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**РАЙОНИРАНЕ И РЕГИОНАЛНА ПОЛИТИКА В БЪЛГАРИЯ:
ПРЕДИМСТВА И ОГРАНИЧЕНИЯ ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ
THE RURAL REGIONS IN THE REGIONAL POLICY OF BULGARIA:
ADVANTAGES AND RESTRICTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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The regioning and regional policy are mutually related fields of natural-social organization and spatial management. These activities have the distinctive quality to analyze, optimize and coordinate the horizontal development policies. This integral by contents problem field is referred to also by the development of the rural regions, the agriculture and the activities related to it in the countries of the European Union. Both for the community and for Bulgaria, these are strategic, priority divisions of the development. Probably in the next plan periods, this stimulating policy will remain. Therefore the scientific regional studies of the agricultural sector and the rural regions have stable up-to-date horizon and applicability.

For Bulgaria and Poland, the structure of the agricultural sector and dynamics of the rural regions have vital importance for the economics and quality of life of the human resources. In fact, for Bulgaria, the development of the rural regions covers more than 80,0% of the country area. Hence, the development of the rural regions is a national and integral problem in the next years. At the same time, the challenges before the agriculture and the rural regions require the application of new, system scientific approaches and methods for analysis and evaluation. The reasons are the new realities and the new economic geography which is forming in the EU. It is fully logically that the results of these studies are imperatively related to

the other sector programs as well, priority axis and development objectives: NSDC¹ – 2012-2025; NRDS² – 2012–2022. The objective is to achieve stability and balance, competitiveness and innovativeness, restriction of the climate changes, intelligent and incorporative growth of the individual regions and national spaces. This is a part of the rationales characterizing the validity of the proposed theme.

Another motive supplementing the validity of the discussed problematic is the wish to offer some new instruments for planning and development of the regional. We think, that the regional development is an objective natural-social process whereas the regional policy characterizes the manners, approaches and models of the territory management. More particularly, the regional policy is to be accepted and evaluated in terms of relations and actions of the human capital to a particular natural-social reality, accordingly to a quality evaluation of the comparative advantages for development of the regional and national level. In this sense, between the regional policy and management of territories, there are direct, functional dependences and interactions. Along with that, the structure of the national space is distinctive with big dynamic and change of the functions of the individual regions. Fast and irreversible changes occur in the territorial (horizontal) proportions of the natural – scientific systems. This complicated process is varied and non-linear, whereat a continuous restructuring of activities is being carried out, horizontal coordination and organization of the social economic systems of various (spatial-temporal) scale. The result of this development is dynamic change of the territorial efficiency of the natural-social systems which predefines the necessity of territory regioning³. In other words, the regioning of the national space is a main instrument for territory management.

The third rationale related to the validity of the studied problem is the objective of this forum „...to evaluate and compare the changes that occurred in the rural regions and agriculture in Poland and Bulgaria“ and to justify the main, strategic coordinates in their development during the next plan period 2014–2020. The problems here are most complicated and discussionable. It is known that the development of the rural regions is an integral, functional problem. It is a part of the state organization and management whereas the agriculture is completely sector, field problem. Apart from that, the development of the rural regions is based on an approved target program, however this process is affected also by the other sector operational programs. How to achieve an optimal balance, effective territorial coordination and stable competitiveness of the sector policies within the boundaries of certain region? When solving this problem, it is accepted that the rural regions are main spatial element and territorial attractor of the social-economic and cultural ecological activities, whose regulation and management is subordinated to the effectiveness and competitiveness. In this context, the existing functionality is to be analyzed and evaluated between the regional policy, agricultural policy and management of the territory including the development of the rural regions).

¹ National Spatial Development Concept of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012, S.

² National Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012, S.

³ See **N. Dimov, 2012**, Regioning, social-economic regions and regional development of Bulgaria, PH Express, Gabrovo.

