



# REVISTA INCLUSIONES

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**PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL ECONOMY OF BULGARIA.  
FEATURES AND APPLIED ASPECTS**

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**Abstract**

The object of the study is regional development planning. In this territory, smaller administrative units of different ranks have formed; we study their structure and behavior as a prerequisite to understand the core of their vital activity designed mainly through their development and regional development. These distinct areas in our country are the subject of our research as well as ensuing problems with their administrative spatial planning and overall implementation of policies for regional development. In this direction, the purpose of our study is to highlight those processes of regionalization that could promote regional development policies and, secondly, to show deficits accumulated by the tradition of the structure and the management of regional communities in Bulgaria.

**Keywords**

Bulgaria – Regional development – Regional economy – Problems

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## Introduction

Development has put the settlement structure that forms the basis of the existence and interaction of society and thus offers the geo-demographic characteristics of the territory. So the combination of population and urban structure highlights the approaches and the methods that can be used in the most efficient way as territorial resources, including the potential of poles/development centers. The object of the study is regional development planning. In this territory, smaller administrative units of different ranks have formed; we study their structure and behavior as a prerequisite to understand the core of their vital activity designed mainly through their development and regional development. These distinct areas in our country are the subject of our research as well as ensuing problems with their administrative spatial planning and overall implementation of policies for regional development. The first to make attempts to systematize these problems is Varenius (1622-1650), which distinguishes "general" and "special" geography. The difference between them is that the focus of special geography is places and regions as broader territory in places. This helps using mathematics to support geographic description. This gives us ground to later assume that planning is an element of the polycentric development that takes into account the various ongoing grades as well as the horizontal and the vertical direction and the economic processes phenomena stimulating competition in the development of society and cooperation between the major urban centers of each level. In this direction, the purpose of our study is to highlight those processes of regionalization that could promote regional development policies and, secondly, to show deficits accumulated by the tradition of the structure and the management of regional communities in Bulgaria.

This approach in structural terms requires conceptual approaches to the problems of the device and the vitality of the national territory on one hand and on the other hand the evaluation and the analysis of the selected models of polycentric development and structuring settlement locations, corresponding in rank and importance. In this direction, we must consider the state variable related to a state of nature and society. In the context of change, or when we have external influences affecting the described system and reported on the model, they lead to a change in the territorial plan and the perceived impact or input independent variables influencing regional development of the various territorial communities. All this suggests that regional development is definitely functional and has its own cycles and adaptability to the changing environment and patterns of socio-economic development. This suggests that the problems of regionalization highlight the essence of the administrative territorial structure of the country.

In theory, it means "to define as an integral defining part of the organization of the state, including the separation of the national territory in administrative territorial units (ATU) for the rational flow of basic socio-economic processes and implementation of state power in the territory.

Respectively substantial matter remains and the location of the population itself is its urban structure. For example, to 31.12.2019 around 42% of the national territory is in the process accelerated depopulation, and another 15% of that gives indications for that. Worsening national disproportion village-town - at the end of 2018 nearly 5,145,000 e., or 75% of the population lived in cities, and 1.755 million people, or 25% - in villages. According to Yi Fu Tuan in his "Space and Place" (1977) man's place is not determined only by books read. I saw cards but still more than the practice that he acquired directly on the field.

## The need for regionalization and making regions of Bulgaria

With the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union it comes to the fore together with the concept of polycentric development of urban structures of countries in national and European context. This in turn creates the necessary expectations, reducing existing regional disparities and ensuring a level of general economic and social development. An important contribution is the quality and the capacity of the connecting infrastructure. The development of a balanced and a functional polycentric system of cities is a prerequisite, but also the objective of sustainable spatial development (defined at EU level by spatial planning documents such as the European perspective spatial development (ESDP), the Territorial Agenda of the European Union and Leipzig Charter) in theoretical and applied nature, they are a part of the territorial systems that fall within the field of regional science.

The aim of any regional policy (regional economic development strategy) is the search of a balanced regional development in which, on one hand, regional economic differences may play a positive role as far as the differences are always a stimulus for development and, on the other hand, do not give a raise to acute socio-economic problems in regional terms. Returning to spatial development, in the spatial plan of the country holding the settlements, social and economic infrastructure, density and population are not evenly spaced. This is due to three main factors that influence the development of Bulgaria in various historical stages: natural, historical and economic. Overall, the approach to the poles of development can be characterized generally as part of spatial/settlement structures that are attractive for investment and living as they have certain properties. It is, for example, the bigger number and higher density of the population, an economic capacity that is above average, modern transport and technical infrastructure, skilled labor force, representation of sectors with high added value, the concentration of capacity for research and development and higher education institutions (colleges and universities), potential for innovation.

On the other hand, we can accept the thesis of leading regionalists that there are existing development axes for Bulgaria for a developed transportation and communication infrastructure. These are Sofia – Varna, Ruse and Burgas – development axes that are formed as a result of previously established economic relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union. The new economic realities and the development of our relations with the EU countries suggest the formation of further development axes directed to Western Europe as an emerging major trading partner of Bulgaria. Of course, the new geo-economic realities give us a reason to conclude that for Bulgaria the movement in the direction of “North-South” is more important, part of which can emerge from the economic interaction between Sofia and Thessaloniki - with further direction to Athens. The East-West direction also remains relevant, especially Sofia-Nis-Belgrade and Budapest to the north and Zagreb to the west. The continuation of this axis of development is in the opposite direction Sofia-Istanbul towards the Middle East. The question is which of the two strands has a greater significance.

