



Inštitut za ekonomska raziskovanja
Institute for Economic Research

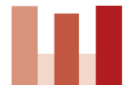


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CHILDBIRTH-RELATED LEAVES IN THE EUROPEAN
FORMER SOCIALIST COUNTRIES:
TRANSITIONS IN THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES

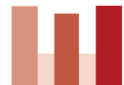
International Leave Policy & Research Network 15th Annual Seminar
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NOTE: The presented results are not final; this is research in progress.



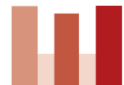
Background (1)

- **Early comparative literature often treated former socialist countries (FSC) as a homogenous group (similar policies & reforms);**
- **Recent works illustrate their diversity, but**
- **Still little is known on leave policies in FSC in the 2nd half of the 20th century.**
 - particularly in the former Yugoslav & Soviet countries
 - & about the development pattern of leave policies
- **First attempt to map the history of leave policies in the European FSC (Stropnik, 2003)** → challenge: collection of data for the 1980s and 1990s; lack of written sources in English; information mostly provided by colleagues through individual requests
- **Our current research: first attempt to map leave policies in these countries in the last 30 years** → challenge continues: comparative sources (even in and for recent years) unreliable due to mistakes (particularly ILO-, but also EU-funded research)



Background (2)

- **Leave policies differ in initial policy logic & scheme design**
 - **Policy logic: FSC – employment-based schemes, followed by the introduction of citizenship-based schemes** (pronounced in 1990s - debate between so-called sameness versus difference feminism)
 - **Scheme design: FSC – generous and comparatively long maternity leaves; introduction of gender-sensitive elements in the framework of the EU negotiations** (e.g., parental leave in **Croatia (HR)** as late as in 2009, **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH)** still has only maternity leave)
- **Outcomes?**
 - Long career breaks for women & discrimination at the labour market
 - Traditional care practices
- **Little is known about differences between FSC** (e.g., **Slovenia** vs. other ex-Yugoslav countries)



Outline of research

Paid leave

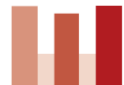
- Maternity
- Paternity
- Parental

Comparing

- Countries
- Groups of countries (inter and intra)

Situation in 4 points of time

- Just before transition (1989)
- Before the 8 countries' accession to the EU (2003)
- Five years after these countries' (and two years after another two countries') accession to the EU (2009)
- In 2017/2018



1989: Before the political, economic and social transition

- **Eligibility mostly limited to *employed persons* and only gradually extended to cover large *agricultural population* and the *self-employed***
- **Insurance used to be voluntary for self-employed** (in **CZ, RO, BG, LI** and **LT** until the early 2000s)
- **Long leave as alternative to expensive nurseries and frequent leave for care of a sick child** (as a consequence of exposure to infections in nurseries (Erler et al., 1994)); **HU** promoted home childcare for youngest children since 1967 and parental leave since 1985)
- **On the other hand: nurseries were favoured in many former socialist countries** (childcare facilities were widespread, highly subsidized from central and local government budgets, and even free of charge, e.g., in **ex-Yugoslavia** and the **Soviet Union (SU)**; in the **SU** companies were obliged to provide nursery facilities (Pöldma, 1995))
- **Long paid leave (+ childcare) allowed women to combine work and childbearing (female labour force participation rates were close to those of men)**

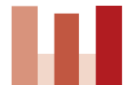


... positive peculiarities

Poland: since the 1970s the maternity leave granted to female farmers (family helpers) in the private agricultural sector: 8 weeks, average pension; still in force in the 2000s (Kocourková, 2002)

Positive discrimination of single mothers

- higher income threshold for entitlement to parental leave benefit in **PL**, still in force in early 2000s (Bodnárová et al., 2001)
- longer maternity leave for single mothers in the former **Czechoslovakia** (Sipos, 1994; Kocourkova, 2002); in **CZ** and **SK**: 28+9 weeks; abandoned in **CZ** in 2008, still in force in **SK**)