And at the end, the subtraction of the spatial regioning as an accent of the study performed imposes short preliminary assumptions. It is known that in the plan and management practice of the EU and Bulgaria, in the territory management, the region is a main category. In the 90-ies of the XX c., in the EU, the usage of statistical regions is implemented (the system NUTS⁴). It includes two levels: *the first one* of 3 grades, defined by parameter number of population, and the *second one*, defined by administrative borders (LAU 1) and populated places (LAU 2). On that base, in the management practice, grouping of administrative – territorial units is performed – districts and municipalities in bigger area territorial structures, which is often unjustified and retains the growth of the territorial (regional) effectiveness. Both in Poland and in Bulgaria, the horizontal network of administrative-territorial units is the basis on which the units of both levels of the NUTS nomenclature are formed. And hence, for the plan and management practice of the country, the statistical regions are defined. The assimilation of the NUTS classification for the territorial management on national level, generates two problems. *The first one is*, that in the existing demographic situation in the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, the NUTS classification imposes constant changes of the borders of the statistical regions of levels I and II. On one side, it is declared that NUTS are not administrative – territorial units, and on the other side they affect the administrative – territorial structure of the country. In 2008, with the acceptance of the effective Law for the Regional Development, the borders of the statistical regions in North, southeast and South central Bulgaria changed. In fact, the new borders of the regions imposed new territorial proportions in the social economic development. Fully naturally, change of the regional planning of the country was performed. Along with that, the formed territorial economic links were torn apart, the effect of which is not measured. Negative alterations occurred also in the regional effectiveness. The most traumatic in the situation was the fact that the changes made did not outline more reliable horizons for development of the rural regions. *The second* problem was the absence of the codification between the effect of the Law for the regional development, the Program for development of the rural regions (2007-2013) and the structural policy in the country. As an evidence to that, we can indicate that in the regulatory basis and the accepted strategic documents, there is no functional coordination between „*the regions for purposeful support*“⁵ and „*the rural regions*“. Along with that, it is found that the territorial cohesion of social economic development in Bulgaria is deepened. Therefore, the scientific regioning of the national space discloses and evaluates more realistically the formed spatial structures whereas the used horizontal networks of administrative territorial units (municipalities and districts) retain, restrict and reduce the regional efficiency of the integral development. Therefore, it is purposeful and imperative to stimulate the scientific studies for discovering, measuring and evaluation of the formed spatial natural-social structures and on that base, to perform changes in the administrative-territorial

⁴ **NUTS** (*Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques*) – nomenclature of the territorial statistical units.

⁵ See **Law for the Regional Development** (2008), art. 5 and art. 6

structure and regional planning of Bulgaria and other EU countries. The accents highlighted of the validity of the problem at hand bring forward the purpose of the report: *to summarize a part of the results in the development of the rural regions in Bulgaria and to less extent of the agriculture in the period 2007 – 2013 and to justify new measures and approaches for the optimization of the regional development and regional policy in the new plan period – 2014 – 2020*. For understandable reasons, a part of the comparisons in the studied field has been made with Poland.

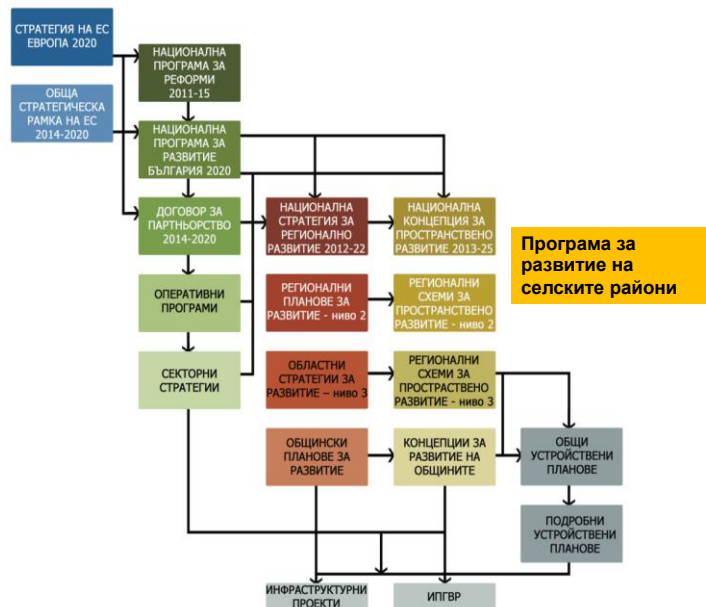
1. Formulation and structure of the study

