

MIGRATIONS

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POTENTIAL OF THE BULGARIAN COMMUNITIES ABROAD FOR OVERCOMING THE DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *The article examines the different stages in the development of the immigration policy of Bulgaria after 1989 regarding the Bulgarians abroad. The different scenarios of the replacement migration in Bulgaria are also examined in accordance with the methodology developed by the United Nations Population Division for its calculation. The migrant potential of the Bulgarian diaspora is compared with the volume of the replacement migration. It is concluded that the number of the Bulgarian diaspora is not sufficient to allow for permanent resolving the existing problems in the demographic reproduction. For this reason, the resettlement of Bulgarians from abroad in Bulgaria can only be an instrument for short- and medium-term impact on demographic processes.*

Keywords: Bulgarian Diaspora; Replacement Migration; Migration Policy; Demographic Crisis.

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After 1989, a number of different acts were adopted in Bulgaria aimed at placing the contacts and relationships of the Bulgarian State with Bulgarian communities abroad into a legal framework. Some of those acts considered our fellow countrymen as a demographic reserve, which is why an attempt was made to influence the process of their return to their historical homeland. The expectation is that this might be one of the main methods to counteract the demographic crisis.

The chronological review of the activities within that scope shows that the first move in that direction was the Decision no. 336 of the Council of Ministers whereby the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad was tasked with rendering aid, including financial aid, to individuals of Bulgarian origin who were permanently established in the Republic of Bulgaria. To that end, the Ministry of Finance developed Individual norms for rendering financial aid, however, while the Agency's budget was quite limited in its resources, no increase of those resources was foreseen. That was the reason why 1996 saw the practical termination of payment of financial aids to our fellow countrymen who were permanently settling in Bulgaria.

The difficulties encountered gave rise to the adoption of decision No 24 of 10 December 1996 by the Council for Regional Policy, Cross-Border Infrastructure Systems and Local Authorities at the Council of Ministers. On its basis, the fundamental provisions and the programme for actions related to the state policy towards the persons of Bulgarian origin who were permanently established in Bulgaria were developed. In its essence, it is the first governmental interagency programme to emerge in the times of transition. The developed programme was to be valid for "several years", and its termination was bounded to overcoming the economic crisis. Even then, the long-term goal orientation envisaged the possibility of influencing the demographic processes in the country by reducing the demographic disparities in the development of the different types of regions: depopulated, mountainous, border, etc. The exacerbation of the economic crisis and its escalation into the political one in early 1997 and the change of government were the main reasons why the programme developed remained a good wish and was never be implemented.

The next stage in the development of the idea of creating a modern Bulgarian immigration programme, oriented mainly to the Bulgarian communities abroad, was the commissioning in 1999 to the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad to develop a draft programme called the Strategy for permanent return and settlement in the country of Bulgarians living outside Bulgaria. Taking into account the demographic trends in the Republic of Bulgaria, the strategy emphasised that in the long-term future, the settlement of 200–300 thousand Bulgarians abroad was foreseen. At that time, this number was seen as a realistic volume of the immigration flow of persons of Bulgarian origin. The Council of Ministers also submitted a bill on the permanent return and settlement of Bulgarians living outside the Republic of Bulgaria in the country, laying down the basic principles of the strategy. The country's entry into the election campaign in 2000 once again hindered the adoption of both documents and the resolution of problems.

The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration¹ and in the Strategy of Bulgaria on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011-2020)²

¹ Adopted by Protocol No 22.21 of the Council of Ministers of 05/06/2008.

² Adopted by Protocol No 8.17 of the Council of Ministers of 23/02/2011.

adopted in 2008 draws attention to the migration policy for Bulgarian citizens and persons living abroad of Bulgarian origin abroad. These documents are also seen as a possible resource for overcoming the negative demographic trends in Bulgaria. A similar approach is enshrined in the National Strategy for the Demographic Development of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006–2020³ 3, which envisages “the development of an immigration policy for attracting Bulgarians living abroad”. As a priority, this activity is included in the Updated National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population in the Republic of Bulgaria 2012–2030.⁴

The chronological tracing of the actions of the Bulgarian state in relation to the idea of a permanent return of Bulgarians from abroad shows that the attempts for its practical realisation are related to the chaotic nature and lack of managerial continuity on this indisputably important issue. Although the documents under consideration provide for monitoring the attitude towards re-emigration and permanent settlement in Bulgaria of persons of Bulgarian origin and/or Bulgarian citizens permanently living abroad, such studies have never been conducted by the Bulgarian state administration, and this is the reason why there are no real estimates of the immigration potential of the various Bulgarian communities.

One of the major weaknesses of the documents under consideration is that, based on the indisputable finding of a decrease in the population of the country and a deterioration of its age structure, no specific parameters are specified to reveal what is meant by overcoming or resolving the demographic crisis; moreover, it is itself a complex consequence of the single and combined effects of other factors and processes. The documents do not provide an answer to the question what should be the values of the individual statistical indicators that can show that the demographic crisis has been overcome and what the demographic contribution of the Bulgarian overseas communities in influencing this process should be.

The answer to such a question can be sought in the model proposed in 2001 by the United Nations Department of Population’s and concerning the definition of what should be considered as substitute migration. (United Nations Population Division, 2001) This concept is conditional and regards substitute migration as a hypothetical immigration flow that needs to be established in a country in order to overcome its demographic deficit. Generally speaking, replacement migration should yield a quantity of migration growth that would replace (compensate for) the insufficient number of births required to sustain a given time period featuring a constant population size or of a given as a whole thereof. It is, therefore, a hypothetical immigrant flow to compensate for the under-population growth, thus maintaining the necessary demographic balance.

To this end, a special study has been conducted by the United Nations Department of Population to clarify the extent to which replacement migration could mitigate the effects of a drastic population decline and ageing in developed countries, including and in the EU and some of its individual Member States. This study also looks at the different scenarios under which the demographic situation in a number

³ Adopted by Decision No 625 of the Council of Ministers of 22/08/2006.

⁴ Adopted by Protocol No 4.2 of the Council of Ministers of 01/02/2012.