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THE “AUTHENTIC” RURAL DEPOPULATION OF BULGARIA

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Abstract. *The scope and pace of depopulation of Bulgaria’s rural regions have long turned into a major social evil and have undoubtedly been a hampering factor for this nation’s development. The pace of depopulation of villages in Bulgaria throughout the last seven decades stands among the highest in the world and the trend toward its acceleration leads to a growth in the scope of the municipalities and settlement categories affected. Despite the serious damages that rural depopulation has caused to the country and to the chances of its rural areas for positive demographic, social and economic development, of ever larger agricultural regions, there are not many studies by Bulgarian researchers working in areas such as demography, geography of settlements, regional economy, sociology or economic history. The paper below presents a new approach to the study of the real pace experienced by rural depopulation along the period 1946–2011 of rural population between the censuses over the indicated period based on the dynamics found in the number of the “authentic” rural population. The shortest explanation of this term (which has not been used in any scientific research efforts hitherto) is that “authentic” rural population means the village residents who have always been rural for the entire period of the study i.e. localities that have not been administratively affiliated to cities and have never been promoted to the category of townships.*

Keywords: “authentic” rural population; rural depopulation; pace of depopulation; rural flight; rural-urban internal migration flow, demographic desert.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of depopulation is usually considered with two main projections: as a general reduction of population within a nation and as a process of depopulation by regions, subnational entities and individual localities. Depopulation may be defined as a consequence of the phenomenon of the mass and comprehensive resettlements from villages to townships during the industrial and post-industrial development period. The uneven distribution of the economic growth across the territory of the country is a reason for the different grades of the damage suffered by the rural population's demographic stability and by the wholesomeness of the rural settlement network seen from both a general and regional perspective. The last seven decades saw the number of Bulgaria's rural population decline 2.5 times and the National Register of Populated Places has deleted nearly 1000 villages for a number of reasons: total depopulation, mergers with other villages, aggregation to towns as city neighbourhoods or promotion of villages into townships¹. The extreme manifestation of the process of rural flight is the emergence of the so called "demographic deserts", i.e. regions where the population density has fallen beyond 10 persons per square kilometre (Luis Saez et al. 2011)². This paper sets the focus on the refinement in the studies on the dynamics of depopulation of this nation's rural regions for the period between the censuses carried out in 1946 and 2011. The practical sense of comparisons between the pace of depopulation across the rural population by subnational entities, settlement categories and individual rural localities consists in the fact that the dynamics manifested in the past in the number of their population has greatly predetermined their future demographic development subject to the presence of identical conditions and trends in the natural reproduction, migration flow destinations and rural regions' socio-economic development.

THE "AUTHENTIC" RURAL POPULATION AS AN APPROACH TOWARD THE STUDY OF BULGARIAN VILLAGE'S DEPOPULATION

A more thorough tracing of the dynamics of depopulation of villages in Bulgaria over the second half of the last century leads us to the conclusion on the impact of a number of political and socio-economic factors, the strongest among which has been the impact of the spontaneous national industrialisation and urbanisation and the forced collectivisation of peasants' land and farming implement carried out by the communist regime installed in Bulgaria after 1944 and transforming those peasants into low-paid labour force (Gruev 2009: 331-336). Village-to-city high resettlement waves emerging by the late 1950s and early 1960s are a principal root cause of the gradual deterioration in the demographic situation

¹ REFERENCES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF POPULATED PLACES: <http://www.nsi.bg/nrm/index.php?f=8&ezik=bul>

² http://www.ceddar.org/content/files/articulof_349_01_DT2011-6.pdf.