The planning and development of the rural regions and agriculture are interrelated, however along with that they are heterogeneous areas. The essence of the policy towards the rural regions is an integral and functional activity utilizing models and approaches ensuring interrelation, stimulating the transition to the stable, balanced, innovative and uniting development of the administrative territorial units (rural regions). Another specificity is that the rural regions in Bulgaria, as per the effective regulatory documents, are identified on the level of municipalities (level LAU 1 of the NUTS classification). In Bulgaria, however, the municipalities are specific with major spatial variations. In most cases, they restrict and retain the effective implementation of the Program for development of the rural regions.

Along with that, the EU standards used for defining the category „rural region“, are not the optimal ones for Bulgaria. Despite of the fact that as per the approved strategic documents in the country for development of the rural regions, 231 municipalities fall within the scope of this category, among them, the social-economic and cultural – ecological inequalities are not only expressive, but also growing for the period 2007-2012. This is the rationale to propose new defining of the category "rural region", to approve new criteria and standards in the identification of the "rural regions". The practice demonstrates that the general approach, the general policy to the development of the rural regions in Bulgaria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland is not effective. It is purposeful to define areas of the rural regions within the community, which are applied differentiated measures and stimuli for development, to realize the principle of territorial cohesion.

Another important problem is the absence of functional interaction between the accepted and executed strategic documents in Bulgaria. The analysis found that PDVR⁶ is isolated from the other strategic documents – see fig. 1. As an evidence for that, the absence of regulatory and functional coordination needs to be indicated between the "regional for purposeful support" defined by the LRD and the „rural regions“, defined in the Program for their development. Therefore, a new, integral approach is needed to the development and management of the „rural regions“ in the country.

⁶ The Program for Development of the Rural Regions in Bulgaria 2007 – 2013, S.



EU STRATEGY EUROPE 2020
 GENERAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OF EU 2014-2020
 NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAM 2011-15
 NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIA 2020
 PARTNERSHIP TREATY 2014-2020
 OPERATIONAL PROGRAMS
 SECTOR STRATEGIES
 NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2012-22
 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS – level 2
 DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – level 3
 MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
 INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS
 NATIONAL CONCEPT FOR SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT 2013-25
 REGIONAL SCHEMES FOR SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT – level 2
 REGIONAL SCHEMES FOR SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT – level 3
 CONCEPTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUNICIPALITIES
 IPURD
 PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL REGIONS
 GENERAL STRUCTURAL PLANS
 DETAILED STRUCTURAL PLANS

Source: National center for territorial development, S, 2012

Fig. 1. STRUCTURE OF THE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE TERRITORY OF BULGARIA

It is found that the Program for development of the rural regions is integrated only with the National Spatial Development Concept. Main binding constructions are lacking, through which to realize the integrated development of the National territory. This is one of the major factors restricting the effective policy towards the rural regions in the country.