So, another economic axis with a particularly positive outlook and growth potential can be found in the construction of the third bridge at Silistra, which will have important multilateral positive effect. It should be noted that the direction Silistra – Shumen – Yambol – Lesovo – Istanbul, is also called to build a strong infrastructure and a newly established axis for economic development of the entire Northeast region planning, to later find a sequel in Razgrad - Rousse, Bucharest and Budapest to Central Europe. The necessary economic prerequisites for the rapid development of these new axes are present, but their implementation will depend not only on economic, but also on the political cooperation in

South-East Europe. The construction of this new economic axis of development involves the improvement and expansion of the infrastructure of the trans-European transport corridors. In reality, 5 out of 10 transport infrastructure corridors pass through Bulgaria. The pragmatic development of Bulgaria's infrastructure is the key to the future regional development of our territory.

In reality, just the construction of the infrastructure is not enough. It is necessary to proceed with a *new region-creating* of the country. So, from an economic point of view, the present and the future development of regional communities goes through the process of zoning the territory and creating opportunities for economic development through respective cores and axis and poles of regional development. In this context, the role of socio-economic zoning is to establish differences in the territories and to propose measures for their solution, to rationally exploit the potential of areas with the aim of improving people's lives. There is a need for an assessment of the ideas for space. Another important feature of the process of creating areas are border areas. Borders influence the surrounding territory. It is a linear or an area in which the transition is not abrupt. And in both cases there is an important contrast between foreclosed natural or social phenomena. As the contrast is greater, the greater is the dividing functions of the boundary, and vice versa. Border classic is the antithesis of the center, but with minor differences between separation phenomena it could play the role of a center. The creation of EU traditional centers of countries in Western Europe is far from borders and border territory LDCs.

Today, the situation is exactly the opposite and interstate borders are places that attract the population and economic activities because of the opportunity to enjoy the strong resources of neighboring countries. The structure of the spatial organization of society interacts with the spatial/geographic division of labor processes and equal formation and complexation. The territorial division of labor is closely associated with spatial differentiation of natural and socio-economic conditions, the territorial concentration of production and population spatial specialization and economic structure of the regions, development and placement of production and social infrastructure, the use of labor and migration of population, the integration of labor, the cultural aspect and the provision of ecological balance. Diverse forms of spatial organization of society and their components determine the need for research on various regional numbers of sciences: economic, social, geographical. The specifics of the social economic geography are defined by integrity, approach to learning objects. Unlike the sciences dealing with different components and functionality argued publicly-structural formations; it studies production and territorial complexes and socio-economic systems. They last appeared as a main form of spatial organization of society. In regional development, specific socio-economic territorial systems are structured, which are called to solve various local problems. The main problems have a regional economic characteristic. This means that intensive economic and social processes are taking place at the meso level. These processes can contribute to one degree or another to improving the well-being at the micro and meso levels. In a geo-economic sense, this has an impact on the society-nature-economy relation and has an impact on the purposeful functioning of a certain territory. The main elements of the socio-economic territorial systems are changing under the pressure of innovation and the changing geo-economic profiles of the individual territories. this gives us sufficient reason to structure the regional economy differently. It is necessary to model the environment based on the demographic resources in the respective territory. Thus, the population is brought to the forefront as the main consumer and forms the new market of total consumption. This is how the new regional economic systems of the 21st century are formed.

## The features of zoning and regionalization as processes

Under socio-economic territorial system that means economically and socially efficient combinations of interrelated elements of society, purposeful functioning of a particular territory as units of public, and in that direction and territorial division of labor and integration of labor. The main elements of the socio-economic territorial systems appear to be objects of material production, the non-production sphere and demographic resources. Population and objects of the service sector relate to social, and sites mining and processing sphere - to the economic elements of the systems. Both a social and economic element of the system can be viewed as a workforce. In terms of public consumption, the workforce has a social nature, but from the standpoint of production - it is an important economic category. The system has a certain territorial scope. The area serves as a protection, securing space, community social and economic elements of the system, thanks to which it differs from other structures on the specifics of development and management. Characteristics of natural conditions and resources are linked with a territory and are the basis of the development of demographic and economic processes. Thus, socio-economic zoning is developed in two main areas: scientific objectives and implementation of practical skills in the areas of implementation of a targeted policy and proper management.

The issues of socio-economic zoning have always been the subject of study by Bulgarian economic geography. The first attempts to zone the territory of Bulgaria were made by Anastas Beshkov in 1934. It offers the country to be divided into seven economic regions: 1. Western Moesian; 2. Middle Moesian; 3. East Moesian; 4. Southeast; 5. Thracian-Rhodope; 6. Sofia; 7. Pirin-Struma region. The next stage in which it is proposed to have a new economic division is the period 1952-1953. The formed conference of BAS featuring a wide range of economy and geography specialists expressed the view that “the economic division of the country does not match the existing scheme of administrative-territorial units' districts and municipalities”. In a discussion Acad. Beshkov again proposed the scheme of 7 areas in 1934. That was imposed by Ignat Penkov, who supported the view that “administrative-territorial units” in counties “are economic development, in other words there is coverage of the administrative units with economic development”. Another scheme that was offered is the one of Tyanko Yordanov with five economic regions: Northwestern, Northeastern, Southwestern, Marishko-Rhodope and Southeastern. A team led by Hristo Marinov offered the country to be divided into three regions: Northern Bulgaria, Western Bulgaria and Southern Bulgaria. Intensive development and studies were conducted during 1956-1960. The results of the research were published in “Geography of Bulgaria” Volume II in 1961, and in “Economic zoning of PRB” (1963) and offered a total of 10 zoning schemes, which include production, demographic and socio-economic activities and more. Another scheme that should be considered in this study is on the lower hierarchical units: sub-regions and micro-regions offered by a team of BAS (1983). Former districts, the current municipal centers, were made into micro-regions. Studies in which were proven all above listed hierarchical units, mainly from 1965 until 1985. As a final result, the research and the analysis led to the formation of the nine socio-economic areas: Southwestern, Western Upper Thracian-Rhodope, Eastern Upper Thracian-Rhodope, Southeastern, Northeastern Primorsky, Northeastern Danube, Yantrensky, Vitsko-Osamsky and Northwestern region (BAS 1989)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Dimov, Regional Sustainable Development of Bulgaria: advantages, limitations and synergistic effect Coll.: Integration and Sustainable Development Foundation " Fr. Ebert " - Institute of Sociology, BAS, “East- West”, S. 2007.

