

## ***HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY***

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### **POLICY, AIMED AT TERRITORIAL REDISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION OF THE COUNTRY, LEGISLATION OF POST- LIBERATION BULGARIA (1878–1912)**

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this research is building up a concept in Bulgarian legislation during the period of 1878 – 1912 concerning one of the major tendencies in our migration politics, and namely the one which has to do with territorial redistribution of the population of the country. The major conclusion of the analysis made is that, although gradually, this concept is becoming crucial in the migration politics, carried out during the analyzed period in our lands.*

**Keywords:** Bulgarian lands population; migration policy; demographic policy.

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One of the main elements of any migration policy in any country is the territorial redistribution of the population residing there. The exact **subject** of this study will be to cast light on the establishment of the *concept in Bulgaria's legislation in the period 1878–1912 in terms of the territorial redistribution of the population residing there*.

Its foundations are mostly based on the idea that that part of the local population, which in the era of Ottoman rule was pushed out of their native places in order to free up space for the newly settled Muslims (Shterionov, S., 2012: 171 et sec. [in Bulgarian]; Muchinov, V., 2013: 144 et sec. [in Bulgarian]; Angelova, D. 2013: 135) [in Bulgarian] after the relocations of the latter in the years surrounding the Liberation War, must return to its old habitats, thus restoring the existing demographic and economic balance in the country.

The first law, in which separate elements of this policy were formulated, was adopted by the 2nd Ordinary National Assembly at the end of 1880. **The Law on the Circassian and Tatar lands** (State Gazette, no. 95/ 23 December 1880) [in Bulgarian].

The beginning of the discussion of the draft law in the National Assembly is set with the examination of the proposed text related to determining the **object of this law**. The opinion was to regulate the lands abandoned by the emigrating Muslim population (although the term “Circassian and Tatar lands” is used in the law, it is a question of the arable area granted to all Muslim tribal communities who had settled in and subsequently left the studied geographical space) (Muchynov, V., 2013: 144 et sec. [in Bulgarian]; Angelova, D. 2013: 135; Balkanski, T., 2011, 17 et sec., 65 et sec.) [in Bulgarian] did not provoke any particular discussions. The fact was noted that there were abandoned lands everywhere across the Principality, however such land were particularly concentrated in the regions of Belogradchik, Oryahovo, Vidin, Lom, Svishtov, Dobrudzha and Radomir, which is why their pervasive redistribution was mandatory. (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 9 et seq.) [in Bulgarian]

The discussion of the text defining the main subject of that law ran without much debate. It was explicitly emphasised that it was only the Bulgarian population whose lands had been confiscated in order to settle the newly established Muslim population.

However, the discussion of the texts concerning the formulation of the main concept on the subject of this law, in its part referring to the way in which the land in question would be redistributed among the regulated right holders, did not run so smoothly. Various proposals were made, from the possibility of legalising the existing situation, as a result of the Bulgarian population's self-settlement in the abandoned lands; moreover, the conquered areas should be provided to such people free of charge; there were also ideas that the settled population should be forced to pay for the newly acquired lands, and to the proposal that all the land should be seized and redistributed.

On this issue, the Prime Minister of the liberal government P. Karavelov stood the opinion that since “whole villages have already retaken their lands, his government has no intention of taking them back, but only needs to legalise the existing situation (Todorov, G. 1961: 51 et sec.) [in Bulgarian]. The MP E. Geshov, however, opposed him, stating that “many Bulgarian peasants take advantage of the

unregulated nature of the Circassian and Tatar lands and begin to cultivate and conquer them.” An eloquent example in this regard was the native village of Geshov, where “some peasants occupied 1000 *dunums* (one *dunum* is equal to 919.3 square metres) of land, and nothing was left for the poor” (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 9) [in Bulgarian]. Therefore, he proposed that this land should be again seized by the State and redistributed. An opinion that appealed to a larger part of the deputies and they united around it.

The National Assembly stated that there were other regions where the population wanted to retake the lands they owned, but that they found some other owners there. An example was given with the western parts of the Principality. Here, in the era of Ottoman rule, a significant part of the local population had been pushed out of their native hearths, mostly in the direction of Serbia, to be settled by Muslim colonists. The MP R. Kostov pointed out that “the Turkish government took from the people, their lands, even raised the peasants from the pens to give them [those lands] to the Circassians” (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 8) [in Bulgarian]. After the Liberation, those emigrants wanted to return to Bulgaria, with the hope of being resettled in their native places. Behind their aspirations stood R. Popov, who expressed the opinion that here “the lands must be returned to those from whom they were taken” (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 9) [in Bulgarian].

The contradictory opinions of the people’s representatives on this issue were caused by the fact that there was no clarity among the rulers about the type of land distributed by the Ottoman officials to the newly settled Muslims, i.e. whether they were private or State-owned, whether they had been bought by the authorities, or whether their former owners had been compensated with identical lands elsewhere.

According to P. Karavelov’s opinion, there was information from Vidin that “the Ottoman government had bought lands from private people, setting aside several *meri* [plural of *mera*, approximately equivalent to ‘village green’ in England, Translator’s Note] (a *mera* was usually uncultivated land designated as pasture for local residents) in order to build Circassian villages there, and those from the Bulgarians, whose lands had not been bought, had been given another piece of arable area in exchange”. The Chairman of the National Assembly P. R. Slaveykov firmly stood the opinion that “no other pieces of land were given to Bulgarians, that such a thing has never happened” (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 8) [in Bulgarian]. According to his opinion the Turkish government had never compensated the Bulgarian population for lands seized from them. A number of different examples were given in support of the first or the second opinion. After the end of the discussion on this issue, the Bulgarian people’s representatives consolidated around Karavelov’s opinion, expressed before the National Assembly, that “those Bulgarians who want to retake their native lands, taken from them because of the Circassians and Tatars, can do it, but they must leave the lands given to them by the Turkish government” (Stenografski dnevnitsi [Shorthand records], 1880, 2nd Ordinary National Assembly, 2nd Regular Session, 2nd-3rd: 8) [in Bulgarian].