The stimulating policy for development of the rural regions in the country is based on external financing. This European practice however has been planned to

be performed in the conditions of stable demographic development and growing, stable territorial cohesion. The reality in the country however is the opposite. In fact, the implementation of the Program for the rural regions development is performed at continuous growth of the territorial inequalities between the municipalities and districts in Bulgaria. And hence, complicated problems occur, changing the trajectory of the regional development and the local self-governance. The assimilation of the financial resources by the individual measures for development of the rural regions for the period 2007 – 2012 is attended by continuous depopulation of the municipalities, falling in the group of the rural regions. Essential irreversible negative changes are made also in the functions of the settlements in the country. We think that the solving of the highlighted problems can and is to be solved on a national level, through active and rational state stimulating support. It is purposeful to create a target state Fund for development of the rural regions. The analysis performed found that as of 2012, in 1/2 of the populated places of Bulgaria are short of financial resource of the Structural funds of the EU. At the same time, the settlement network is liquidated. Therefore, a priority task of the Fund is to be the preservation and optimal extension of the municipal property – mainly in depopulated settlements, however located close to the municipal centers. Still, the major unassimilated resource for the development of the rural regions are a part of the natural resources and the relative advantages by the location of the populated places. In this sense, the management of the rural regions requires new approaches and innovative practices.

The development and management of the agriculture is a sector strategic activity. The essence of this policy, as opposed to the rural regions, is defined by other factors of development and there are other economic coordinates. This policy however is supplemented by the priorities of many other strategic documents (NSDC, NRDS, „Strategy Europe 2020“, the National Program for Development of Bulgaria by 2020, etc. etc.), which necessitate changes and certain specificity in the management of the territory. A range of issues and tasks occur which can be summarized in the following way: what kind of instruments and approaches need to be used for the functional stimulating interaction between the development of the rural regions and the regional agricultural policy in Bulgaria? The task for the diversification of the economic activities in the rural regions is set forward, however economic stimuli are lacking. We think that the solutions of the problems addressed cannot be done on a common, universal basis in the statistical regions. The reason for that is the dynamic and complicated natural-social relief of the national space of Bulgaria. It happens that in the natural areas and social-economic regions, the interactions and spatial organization between the natural-social systems of various scale is very specific and unique and is not subordinated to universal approaches of management. From such positions, the priority for innovativeness and competitiveness is focused and established of the development in „Strategy Europe 2020“. During the plan period 2014–2020, the development of the rural regions and agriculture in Bulgaria will be performed in conditions of growing restrictions. The most important of them are the following:

a) continuous decrease of the human resources, majorly aging population, quality alterations in the functions of the settlement network and the individual

populated places, limited access to main services for the population, continuous destruction and liquidation of valuable assets in the municipalities of the country;

b) bad quality of the living environment in the villages of the rural regions. Limited access to quality services of the population;

c) non-maintained and amortized infrastructure.

Therefore, quick measures and actions (policies) are needed, directed to rational scientific solving of the problematic areas in the rural regions of the country. The results from the policies applied in the period 2007-2012 are not positive and stable. Another effective approach of regional management is needed and measures for impact in the next plan period – 2014–2020. During this period as well, the development of the rural regions will be performed in the conditions of domination of migration flows from the villages to the towns, deepening the changes in the ethnical and religious structure of the human resources, restrictions and insufficiently prepared professionals, probably higher unemployment and poverty.

1. SWOT analysis of the problematic areas for the development of the rural regions in Bulgaria

In this reality and from such starting positions, 4 problematic areas are analyzed and evaluated, with the strong impact on the development of the rural regions and agriculture in Bulgaria. These are: the extremely critical for the overall development of the country demographic problem; the absence of codification and functionality in the effective regulatory basis; negative dynamic of the territorial cohesion; and the necessity of scientific regioning of the national space as an irrevocable condition for effective management of the territory.