To reduce the negative effects of improper and irrational administrative division to the critical minimum, we are looking for new models and approaches both on national and on regional and local level. It became increasingly clear that implementation of the most departmental and sectoral policies to solve these problems throughout the country did not give the desired results. Therefore, their solution was to already look at cross-industry level through the use of instruments and mechanisms of regional policy. Regional policy has pronounced integral characteristics.

### **Approaches to regional spatial planning of the Republic of Bulgaria**

Regional development is the science of management, administration and the economy of the territory in terms of establishing functional patterns of territorial development. The center of the system is surrounded by concentric sector-functioning area. When approaching the limits of the system, the number of functions in the field is reduced. By moving away from the center of the system, the field shows a high selectivity of spheres of human activity and is the smallest functional load. This approach is associated with the scheme for the diffusion of innovation/concretization of statistical regularities by a Swedish scientist Hägerstrand known later as the model “center-periphery”. Territorial systems such as spatial forms of life of the community are characterized by hierarchical subordination. The taxonomic status of each system is measured on the basis of the analysis and synthesis of system connections. In manifestation of hierarchical subordination, taxonomists take into account all types of connections as only their combination forms an organic integrity system. Usually they separate them to macro, meso and micro units. All these levels of ranks include several administrative-formed and unshaped taxonomies. It should be noted that there are no such effective methods for objectively determining the amount of levels in the hierarchy of systems of every kind. In existing proposals for structuring systems are used heuristic methods based on expert assessments and quality characteristics of the operation of a particular system. Therefore, depending on the purpose of the study of one or another structure, it may be separated in a different amount of hierarchical subsystems.

It is necessary to observe the unity between the functional and hierarchical structure of the systems. Each functional subsystem has its own spatial organization of its elements that is oriented towards its natural, economic, environmental, social, historical, demographic and other conditions and resources. All hierarchical levels have a crucial role in the socio-economic system-executed production subsystems. The connections between the units of the system were examined by the German geographer C. Kristaler and in 1933 he developed a spatial model and the theory of central places. It found that the settlements are located in the geographic space in a certain order and have different functions, depending on their location and size. This requires time to seek optimal models of spatial development and effective regional policies to impose a new spatial and territorial division.

In 1959, a new administrative-territorial division of country was made. Overall, it was dictated by the objective processes of social economic development of the country. Many experts agree that this reform is not the most successful, as Dimitrov (2015) considers that “most of the county centers are settlements with established administrative functions, exercising considerable gravitational potential in terms of territory adjoining. This is evidenced by the fact that most of them (109) were scientifically proven in making the 70s of 20th century”. The mentioned above author brings a new administrative structure and a territorial division of 14 counties out of 30, including 3 cities: Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna.



The number of municipalities reaches 979 and they are divided into urban and rural, and are formed by over 5300 settlements. In 1964, the districts of Plovdiv City and Varna City were closed, after which their number was set at 28, totally 19, until 1987.

In reality, in this period the foundations of progressive centralization of the government because the 14 district cities were more developed than county centers, they also had the opportunities for a sharper industrial profile. The increase to 28 county towns leads to overestimation of the 14 district centers and clean additional load into them with economic and social functions, and the rest district centers are assimilated to municipalities and naturally, they went to decline and fall under the gravity of the regional centers. In this period actually strengthened the bureaucracy in county towns and they increasingly started to resemble administrative centers and began to reduce the economic importance of pull-economic development of the country.

This may largely be regarded as a controversial decision, mainly due to an increase of the concentration of responsibilities in the municipal center and the reduced flexibility of the local government. The number of municipalities was established in 1984. In the areas delegated, there were only certain features of supra-municipal significance - mainly control and coordination.

In reality, the reduction to 979 municipalities (minus 249) sets new problems for the regional development of the country due to the fact that municipalities in this period had already built their socio-economic profiles in consolidation and quickly lost accumulated branch connections and the flexibility of territorial communities and became stunted incumbent to practice effective self-government.

The new communities are a juxtaposition of purely urban areas to rural areas, which set new sets of problems during the transition after 1989 for a sustainable form of local government. In order to develop a territory, it is necessary to help solve economic and social problems in the area.

So after 1990 it was thought about returning a large number of municipalities, in the range of 545, and linking them with branch and economic nature, as the smallest municipalities should not had been less than 2,500. Work is also on view to introduce 45 districts and 14 regions, but ultimately the selected model introduced 28 districts and 265 municipalities.

After the adoption of the new Constitution from 12.07.1991, Bulgaria started to pass laws about local government. In 1999, the Law on Regional Development was adopted, Article 21 of which defines the object and purpose of the spatial and territorial management of our national territory.

The Regional Development Act is the formal milestone of a new stage, which seeks to solve the main problems of regional development policy and conceptual transition to integrated, financially secure and publicly proclaimed and observed regional policy.