Transition period

- **Break with the former systems: 1989-1991**
- **Maternity leave earnings compensation rates decreased:** in **HU** from 100% to 70% in 1996; in **BG** from 100% to 90% in 1999 (European Commission, 2002a and 2002b); in **CZ** from 90% to 69% in 1994, also applied to a lower assessment base (Sipos, 1994; Kocourková, 2002)
- **Declining standard of living: flat-rate benefits unaffordable** (**BG**: parental leave till the child's age of two, but parents tended to use it only until the child turned one)
- **HU: abolishment of parental leave** (GYED: till the child turns two years with earnings compensation rate of 65-75%) **in 1996 as part of the economic austerity measures** (many pregnant women requested an early childbirth prior to 15 April in order to enjoy the right to childcare leave; Szabo, 1996) → **Reintroduced in 2000** at 70% of the earnings (Gál et al., 2003)
- **Albania could no longer afford parental leave, particularly not a paid one** (Suzor, 1999)
- **Number of places in crèches declined:** **PL**: by 76% in 1989–2003; only 2% of children aged 0-2 y. attended crèches in 2003 (Kotowska, 2005); **RO**: introduction of childcare leave in 1990 was reaction to a lack of childcare provisions (Muresan, Haragus, Haragus and Schröder, 2008)

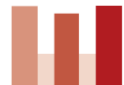
Coping strategies (1)

- **Eligibility to parental leave was widened**
 - **High unemployment rates influenced leave regulation**
- **SI (1995): earnings compensation extended** to mothers whose permanent employment was terminated without their violation or fault during pregnancy and maternity leave
- **HU (1996):** maternity benefit paid also to mothers with **less than 180 days of social insurance** in the two years prior to delivery (Tárkányi, 2003); **from 2001 the periods of study in secondary education counted as insurance period** → also pregnant women without contributory entitlement can receive maternity benefits if they had studied full-time for at least one year in a university or a college within two years prior to delivery (European Commission, 2002b); the same applies for eligibility for childcare benefit (GYED)
- **PL:** from 1994 the **parental leave could be extended if both parents remained unemployed** (Golinowska et al., 2003)
- **SK (early 1990s):** introduced a somewhat **longer maternity leave** for unemployed mothers
- **RO: increase in the length of childcare leave by another year** (two years in total) **in 1997 was aimed at decreasing female unemployment** (Muresan, Haragus, Haragus and Schröder, 2008)



Coping strategies (2)

- **Parental leave extended in some countries to offset cutbacks in childcare provision, but also to solve the problem of excess labour supply** (**former Soviet Union**, 1990: 1 y. + 0.5 y. + 1.5 y. unpaid; **RO**: 1 y. + 0.7 y in the mid-1997 + 0.3 y. in 2001); **however, BG** 3→2 y. in 1999)
- **LI: in 1991-1994 option for mothers to care at home for their children up to age 7**, however without a job guarantee
- **HR: since 1996 one of the parents may opt for unpaid leave from the child's age of 1 to its age of 3** (however, social security contributions are not paid); but this leave is **paid to parents with 3 or more children and in the case of multiple births** (retraditionalization discourse; closely connected to ethnicized nationalism)



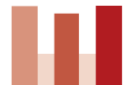
Influence of EU accession

(8 countries in 2004, 2 in 2006 and 1 in 2013)