1.1 The demographic situation in Bulgaria: state and trends

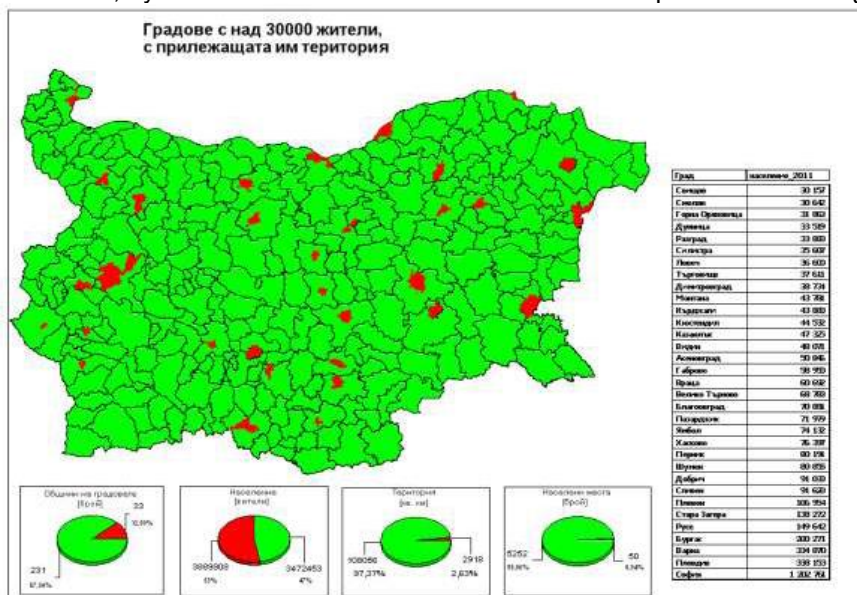
After 1990, the demographic dynamics in the country is negative and extremely critical for the development of the country during the next years. Only for the period 2007–2012, the human capital of Bulgaria decreased with 355 686 p. or average for the year with 59 281 p. The biggest decrease is in the municipalities Vratsa, Vidin, Razgrad, Silistra, Montana, Lovech, Kyustendil. After 2007 (the regular accession of Bulgaria to the EU), the population is increased in the districts of Sofia and Varna and in 4 districts – Plovdiv, Burgas, Blagoevgrad and Kardzhali, the average annual decrease of the population is lower than the average for the country.

Along with that, the territorial demographic inequalities in the national space deepen. In 2012, 40,0% live in 9 municipalities and only 3,0% of the human capital lives in 62 municipalities. This trend renders strong holding effect over the development of the rural regions. The rural regions in Bulgaria are critically depopulated as the process of depopulation is ongoing. No effective alternative policy is performed for restriction of this trend.

For the development of the rural regions and agriculture, very strong impact is rendered by the settlement network, separate populated places performing functions of poles of economic growth and their location. After 1990, the demographic dynamic caused irreversible changes to the settlement development of Bulgaria. Here are some facts:

➤ In 2012, 86,0% of the populated places in Bulgaria are with population below 1 000 inhabitants. The number of villages is continuously decreasing, which are to be secondary and tertiary centers (poles) of the regional and local development. In 2012, Vidin district is the first district with population below 100 thousand inhabitants (97 546 inh.);

➤ As of 2012, in Bulgaria, 45 municipalities (17,0% of the municipalities of the country) have population above 30 000 inh., and the cities with population above 30 000 inh. are 33 (12,4% of the cities of the country) see fig. 2. These are the EU standards, by which these territories are outside the scope of the rural regions;



Cities with more than 30 000 inhabitants with their pertaining territory.

Fig. 2. Territorial structure of the cities with population above 30 000 inh. in Bulgaria*

*Source: National center for territorial development, 2012, S.

➤ During the period 2007–2012, in 26 districts, the population growth in the district centers went ahead of the one in the other settlements. In other words, the depopulation on district level in the country is ongoing.