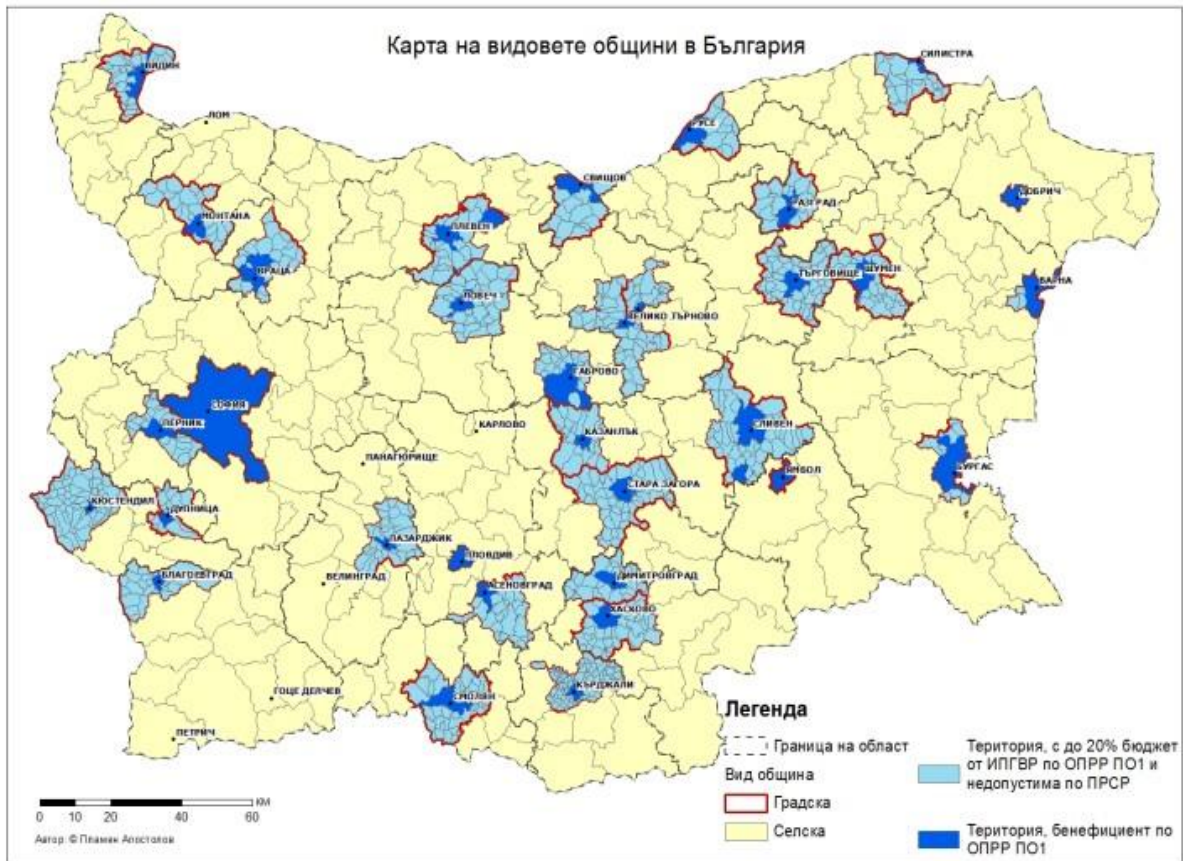


Figure 1

Types of municipalities in Bulgaria

Source: Operational Program “Regions in Growth”, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria

So today the Republic of Bulgaria covers an area of 110.9 thousand square kilometers and has a population of 6.9 million people in early 2020. In terms of statistical needs, Bulgaria is divided into six planning regions (NUTS 2 level) (Figure 2), 28 districts (NUTS 3) and 265 municipalities (LAU 1). In general, rural municipalities predominate on Bulgarian territory (Figure 1).

According to the European typology, as many as 15 districts are mostly rural, 12 - intermediate and only one is established as a predominantly urban area (Sofia-capital). In this direction, the rural areas in Bulgaria cover an area of 59.49 thousand km and a population of 2,519 thousand. On the other hand, it can be seen that the population density in rural areas in Bulgaria is 47 people per square km and is similar to that in the EU-27.



Figure 2  
Regions in Bulgaria (NUTS 2)

Source: <https://www.mrrb.bg/en/regional-development/regions-in-bulgaria/> (26.10.2020)

It is aimed at establishing rules for the allocation and the use of funds for regional development and settlement of relations between the agents of regional development and the creation of conditions to meet the requirements of the regional policy of the EU. The law should be viewed not as an end but as a beginning of a long and difficult process. It was followed by the development of a significant number of regulations, establishment and strengthening of a new institutional organization, carrying out an intensive process of planning. At national level, the ultimate responsibility for the formulation and implementation of regional policy is given to the Council of Ministers. They adopted the National Plan for Regional Development (NPRD) and the National Economic Development Plan (NDP). An annual report on the implementation of the Regional Development Plan and its update sets special impact areas, the coordination of central and local executive authorities and their administrations. The Directorate "Regional Coordination" is a unit of the Administration of the Council of Ministers, which supports the government and provides methodological assistance to local bodies of executive power, prepares opinions on regional development projects and others. "Economic Policy" and "European Integration" coordinate and monitor the implementation of the national plan for economic development and the national investment programs and participate in the preparation of programs financed by the EU.

For coordinating the regional policy at national level there is a Council for Regional Development at the Council of Ministers, whose members are the majority of ministers, regional governors and a representative of National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Council shall coordinate NRDP prior to its submission to the Cabinet and coordinates the activities of ministries and agencies with a regional character, coordinates the annual plan, accounts extra budgetary funds with a pronounced impact on

regional development, consider major infrastructure projects, approves the allocation of funds to build roads and municipal roads and others.

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works has a central role in the formulation and the implementation of regional development policy. It implements the state and develops the policy objectives and the priorities of the state strategy on regional development, organizes the development, implementation and control implementation of the Regional Development Plan, submits an annual report on implementation the plan to the Council of Ministers, renders methodological assistance to other authorities in the development and implementation of NRDP. At regional level, the main responsibility for conducting regional policy and coordination of national and local interests is on the governor. They implement the state policy; coordinate the work of the executive authorities and their administrative region and their interaction with the local authorities; organize the development and the implementation of regional strategies and programs for regional development; interact with local authorities and local administration.

Regional governors also interact with the territorial structures of trade unions, employers' organizations, organizations for social protection and NGOs. In performing their functions, the governor is assisted by departments of regional development in the regional administrations (which tend to have 3-4 employees). In regional centers were established territorial units of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (with 1 employee) that support the planning, coordination and control of implementation of the plans as regional administrations and territorial units have very limited experience in programming, implementation, monitoring, the funding of programs and projects for regional development.

