Dinmukhamed Shermakhanbetuly:
Fertility patterns and trends in post-socialist countries contrasted with Sweden and the United States of America

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The master thesis addresses the issue of recent fertility changes in six selected countries including Kazakhstan. It aims to identify patterns of fertility behavior experienced by populations living in different socio-economic conditions and various political climates. The main question is whether demographic trends or patterns can be later repeated by countries delayed in their developmental trajectory or whether deviations in some countries prevail and thus create new distinct pattern.

Dinmukhamed Shermakhanbetuly has submitted the work of 97 pages divided into two parts: theoretical and analytical. The thesis starts with the overview of literature, listing main publications dealing with the issue of fertility determinants, theory of the second demographic transition, etc. A special attention is further paid to the references addressing new developments in former socialist countries. In the chapter *Theoretical background and historical overview of fertility decline* a reader is informed about the principles of the first and second demographic transitions, contraceptive revolution, ongoing postponement transition, and main characteristics accompanying such profound changes. The effect of gender equality, female labor force participation, and the impact of family policies are not forgotten. For elaborating analytical part, different data sources (international databases as well as national statistics) and methods (simple but also more advanced) have been necessary and are correctly described in the special methodological chapter.

The analytical part starts with providing descriptive characteristics of recent fertility trends in Sweden, USA, the Russian Federation, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and the Czech Republic. In this part not only fertility figures are presented but also the actual conditions related to family formation of each respective country are documented via types of leaves, child allowances, baby bonus, deductions, and credits. The short historical context is not missing. The core of the analytical part consists of comparative fertility analysis based on total fertility rate, absolute and relative age specific fertility profiles, weakening correlation between fertility timing and overall fertility level, rising mean age at first live birth, and other indicators of country differentiation based on birth order. The development of extramarital fertility patterns follows. Country typology is first based on descriptive relation between total fertility rate and the percentage of extramarital births. This issue has been extended when decomposition approach has been applied. Finally, clustering countries according to main fertility indicators has pointed out that the same formal demographic indicators do not necessarily mean similar external conditions. It is particularly striking when Kazakhstan and USA are compared because they belong to the same cluster.

To conclude, the author, Dinmukhamed Shermakhanbetuly, proved by this master thesis the ability to delimit the topic, to investigate it with appropriate methods, and more particularly to comment the results with an understanding of a broader context. The text does not contain visible errors. Therefore, I recommend the thesis to be submitted.

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