➤ The territory of Vidin district is divided into 11 municipalities. Of them, 1 municipality in each is with population 61,0 thousands inhabitants and the remaining 10 municipalities are with population below 6,5 thousands of inhabitants. At this demographic relief, the development of the rural regions is withheld due to the limited number of the human resources and the applying of specific policies for development becomes more expensive and higher cost per unit of finished product. The competitiveness of the district economic also decreases. It is traumatizing that this district will be added up in the midterm with other districts (between 3 and 5);

➤ In 18 districts of the country, there is only 1 municipality in each with population above 30 000 inh. (2012). This group involves districts such as Varna, Burgas, Russe, Pleven, Dobrich, Shumen. In other words, in districts of the country with major human capital, there is no distinct secondary settlement center to perform organizing and distributing functions for the development of the district territory and the rural regions;

The rural territories (regions) in Bulgaria cover 81,0% of the area of the country, whereas the city areas are small „oasis“ (poles) for development. The economic in the city poles is not developing in a strategic and innovative manner. No policies have been established for stimulating development. At the existing demographic situation, the development of the rural regions practically cannot develop efficiently. As a result of this, new approaches, instruments and measures will be proposed to form a new, more effective policy for regional development which is in compliance with the specificity of the country and accents stimulating the rural regions, their profile, specialization and effectiveness.

1.2 Regulatory-legal issues

The regulatory system of the country contains 3 established laws⁷ with direct impact for the development of the agriculture – Law for the ownership and utilization of the agricultural lands, Law for the seed and plant material and the Law for the preservation of the agricultural lands. At this legal reality, the regulation of the relations and the problems for the development of the rural regions and agriculture is subjected to the effect and regulation of other laws – for instance LATSRB, LRD, LST, LSCER, etc. it is obvious that the rural regions covering more than 81,0% of the national territory and generating a big part of the problems of development have not been covered by particular legal regulations (laws). This does not mean that special laws are needed for the rural regions and the agriculture but we think that this problem-economic area is legally incomplete. Here are some evidences in this field:

- The LRD provides for the order for separation of „regions for purposeful support“ (See art. 5, p.1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). They are defined on level 3 (on district level) and include the area of one or several neighboring municipalities. It is an important specificity that the regions for purposeful support are backwarding in social-economic development territories. The scope of the regions for purposeful support is defined in the district strategies. In terms of the rural strategies, there are some principle differences. Here is a part of them: the rural regions are defined by standards of the EU covering the territory of the country. We will indicate that the methodic for determination of the regions for purposeful support and the rural regions contain principle differences. Hence the absence of a regulatory synchrony in the development and management of the territory. In this connection, particular regulatory provisions can be outlines for the effective management of the territory;

⁷ In the legislation of the country as of 2013, also a Law for the extra savings of agricultural and sugar products (2006), Law for the fisheries and aquacultures (2001), Law for the irrigation associations (2001) have been established, which have no direct impact on the issue concerned.

- As a regulatory basis in the determination of the limits and scope of the rural regions, the LATS RB applies (See SG/14 July 1995). In fact this law is fundamental for the life of people on the territory of the country. It states that the structure elements of the municipalities are the populated places and settlements. We think that these are the territorial units (structural elements of I rank), and the elements of the II rank forming the structure of the municipalities are the mayoralties and regions. These are the elements forming the structure, territorial organization and functions of the municipalities, incl. the rural regions;

- According to LATS RB, the municipalities are main administrative territorial units in the country because the basic social and engineering infrastructure is build in them, one of the pillars for the quality of life. LATS RB (1995) for the first time in the structural policy of the country provides for the thresholds for the creation of municipalities, for maximal distances from the municipal center to the furthest settlement within the boundaries of the municipality, minimal number of population for change of the settlement statute, etc. Therefore, LATS RB has direct and indirect impact on the spatial structure of the rural regions and territorial inequalities between the municipalities and districts in the country. The connecting of the demographic situation with a horizontal network of municipalities in the country discovers an extreme variety:

- As of 2012, 697 populated places have no lands, as the possession over the lands is administratively referred to other settlements;

- About 4000 populated places have no pharmacies and 3200 have no health centers;

- More than 4 200 populated places have no schools;

- More than 3200 populated places have no representatives in the local parliaments (Municipal councils);

- The increase of the number of settlements with no inhabitants registered is continuing. The Census in 2011 indicated 183 of these settlements.

The examples given affect the development of the municipalities referring to the rural regions. In this connection, it is purposeful to organize more studies of the regulatory system paying special attention to the rural regions.