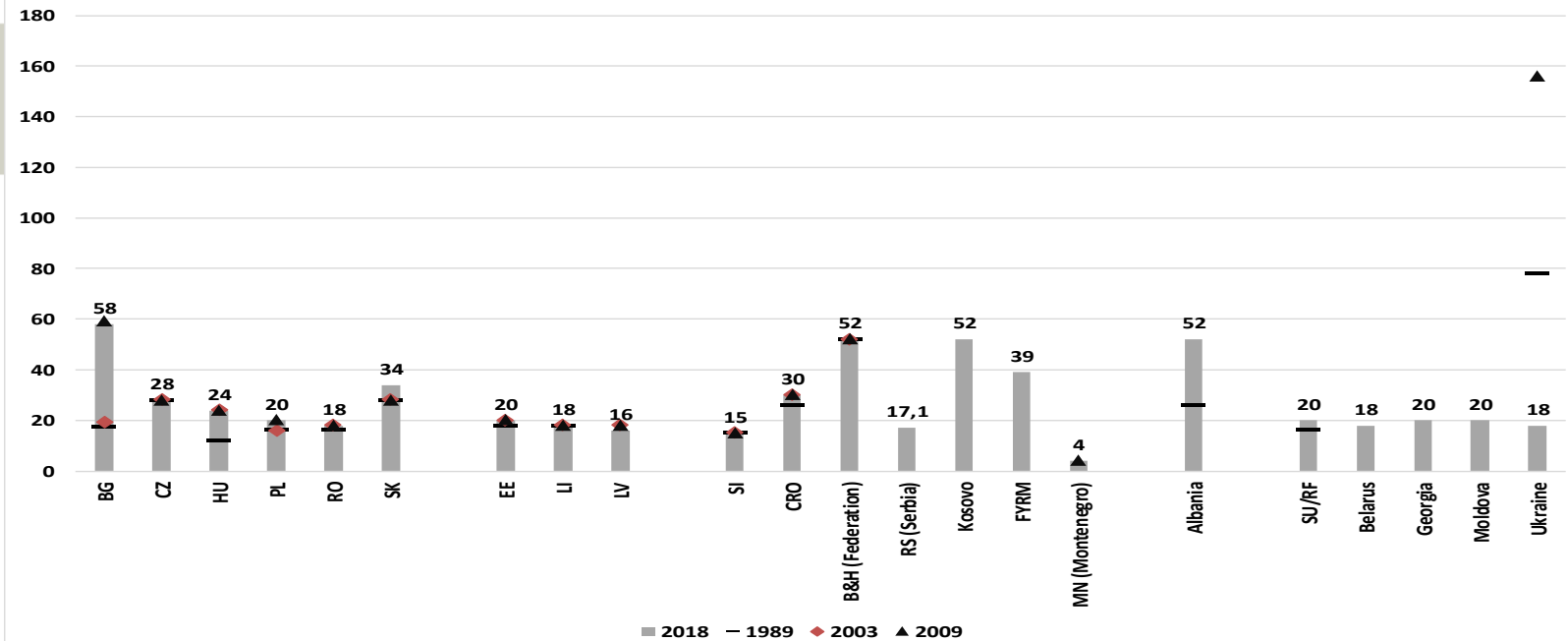
Maternity and parental provisions in the accession countries often more generous than the compulsory ones for the EU Member States

→ However, in the process of EU accession the countries were required to adapt their parental leave regulations to the EU policy of equal treatment of both sexes (1996 EU Directive on Parental Leave: individual right of men and women workers to parental leave for at least three months)

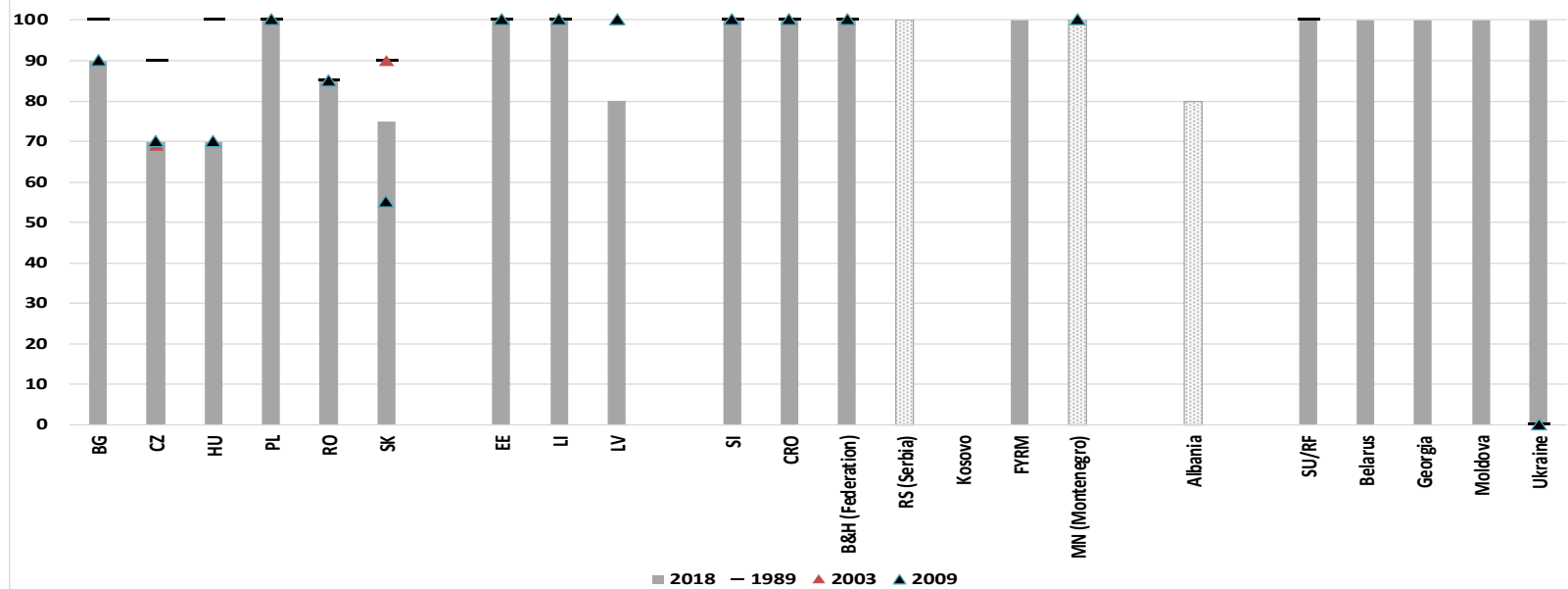
- **Paternity leave in LV: up to 10 days at 80% of previous earnings** (accepted in 2000; introduction postponed until the social insurance budget reached a positive balance and repaid its loans to the general state budget)
- **Paternity leave in SI: EU regulation interpreted as requiring paternity leave of 90 days** (accepted in 2001, gradually implemented in 2003-2005)
- **Parental leave in HR: introduction of individual right to parental leave in 2009 & 2-month father's quota in 2013**