Municipalities play a specific role in regional planning and implementation of regional development policy. As self-governing administrative-territorial units, they are autonomous bodies who manage and own their limited financial resources. Local authorities are the main generator of ideas, initiatives and regional development projects, a key partner of central authorities in the preparation of regional development plans, including the participation of their representatives in district councils for regional development, commissions for economic and social cohesion in the planning regions and nationally - by a representative of the National Association of Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria in working groups at the Council of Ministers. They are particularly a suitable partner for attracting the private sector and NGOs to participate in the development and the implementation of regional development projects.

Strengthening the capacity of the control of regional development is a strategic necessity for the improvement of regional development policy. Improving coordination and partnership between the participants in regional development is also essential to streamline their collaboration. Regional and District Development Councils have significant functions in the strategic planning of regional development, monitoring and evaluation in implementation of regional development plans, coordination of strategies, development of the fields and in the process of regional coordination implementation of operational programs, co-financed from EU funds, affecting the development of regions of Level 2 and Level 3.

Expanding the functions of regional and district development councils and their participation in the development, updating, monitoring and evaluation of strategic planning documents – regional development plans and regional development strategies, impose the need for expert studies of the administrative and management capacity of these socio-advisory authorities to conduct state policy for regional development, as well as other

authorities, bodies and partners at regional level. Within the meaning of RDA (2008), 23 regions were formed on the basis of their geographical location and population.

Areas that form Level 1 do not constitute administrative-territorial units and are as follows:

- The “North and South Bulgaria” area, which includes the Northwest region, North Central Region, Northeast Region and Southeast region
- The "Southwest and South Central Bulgaria" region, which includes the Southwest region and the South Central Region. T

The areas that make up Level 2 do not represent administrative-territorial units and territorial range as follows:

- North region, which includes the districts of Vidin, Vratsa, Lovech, Montana and Pleven
- North Central region, which includes the regions of Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Razgrad, Ruse and Silistra
- North region, which the districts of Varna, Dobrich, Targovishte and Shumen
- South region, which includes the districts of Burgas, Sliven, Stara Zagora and Yambol
- South region, which includes the districts of Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Pernik, Sofia
- South Central region, which includes the districts of Kardzhali, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Smolyan, and Haskovo.

Based on this classification, the Republic of Bulgaria is divided into three levels:

- NUTS1 - covers both territorial areas of North and South Bulgaria and the Southwest and the South Central Region
- NUTS2 - covers six statistical areas (North, North Central, North, South, South Central and South region)
- NUST3 – the 28 administrative territorial districts.
- Locally - LAU1 – 265 municipalities and 231 belong to rural areas (2016).

It should be emphasized that interest in the regions, and in particular to regional studies, has formed in larger countries in Western Europe - Germany, France, Italy, England and others. Activating the “regional ideas” on the continent was reported in 1996, when in Europe there were over 300 different region territories, political and administrative management with a population of over 400 million people. In the adopted “Declaration on regionalism in Europe” are the concept “remote” regions to submit their institutional frameworks to countries. The initiator of this event is the Assembly of Regions in Europe and seeks to affirm the “Declaration” is not so much about Europe as elsewhere.

The formation of regional policy within the European Union is to achieve the necessary pace of sustainable development, to reduce structural disparities between regions in the EEC/EU and accelerate the balanced development in territories within the whole European area. It proclaims that all targets and tasks related to regional policy are based on the concept of cohesion and economic cooperation between member states.

### **Structuring and features of zoning of rural areas**

In a sufficiently long period of time, rural population was crucial for the overall development of the country. From the Liberation to the first years after World War II, Bulgaria retained the agricultural nature of economic development as its dominant importance was agrarian population. During the same period, there was rapid growth of its cash and it lasted



until the mid-twentieth century. At the census in 1946, the rural population reached its absolute maximum of 5 294 thousand people, which compared with Census in 1887, represented a doubling in the numbers. This required searching for a method for strategic dependence of the structure of the population and rural areas in the administrative and territorial units of Bulgaria. Practically, rural areas are areas that are not urbanized. They are not densely populated and typically much of the land is occupied with agriculture.

After the start of the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, it has been important to create strategies and to modernize existing contracts and to accept programs of territorial development. In this regard the EEC/EU pursues a policy of rural development for all member states. Rural areas in the EEC/EU occupy more than 90% of the territory and are a home to approximately 60% of the population. Policies pursued by the EU Rural Development aim to support a significant proportion of the rural population of the Community. Many of these areas are facing major social, economic, environmental and infrastructural challenges. Business activities and operating enterprises, employment in rural areas, agriculture and forestry are still not sufficiently competitive.

By 2011, in the country as well as in other countries in EU rural areas were selected by a single indicator - that the population of the main village does not exceed 30 thousand residents. In the same year, a new, more complex methodology was introduced that required the digitization of the country and the determination of geographical population density on territorial cells. Difficulties with the application of the new method can lead to a delay or a return of administrative approach in determining rural areas.

In literature, the term "rural areas" is considered individually by defining their specialization as developing activities related to agrarian economy. The formation of rural areas is carried out under the influence of certain factors: location, agro-climatic, ecological, socio-economic, geo- demographic factors, policy formation, infrastructure and others. These areas are in a continuous process of change and development depending on their location, proximity to large social and economic centers, metropolitan areas, availability of technical and social infrastructure and others. In terms of terminology and the formation of "rural areas", there are various explanatory and opinions. According to Madzharova (2000) there are areas "in which... agricultural workers occupy a relatively high proportion of the population and live in them and so rural way of life prevails". These areas are described as areas with a less developed technical and social infrastructure, lack of capital, low labor productivity, deteriorating social services and a lower standard than the national average. The role of municipal centers has been successfully implemented in a village or a small town in the administrative unit, determined by the regulations. Other authors define rural areas as: "smaller administrative territorial units that are a part of the regionalization of the country. Their population is engaged in agricultural activities, typical for rural life. The economic activities have reduced performance compared to the national average; the technical and social infrastructure in their territory is underdeveloped. These areas are the smallest in the administrative territorial structure of the country". In the process of territorial division of labor and the impact of various social-economic factors rural areas can be divided and formed and although the main activity involves the development of agricultural activities, they are part of the administrative-territorial division of the country. Again according to Madzharova (2000) "by rural areas we understand separate territorial entity which is a part of the administrative-territorial division of the country. The capacity of the rural economy prevails".