In this connection, special attention must be spared to the results of the comparative analysis of the administrative territorial units between Bulgaria and Poland. The differences in the area and number of population between the two countries must be considered in advance. In Poland, the administrative territorial structure is three grade (dated 1999) – the biggest by territory and population are the districts (*voevodstva*) – total of 16, the second level regions (*poviaty*) are 379 and municipalities (*gminy*) - 2478. The average area of a municipality in Poland is 126,3 km², and in Bulgaria it is 420,5 km². On the level of district, the average territory is 825,9 km², and in Bulgaria it is 3964,4 km². Obviously, the administrative territorial units as a territory are significantly bigger compared to these in Poland. These proportions are specific also in comparison of the average demographic weights of the administrative territorial units. The average number of the population in one municipality in Bulgaria is 27,6 thousands of inhabitants, and in Poland 16,0 thousands of inhabitants (2012). On the level of district, the average number of the

population is 260,1 thousands of inhabitants and for Poland – 102 thousands of inhabitants. Therefore, the administrative territorial units in Bulgaria are significantly bigger which affects the management of the territory. These results demonstrate that a new enlargement of the municipalities will strengthen and deepen the territorial inequalities in the country development.

1.3 Dynamics of the territorial cohesion: results and trends

The territorial cohesion is a policy directed to the restriction and reduction of the spatial inequalities in the social-economic development between the regions in each country and between the different countries within the EU. The analysis performed of the territorial cohesion in the EU and Bulgaria for the period 2007 – 2011 found that despite of the targeted financing of this direction, the results are negative. In other words, the economic and social „distances“ between the regions and individual countries of the community increase. This is specific also for the rural regions in Bulgaria. It is obvious that other reasons and processes generate strong turbulence in the development, which withholds the transition to stable, balanced and incorporating development. A strong factor in this process is the territorial (regional) competitiveness. It is however not studied systematically and the statistical information used from the regional statistics is incomplete and insufficient.

The territorial cohesion also discloses the effects of the territorial planning. The spatial planning is of *„...evolution of the territories in all their dimensions (economic, social, ecological and natural) and the methods used for their evaluation and regulation of the distribution of the human resources and economical activities in the space on the various levels and scales as well as the location of the natural, recreational and infrastructural areas⁸.*

The negative territorial cohesion is a reason for the higher expenses and assimilation of more resources per unit of product. Therefore, the policy for development of the rural regions must be regulated and coordinated through the territorial scope of the cohesion.

1.4 Regioning of the territory of the rural municipalities in Bulgaria

The regioning of the national space is a research process related to the disclosing and analyzing of actually formed natural-social spatial structures. Such spatial functional structures are the rural regions. When regioning the natural-social structure of the national space, certain territorial proportions are disclosed and evaluated, which are classified as sectorial and integral. The planning and effective management of the actually formed territorial proportions may and should be one of the irrevocable pillars of the policy for the development of the rural regions (the German practice utilizes the term space organization). The results of the justified

⁸ See **Glossary of terms for spatial planning**, 2006, Council of ministers for the spatial planning in Europe, p.54

integral regioning are the rationale for the performance of purposeful alterations in the horizontal networks of the administrative territorial units in the country – municipalities and districts.

Table 1

The spatial variations in the number of population between municipalities, districts and statistical regions in Bulgaria (1989 - 2012)