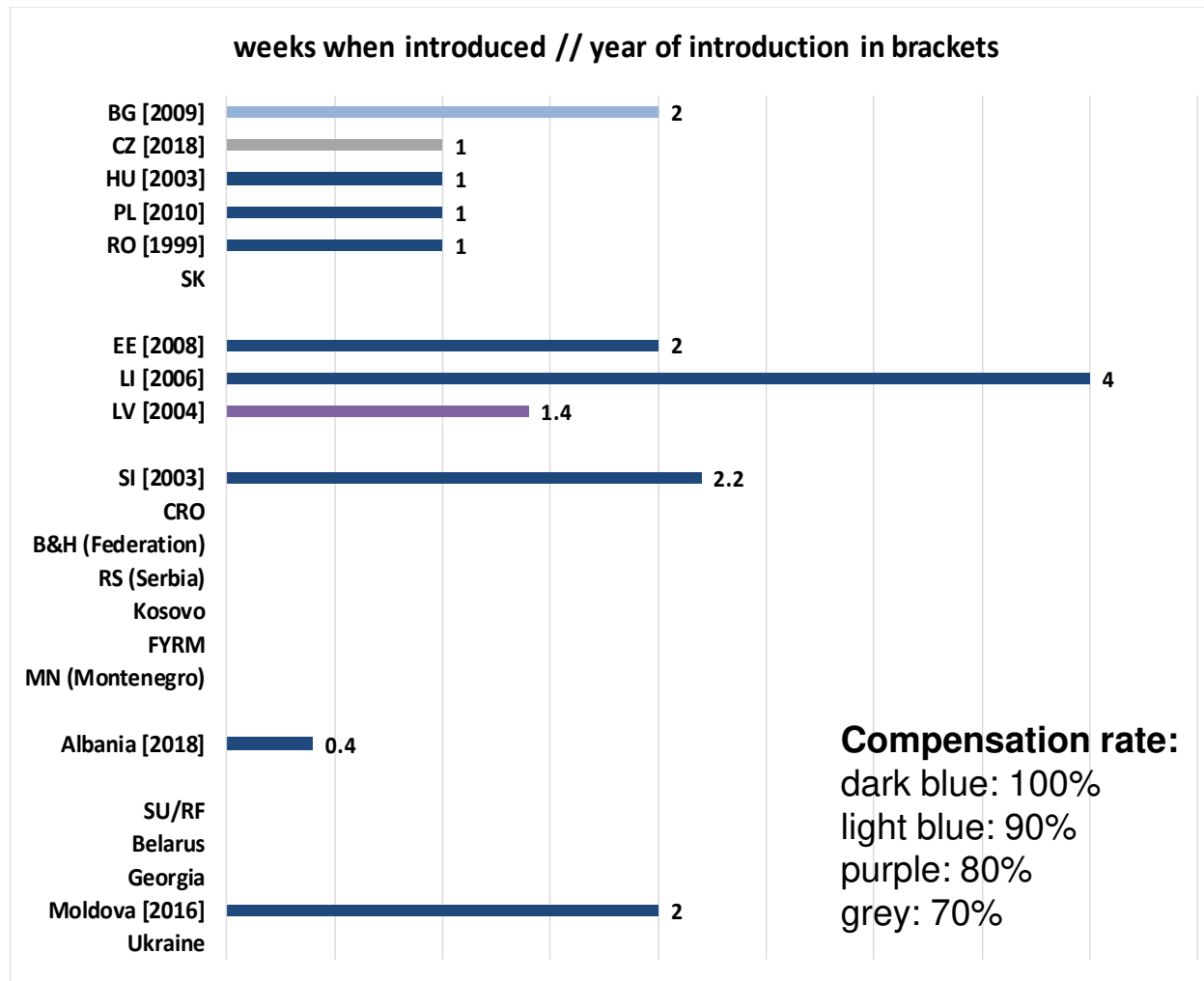
MATERNITY LEAVE (weeks for the 1st child)