For rural areas to become territorial units in the European Union, they should have a population density of 100 p/km<sup>2</sup> or a share of agricultural employment that is by two times

higher than the Community average for any year after 1985. A development in socio-economic objectives of a particular EU country affects the overall development of rural regions. Generally, the term "rural area" means: "a certain small administrative unit that has population below the threshold for an urban area". This threshold varies very widely in the EU - more than 200 residents of Sweden to 10 000 in Italy or Germany. The European Commission provides a definition of rural areas in its post from 1988: "The future of rural society": "rural areas are shaped by socio-economic and environmental structure. Those entities may include villages, towns, regional centers and other places". Based on this conclusion, the EC determined that rural areas occupy 80% of the territory of 12 states and ½ of the population of the EEC/EU lives in them. This work is not complete, because areas and methods by which to determine a status of a rural area hasn't been specified within the Community.

According to the program LEADER 1, which is introduced by the EC in 1991, the definition of rural area was: "For that rural areas are considered municipalities with a population of 5 000-10 000 people. The population of any of the settlements should not exceed 10 000 people; the density is less than 120 p/km<sup>2</sup> with an average in the EEC 115p/km<sup>2</sup>. In 1995 an "agrarian strategy" was developed in connection with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU, using the same definition as the EU and the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. The Cork Declaration, adopted at the European Conference on Rural Development (EKRSR) in 1996 defined these territories as " areas covering 80% of the EU territory and in which lives 25% of the population, characterized by a unique culture, economic and social structure, unusual combination of economic activities and varied landscape (forests, farmlands, natural areas, villages, towns and small industries). In the Declaration of Cork rural areas were defined as a source of public goods outside the sector of agricultural development for the first time, they are autonomous regions, which are not only a source of food resources and habitats that form their own appearance and development on the basis of a developed landscape, natural resources, cultural heritage, geo-demographic potential and others. A new element in rural development is to overcome the socio-economic differences. It appears as a new European base for the growth of this type of development. Parallely, the Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Recommendation №1296/1996 on the European Charter of rural areas. In this document rural areas are defined as it follows: "internal and coastal areas, including villages and small towns, where most of the land is used for: 1) agriculture, hunting, fishing and forestry; 2) economic and cultural activities of the population in these areas; 3) development of non-urbanized areas into areas for leisure or reserves; 4) for other needs such as residential areas" (Hanover 2000). Rural areas generally have an agricultural function, which have a social and an economic influence in the development of the area. It is important to create acceptable living conditions in rural areas in terms of all economic, social, infrastructural, ecological and ethno-cultural aspects.

Distinguished areas are located near large administrative centers or near agglomerations, compared to those located on the periphery of the region. In the areas a development the specific way of life of local people and landscape protection must be taken into account. With this type of territories additional construction and development of infrastructure facilities of the social and the economic type is needed. The transformation in agriculture and raising its competitiveness is determined by diversifying economic activity in rural areas; the development of the service sector is a preservation of rural communities as a source of labor force and a prerequisite for the realization of those, employed in agriculture. The definition of the terms "rural" and "rural areas" is crucial to detect regional differences in these concepts. In most economic studies understanding rural areas in their geographic

sense prevails, connects more with certain territory, which has a diverse and dispersed business with clear predominance of primary economic activities (agriculture, yield activities, forestry, etc.), low population density and relative independence of the impact of urban centers. The criteria for the classification of rural areas must be considered essential links between these regions and urban centers.

On the basis of the elaborated strategies four axes are formed and are directed towards improving the quality of life in rural areas, creating new opportunities development activities outside the known traditional agricultural industries. Developing the rural and socio-economic status of the population is an important element of agrarian socio-economic policy. The information on the population of Bulgaria and rural areas of the South Central Region is based on information by the National Statistical Institute (NSI). Rural areas cover 90% of the EU territory and approximately 60% of the population lives in them. According to the last national census in the country, which was conducted on 01.02.2011, the population of the Republic of Bulgaria is 7 364 570 people (in 2013 the population was 7 245 677 and 686 491 people in the South Central region). The rural areas cover 90 371km<sup>2</sup> or 81% of the territory and 43% of the population or 3 166 755 people live in them. The average population density in rural Bulgaria is 40 p/km<sup>2</sup>, at an average density - 74,6 p/km<sup>2</sup>. In rural areas of the South Central Region the average population density is 38 p/km<sup>2</sup>, which is below the average indicators for the country and the EU. In 186 settlements which are 3.7% of all settlements, there were no people counted, as 21% of the urban population is 50 people, while 36% of urban population is 100-500 people.

The lack of information about the development of business projects gives little to no access to information technology, financial, legal, software services. It leads to weak sectoral specialization and lack of competition and development in only the primary sector in most areas and poor preparation of bureaucracy when dealing with European programs and documents. The definitions and interpretations of "rural" vary widely for Europe. For some of the EU countries the criteria for defining rural areas is mainly the number of habitants. The main criterion is the density of the population (p/km<sup>2</sup>), because 60% of the EU population lives in those areas where geo-demographic factors, negative natural growth or missing values are minimum. In 1996 the EKRSR accepted a definition of rural areas as autonomous regions, emerging industries and activities other than the agriculture sector. Using the methodology of the OECD the definition of rural areas is based on population density (p/km<sup>2</sup>) and the proportion of population in the region. The methodology of Eurostat also based on population density (p/km<sup>2</sup>). The country average density in rural areas is below the average. For Bulgaria the definition of rural is defined in the RDP and we adhere to the national definition of rural areas. The villages that fall within the boundaries of municipalities with populations over 30 000 people are excluded from the formulation of rural areas, although they are eligible for such socio-economic, infrastructural, ecological and geo-demographic plan.

