

the global population. This model considered by some Bulgarian scholars as fifth stage of the demographic transition, probably might lead to the end of the Homo sapiens existence.

Avoiding of such perspective is to be among the key problems assigned to scientific researchers and considered as responsibility not only regarding the next generation, but the human being surviving on the planet.

Key words: global issues, demographic transition, economic growth, reproductive level, demographic crisis

NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH IN EUROPE

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The trend of population decreasing since the beginning of the 21st century in some European countries is considered in this article. The study is aimed at presenting the empirical evolution of negative population growth in order to make a raw assessment of the dimensions and scale of this phenomenon as well as of its components and their trends over the past decade.

The results of an analysis of the total rate of population increase dynamics among the EU countries over the period 2001–2012 are presented in this article. Three indicators were used in the analysis: total rate of population growth, crude rate of natural increase and crude rate of net migration. A 4-group classification of the countries was applied to the indicators analysed focussing on the negative and zero population growth. Thus, a general estimate of the evolution of the groups of countries with decreasing or stagnating population over the period considered was made. Data of Eurostat datasets and of the UN Population Department publications were used in the study.

Causes for negative population growth emerging in some of the European countries over the period mentioned are considered. Its general demographic effects are outlined for the countries having high values and longstanding trend of population decrease after the example of Bulgaria.

Key words: negative population growth, total rate of population change, crude rate of natural increase, crude rate of net migration

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INTRODUCTION

The future population growth and structure as a whole became particularly challenging questions to both the societies and the governments of a number of developed countries over the past and current decade. Habitually, demographers, geographers and researchers in social sciences are the leading figures in those debates as they give explanations to the changes in population indicators and make assessments as well as forecasts and projections of their future evolution. The significant reduction of fertility and its longstanding retaining under the population replacement level has been among the main reasons of the grown interest to the prospects and scenarios of population development. The gradual conversion of international migration into a population growth driving force for many developed countries as a whole or their territorial units (Lanzieri, 2007: 2) is also among the paramount motives to study the long-term effects of a given population reproduction regime. The high speed of population ageing in the developed countries is the third most important cause which maintains the interest to population development scenarios. The demographic changes arising from ethno-cultural variety, time-varying formation, types and structure of families and households along with the transformation of individuals' values and aspirations, changing cohabitation behaviour, etc., are also among the complicated demographic problems which the today's society encounters (Eurostat, 2007: 1). In other words, nowadays the need to study a great number of problems related to the demographic characteristics of society has become more and more pressing.

Since the beginning of this century more and more attention has been paid to the sets of population development scenarios published by international organisations (such as UN Population Department, ILO, Eurostat, etc.) or separate institutes. The purpose of these exercises is mostly demonstrative: to exhibit the possible paths of future population evolution based on the adopted assumptions of fertility, mortality and migration. As it is pointed out in the methodological guide, all Eurostat long-term population projections, including the regional ones, are in essence scenarios of development (Lanzieri, 2007: 11). They contain several variants (usually three or four) which have to be interpreted only as possible, alternative paths of population evolution and it is implicit that the projection results could turn aside beyond the scope outlined by each of those variants. It is imperative to take into consideration that none of the variants results has to be considered as confidence interval boundary in the statistical meaning of the term. Population development scenarios do not have to be used as forecasts in the truest sense of the word (Lanzieri, 2007: 1). They are an analytical instrument by means of which the effects of some changes in the population reproduction regime, set through the assumptions, could be studied.

Population development scenarios differ from the demographic forecasts at least in one very substantial feature: the time horizon they span. 20-year period is adopted in the demographic forecast practice as an utmost possible time horizon for a long-term forecast. A major reason for that is that the forecast models are drawn from assumptions largely derived from prevailing demographic trends in the reference period. It is quite true that the evolution of the main demographic processes (fertility and mortality) are notable for their considerable lag, i.e. high dependence of the