MATERNITY BENEFIT (max compensation rate)



Paternity leave



Afterwards extended in:

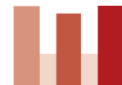
- **PL** to 2 weeks
- **RO** to 2 weeks (2nd week conditioned)
- **SI** – gradually to 4.3 weeks

The crisis period:

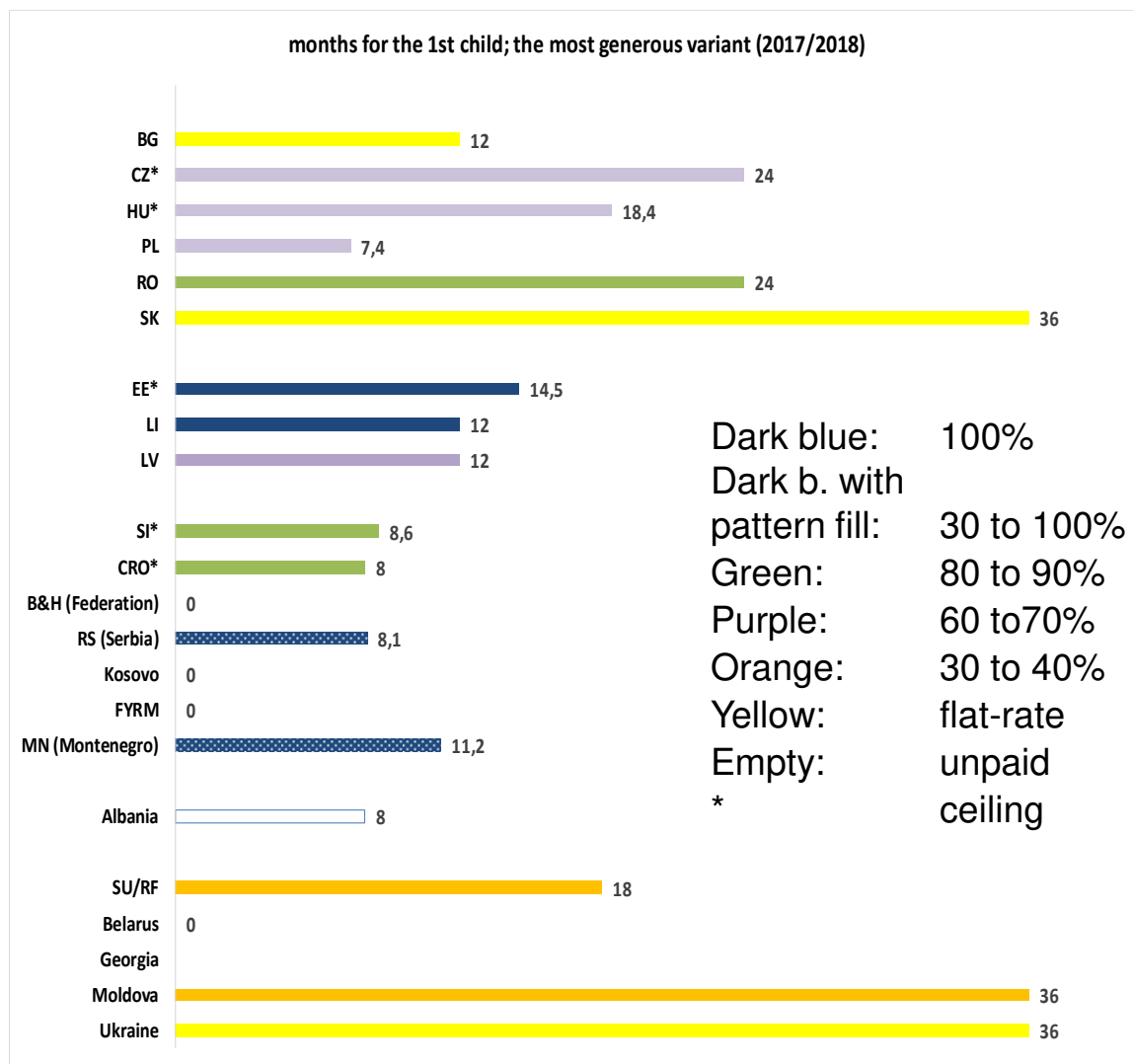
temporary changes in compensation rates (e.g., **Baltic states, SI**)