### **New projects to improve regional development in Bulgaria**

In territorial terms, Bulgaria may adopt a project approach that is focused on building a large infrastructure that enables regional connectivity in the North-South direction, and then to focus on the development of regional economy. This can be done by attracting strategic investors or creating conditions for supporting production in specific regions of the country that give an appropriate branch and a specific model of regional development. Largely, spatial impact should start from the Danube coast. Looking more globally at the Bulgarian Danube coast as part of the national territory, it is necessary to bring out its

specific characteristics, associated with geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions. The main approach to this area is improving the accessibility of Bulgarian river ports and actually creating conditions for year-round navigation on the river. In this direction, it is necessary to think about the construction of a new river fleet and building ten logistic port centers on the Bulgarian Danube to link the emerging traffic flow in direction North-South. This is necessitated by the fact that the North part of Europe makes efforts for rational use of river transport and enough investments to be put into it.

In recent years, US diplomacy has been preparing for the construction of an intermodal port in Alexandroupolis to connect the White Sea with rail and road links to the Black Sea and the Danube as part of a new North-South direction. So, on one hand, it will allow the rational use of the port and to raise the visibility of the rail.

Under the new railroad heavy freight trains and high-speed passenger trains will move, so the load on the field of motor transport will be reduced and mostly, it will improve road safety. The aim is loading compositions to move at a maximum speed of 160 km/h and passenger ones – at 360 km/h in the North-South direction. This approach of combining rail, river and road transport will mean that the Danube and its tributaries Sava, Tisa and Morava will be transformed into efficient inland waterways throughout the year. On the other hand, now the project ABC + De is on track of being realized and it will provide a series of specific solutions to improve the navigability of the river. It is good to address the problems of the annual flooding caused by the river. According to the project, after its implementation, floods from Vienna to Tulcea and near the town Passau, Germany will end.

This has a degree to be a new opportunity for Bulgarian river shipping, infrastructure and the development of the route of the 7th Euro corridors in the region. The most important elements in its infrastructure development and functional linking are the Danube ports of Silistra, Ruse and Svishtov. Their technical and technological modernization will allow an intelligent transport system and combined transport in transport to be developed in the region - more Atlantic destinations from the Rhine-Main-Danube in the Black Sea for Caucasus-Central Asia and the Far East to the Middle East and North Africa. Important component of its infrastructure development is building a parallel (along the river) – a high-speed road, which will be very important for the economic linking of the Danube riparian areas of the district.

For the realization of projects on this route, it is important that Danube municipalities in the region participate in the implementation of the EU Danube Strategy. In this direction, it is need to create a legal opportunity for the development of the Black Sea and the Danube private ports such as simplification of procedures in the construction of new ports and expanding existing ones.



Figure 3

Major Bulgarian ports

Source: [https://www.industrial-zones.com/general\\_eng.html](https://www.industrial-zones.com/general_eng.html) (27.10.2020)

Ports are unquestionably state property (not exclusive) and therefore, they fall under the prohibition of Art. 7, paragraph 1 LSP to be burdened with any rights of third parties. This determines the impossibility for the construction and the expansion of the port, which is not owned by the state. Since the business has clearly manifested the desire to overcome this existing legal obstacle, which currently is absolute, for the construction of new or the expansion of existing ports - municipal and private property. For example, in Silistra it is necessary to build a new grain port on the Danube River at port Aydemir near Silistra. The size of the port terminal should be at least 4 berths and the storage silo should be with a total capacity of 68 000 tons. The implementation of large infrastructure projects in order to become a reality requires individual governments to provide state guarantees or commit to their implementation, including large infrastructure projects. The planned turnover volume of grain is 150,000 tons after it starts functioning at the full capacity of the base. In these amounts, there will be 70% cereals and 30% oilseeds. Upon the adoption of any legislative approach to overcome the problem is to find a balance between the public interest and the private interest of investors. Possibly, people who are willing to build a port with a property, which is shared between more owners, is more than acceptable for the safety and security of shipping and the macroeconomic logic. To overcome this problem, the state should at some point withdraw the rights to build new ports, which would mean adopting the approach "the first in time is stronger in law." This approach is fully in line with fair competition and does not fully fit into the modern community. Another possibility to overcome that disadvantage is the creation of objective criteria by which it can be determined which owners will be granted rights and which – will not be. The state can hardly control the process through a detailed development plan for violations. Macroeconomic logic can hardly become a reason to give up coordination of the plan.



It may have Northeastern Bulgaria a strategic importance. First of all, further improvements in infrastructure connectivity are needed. An important project in this direction is the modernization of the Ruse-Varna railway line, which will be doubled and the speed will be increased to 160 km/h. It is also necessary to double the line in the direction Samuil - Silistra by optimizing its route and electrifying it, while seeking an opportunity to build a speed road in the direction of Silistra-Shumen-Rishki Pass-Karnobat.

An important condition for regional development is the certification of the airports in Targovishte and Silistra as international terminals for cargo and low-cost civil flights. This intends that the Bulgarian state must structure a new Economic Development Plan for the period 2020-2030 and to give special attention to the Dobrich, Silistra and Shumen regions as areas that can quickly become regions with sustained economic growth.

In this direction, it is necessary to pay special attention to the North coast. The emerging new challenges, especially considering the emerging new pattern of regional relations mainly in direction "North-South" requires the search for new creative solutions for regional development. Recently, the question of building new port terminals has been raised seriously and can therefore assess the feasibility of the implementation of the second industrial port in the Northern Black sea coast.

