambition to contribute towards a better understanding of the nature and the consequences of undocumented migrations. Brussels, as the capital of the European Union, and geographically small compared to other multicultural cities such as London or Paris, but at the same time accommodating an enormous cultural diversity, hosting foreigners from

more than 200 national and ethnic origins (See Appendix 2), offers a unique opportunity for expanding the existing knowledge on both legal and undocumented Eastern European migrants and the way Eastern Europeans integrate into multicultural spaces.

By focusing on two research groups, namely Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels, the study will attempt to collect knowledge in multiple areas: from creating a broad and systematic description of the research groups to challenging the presumptions of major theories for explaining the phenomenon of international migration. Considering the current state of research on undocumented and professional migrants from Eastern Europe in Belgium, the present study is designed on the first place to be an exploratory study over a largely unfamiliar population. The necessary initial step would be therefore to collect detailed descriptive information about the Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels including issues such as: immigrants' demographic characteristics; educational status and language skills; living conditions before and after migrations; occupational practices and employment history; incidences of working accidents; mistreatment by employers; prosecution by the police or work inspection services and coping strategies in such occasions. We will proceed by looking into the immigrants' social life and prevailing types of social relationships, their subjective feelings of integration, the ways leisure time is spent, and the general social life of the Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels. An in depth analysis of the individuals' migration history, reasons for migration, implementation of migration, and future migration plans will not be missing from the analysis. An in-depth examination of the motivations for settling in Brussels and bringing over family and kin will also constitute part of the current research.

Since the data about the Eastern European migration history in general and the Polish and Bulgarian migration movements in particular are largely contradictory, the present research cannot be built on a strong tradition of Eastern European migration research. Under these circumstances, it is inevitable that the step towards empirically analyzing the migration movements under focus must be preceded by informing the reader about the aggregated up to date information on East-West migrations, the patterns in these migrations and the respective issues of data quality and data inconsistencies. To pursue this

goal, the first part of the present contribution will concentrate on a detailed analysis of the history of Eastern European migrations and their positioning in the global European context. We will proceed by first briefly outlining the general European context of migration in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to a comprehensive reconstruction of the trends in population movements from and within Eastern Europe, including the pre-Second World War period as well as the most recent migratory phenomena. The crucial point in this analysis will be to reveal that the post-1989 status quo in Western Europe did not stop or discourage potential migrants from Eastern Europe but only redirected them towards employing alternative migration strategies, which are consistently irregular and result in the creation of a stock of undocumented migrants in the countries of destination.

Concluding this more general illustration of how Eastern European migrations develop and how they relate to the Western European context, we will focus our attention on the particular profiles of Bulgaria and Poland as migration sending countries in Chapter 3 and 4, respectively. With some country specific exceptions, the uniform structure of presentation will include migrations before the fall of totalitarian regimes, after the transition to democracy, and most recent migrations, which will allow for easier comparison between the Polish and the Bulgarian migration histories. Particular attention will be given to issues of data quality and data inconsistencies, and we will note when cases of extreme data incoherencies are discovered in the literature. This step is viewed as necessary, since it not only exemplifies the poor information about a phenomenon of great impact, but also leads to a differential interpretation of the magnitude of the Eastern European migrations and, consequently, to poor measures for migration management in the field of East-West population mobility. The comprehensive analysis of the Polish and Bulgarian migrations will reveal that throughout the years, Belgium has become one of the most preferred destinations for both Poles and Bulgarians and currently these two populations are among the numerically largest immigrant populations from Eastern Europe in Belgium.

In Chapter 5, we will outline the history of Belgium as a country of immigration, the general trends in migration to Belgium, and the demographic characteristics of the foreign population in the country. Since requesting asylum is one of the few channels for legal migration, we will dedicate part of the chapter to a comprehensive presentation of the Belgian reception system, the trends in refugee movements towards Belgium, and the respective recognition rates, the latter constituting a major indicator for how the undocumented population in the country might develop further.

After presenting the general migration contexts of Europe, Eastern Europe, Poland, Bulgaria, and Belgium, we will direct our attention to an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of "undocumented migration" in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 will be opened by a reflection on the terminological discordances as to how exactly to refer to undocumented migrants. Since this topic is usually avoided in the literature and the terms to denote undocumented migrants are various and quite often manipulated by social and political interests, we will provide arguments for the use of the term "undocumented migrant" instead of illegal immigrant or clandestine immigrant.

Defining who are undocumented migrants we will progress by summarizing the wide variety of research on undocumented migration as undertaken worldwide and then we will focus at length on the knowledge of undocumented migrants in Brussels as accumulated until the present day as well as the advantages and the drawbacks of the conducted research. Chapter 6 will be concluded by presenting the different actors who provide support and assistance for undocumented migrants in Belgium.

The second part of the present contribution will be dedicated to the particular research goals and the chosen research methodology. Therefore, in Chapter 7 we will begin by revealing the selection criteria for including Bulgarian and Polish immigrants in Brussels as unique research groups. Subsequently we will elaborate on the two phases of the present study: 1) conducting an all encompassing exploratory study about the Polish and Bulgarian populations of undocumented and professional migrants in Brussels; 2) testing the assumptions of two theoretical models (the cumulative causation theory and the

social capital theory) to explain the process of continuous migration flows from Bulgaria and Poland to Belgium. We will conclude the chapter by exploring if the undocumented EEI in Brussels are being transformed to a new marginalized class of people in Belgium.

In Chapter 8, we will treat thoroughly the adopted research methodology, the research design, and the research instruments. The choice of the ethnosurvey as a particular research method in the current study will be first justified. Afterwards the difficulties in reaching and identifying the scattered, highly mobile, and hidden population of undocumented migrants are adopted as an argument for selecting the snowball sampling technique as the only appropriate tool for selecting research respondents. The chapter lastly focuses on the creation of a standardized questionnaire for studying undocumented migrants.

The last part of the dissertation will be dedicated to presenting the obtained research results. Chapter 9 will first provide an account of the process of identifying and sampling respondents for our study. Then the results of the exploratory study of the Bulgarian undocumented migrants in Brussels will be revealed, followed by a similar depiction of Bulgarian professional migrants. Following the same structure, in Chapter 10 we will respectively draw a portrait of the Polish population in Brussels.

Chapter 11, will be dedicated to examining the assumptions of the two theoretical models as applied to the case of Eastern European migrations. The social capital theory and the cumulative causation theory will be shown to have limited exploratory powers to clarify the contemporary Polish and Bulgarian migrations to Brussels. In the very particular research case, the reader will be invited to reconsider the adequacy of classical push-pull theories as being more adequate to elucidate why and how peace time migration from the Eastern territories of Europe occur.

As a final point in Chapter 12, the results of exploring the issue of immigrants' marginalization will indicate that indeed the undocumented migrants are being socially marginalized, but under no circumstances may one speak about the creation of an underclass of undocumented EEI in Brussels.