Some countries:

paid days of absence in case of childbirth (regulated by Labour Law, e.g., in **HR** and **BIH**)



Parental leave



In some countries the parental leave may be longer, but with lower benefits (e. g., in CZ, HU, EE, LI, LV and RF)

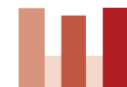
Reforms of different character in the last 30 years (examples):

- Leave extended in EE and HR, but shortened in PL
- Option to use shorter leave with higher benefit introduced in CZ and LI
- Benefit level increased in LV
- Means-testing withdrawn in SK and PL



Kinds of leave in 2015

	MATERNITY	PATERNITY	PARENTAL
BG	+	+	+
CZ	+	+	+
HU	+	+	+
PL	+	+	+
RO	+	+	+
SK	+		+
EE	+	+	+
LI	+	+	+
LV	+	+	+
SI	+	+	+
CRO	+		+
B&H (Federation)	+		+
RS (Serbia)	+		+
Kosovo	+		+
FYRM	+		+
MN (Montenegro)	+		+
Albania	+		+
SU/RF	+		+
Belarus	+		+
Georgia	+		+
Moldova	+	+	+
Ukraine	+		+



Discussion (1)

Generously long leave: up to the child's age of one, two, three or even four

- Long leave contains hidden constraints for female professional careers
- The notion that a mother should take care of a child up to 3 years of age is widespread and women tend to spend this period in parental leave (e.g., in **CZ** and **SK**)

Full or high earnings compensation during maternity leave in most of the European FSC

- However, **parental leave compensation rate rarely 100%** (**EE**, **LI** and **SI**).
- Where duration over 1 y., earnings compensation only for a certain period of time; after that **(low) flat-rate benefit**, even means-tested (**PL**)

a) Flat rate benefits: disincentive for mothers with high income to use long parental leave (Hungarian experience: the benefit was fully used mostly by unskilled women who suffered the smallest loss of income or even received more income while on leave than if working; depending on the level of a flat-rate benefit; Sipos, 1994)

b) Poland: low income threshold for entitlement to parental leave benefit (income per family member <25% the national average wage (Bodnárová et al., 2001), in force at least until the early 2000s)



Discussion (2): Leave for care of the child or a work-life balance measure?

The prevailing main purposes of leave:

- **In the socialist regime:** enabling childbearing for working women (lack of workforce), even stimulating fertility in some countries
- **In the transition period:** alleviation of unemployment, coping strategy when the provision of childcare services deteriorated; in some countries stimulation of fertility (e.g., in HR)
- **In the 21st century:** work-life balance (for both men and women) → paternity leave, father's quotas, longer leave if fathers take some of it; **however**, in some of the countries, strong familialism (e.g., in BIH and MN) and pronatalist discourse (e.g., in HR and RS) are still present

EU accession accelerated the adoption of measures/acts that are in line with the current (at that time) EU policy and priorities

- Recent case: **RS**, 2017 act: work-life balance explicitly stated as the purpose of the leave