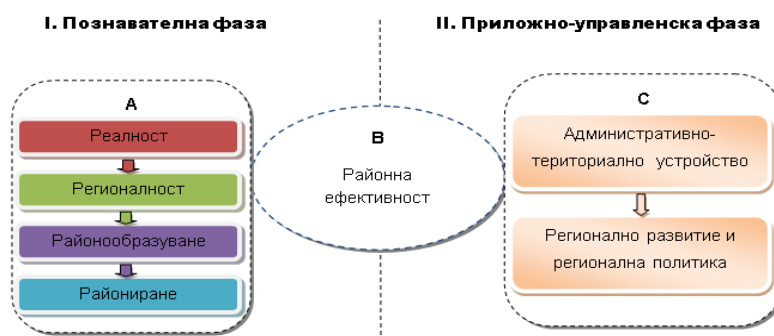
1 9 8 9			2 0 1 2		
Municipality, district, statistical region – number of population	Municipality, district, statistical region, number of population	Variation rate	Municipality, district, statistical region – number of population	Municipality, district, statistical region – number of population	Variation rate
The municipality of Trekliano (Kyustendil district) 1734 inh.	Sofia city 1 212 230 inh.	699 times	The municipality of Trekliano (Kyustendil district) 625 inh.	Sofia 1 302 316 inh.	2084 times
Vidin district* 158 930 p.	Sofia city 1 212 230 p.	7,6 times	Vidin district 97 546 p.	Sofia city 1 302 316 p.	13,4 times
Northwest region** - 660 108 p.	Southwest - 2 234 039 p.	3,4 times	Northwest soc.-econ. region** 422 782 p.	Southwest soc.-econ. region 2 128 783	5,0 times

*As of 1989, within the contents of Mihailovgrad district

** Northwest social-economic region – within the territorial scope by 2008.

Source: Statistical annual record book - 1990; Population 2012, NSI, S., N. Dimov, 2006

During the last years, the scientific studies in the country in the field of the integral and sectorised regioning have been abandoned. The NUTS classification of the European Union is used, the objective of which is to compile more correct comparative analyses. The NUTS classification cannot disclose the actual social economic structures which are to be used in the planning and management practice of the regional development. In many scientific studies, the regioning of the social-economic systems usually ends at the cognitive phase whereat the borders of the territorial structures are outlined (demarcation). The applying of the regioning in the planning and management of the territory including the rural regions, increasing its added value provided that the category of the regional efficiency is used. The region efficiency is an indicator with an integral contents – economic, social and ecological.



- I. Cognitive phase
 A
 Reality
 Regionality
 Region forming
 Regioning
 B
 Region efficiency
 II. Applied management phase
 C
 Administrative territorial structure
 Regional development and regional policy

Source: N. Dimov, 2012, Regioning, social-economic regions and regional development of Bulgaria, p. 251

Fig. 3. Structure – functional model of the process of regioning and regional development of the social space

We think that the applying of the regional efficiency as a tool for horizontal management of the rural regions in Bulgaria will change the approaches and policies, accordingly the final results in the development. In this sense, the regioning is a perspective method for regional policies which is an alternative of the administrative and frequently bureaucratic management approaches.

2. Some conclusions and directions:

➤ The developed and approved strategic documents need change in their general structure and functional binding between the individual documents, incl. of the Program for development of the rural regions. We think that it must be taken out of the planning practice and to be linked efficiently with the other strategic documents;

➤ The development of the rural regions and the agriculture will be performed at continuous decrease of human resources, whereat the scale and expenses for each measure will be increased. It is purposeful here in a part of the laws accepted to separate regional sections providing additional stimuli for the occupied rural regions;

➤ It is not justified for the development of the rural regions to be based only on linear trends and dependences. These are the use of „regions for purposeful

support“ and „rural regions“, the acceptance *a priori* of the municipalities as „rural regions“ and the continuous general policy towards them, without taking into account the large variety and need for functional zoning;

➤ The dynamic is the development of the rural regions in Bulgaria will impose changes in the administrative territorial structure of the country. These changes however must not be related to the enlargement of the existing municipalities. The critical demographic situation will be factor wise, which will make the management of these territories more expensive, with bigger expenditure of financial resources;

➤ The regioning of the territory of the rural municipalities and the utilization of the regional efficiency as a measure for their development is a reliable tool for effective and efficient horizontal management. As an additional instrument, the effect of the territorial (not the corporate) scale may and should be used.

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