The localization such port should be mostly about Shabla, but this cannot happen due to the inclusion of this area within the "Natura 2000". However, this can create conditions for the natural extension of the European Transport Corridor №8 from Varna to Constanta and eventually, to Ukraine and Moldova.

On the Romanian side, it is good to finish the highway Constanta-Vama. Now the Bulgarian side needs to create a link to the Hemus highway after Aksakovo through Balchik towards the Romanian border and connect to the Romanian pathway at the border. The realization of this project is necessary in order to strengthen transport traffic on 8th Euro corridor within the country through the port Constanta-Bulgaria to be integrated into this new geo-economic area.

For similar project and its realization it is appropriate to adopt new spatial development solutions. This means that apart from the construction of express road, it is necessary to modernize rail links in the direction Dobrich-Kardam-Constanta, mostly through their electrification and increasing the maximum speed to 140-160 km/h.



Figure 4

## Pan-European transport corridors

Source: [https://www.industrial-zones.com/general\\_eng.html](https://www.industrial-zones.com/general_eng.html) (27.10.2020)

Ruse might have a significant role in the regional development of the country. A reason for this is the strong gravitational potential of Ruse, which has strong implications with Razgrad, Svishtov, Levski, Byala and the Municipality. In order for Ruse to become a withdrawing regional economic center, serious efforts are needed in this direction. First of all, the city must maintain and preserve its demographic potential. Next, it is necessary to open the city of Ruse again to the Danube River, as well as the planning of at least two high-tech zones to the east and west of the city. In practice, Ruse is of key importance in the direction of Corridor №9, Corridor №7 and in the regional economic integration in the Northern Planning Region. Overall, strengthening the role of Ruse could be regarded as logical and reasoned. Ruse has a crucial update on the construction of the route of the 9th Euro corridor in the country. In this respect, the update of the master plan of Ruse, mainly the construction of a new railway track to Danube Bridge I, which is displaced by the urban area, and a new bridge to replace the old facility is also planned in the following 15-20 years. Then it is important that building speed road Ruse – Gorna Oryahovitsa on a new route to mine outside urban areas and settlements. In the new conditions, it necessary Gorna Oryahovitsa to become a major transport hub in Northern Bulgaria where it is crossed by the "Hemus" highway, alternative paths to Plevna and it is necessary to build a new express road in the direction of Gorna Oryahovitsa – Lyaskovets – Sheremetya - Malak Chiflik - Debelets to carry the traffic along Veliko Tarnovo. In this part, the most important turns out to be the detour of Gabrovo and the construction of a road tunnel under the Shipka Pass. In practice, with the infrastructure development in Central Bulgaria, the route of the transport corridor will directly and indirectly influence on all of Northern Bulgaria, and later it will result in a direct relation to the technical modernization of ports Somovit, Belene, the road Nikopol-Plevna-Lovech-Troyan and the multi-highway tunnel Troyan - Hr. Pole. So, it will give a new horizon for transport and the urban axis through extra modernization and construction of the high-speed road Ruse – Byala – Plevna - Yablanitsa. Practically, economic specialization in the central parts of Northern Bulgaria is strengthening the role of engineering industries, the

chemical, food and light industry. In practice, the technological and territorial restructuring in regional economic aspect depends on the territorial factor and especially those areas of regional specialization that have a sustainable character and reliable human capital. Thus, regional economic activity also depends on local tradition and experience in the management and development of the regional economy.

At the same time, the region has an extra need of development of agriculture and agribusiness. In Northern Bulgaria there was a clear specialization and zoning in the development of vegetable (near Danube's areas and along the rivers Yantra, Rusenski Lom, Osam, Vit), grain (northern and central areas, Danube plain, Ludogorie), cultivation of perennial crops and potatoes (the area of the region), the development of environmentally pastoralism (the Fore-Balkans and Stara Planina mountain).

In South Bulgaria, it is necessary to pay attention at improving the main road. The road between the highway was built south in the foothills of the Balkan Mountains to connect Sofia and Burgas. This is the shortest route between the two end points. It is of great economic importance for the development of infrastructure, industry and agriculture in the settlements of this region of Bulgaria. The transition between the Sofia Plain and the Zlatitsa – Pirdop valley is done with a mountain pass through the saddle Galabets. The favorable earthy relief of the Balkan valleys between the Balkan and Central Forest was used for its construction. In this direction it is necessary to create conditions for economic interaction on both sides of the Balkan Mountains, mainly through the establishment of joint factories and companies, as well as putting the competitive advantages of settlements at both parts of the mountain. This means changes at a national level in the Law of Regional Development to draw up a specialized program for the development of the Balkan region. This effectively means putting municipalities as Berkovitsa, Tryavna, Kazanlak, Pavel Banya, Elena, Kotel, Sungurlare, Troyan, Karlovo and others to deliberately influence on their regional development and to measure the priorities for their regional economy. In this direction, we can go towards the development of regional industrial clusters to further consolidate the economic territory of the Balkan region. It means that the utilization of cultural, historical and natural resources and potential for the development of regional economy creates opportunities for investment and the construction of facilities that may have significant potential, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development of regional economy. The economy in South Bulgaria was marked by ups and partial standstill. Positively affected by major infrastructure projects south of the Balkan Mountain and the proximity to Greece and Turkey have led to significant investment flows in the region. The crisis hit hard southern regions too. But a prolonged recovery after it, most of the new jobs were created in the southern part of the country. The economic development of Southern Bulgaria finds strong support from the state through the construction of the highways "Maritsa", "Trakia" and "Struma". On the other hand, in Southern Bulgaria there are several regions with a deteriorating socio-economic picture due to the broken connection. No funds were invested in the transformation of a highway on the sub-Balkan road in the direction Sofia-Elin Pelin-Pirdop-Karlovo-Kazanlak-Karnobat-Burgas. Thus, a number of settlements in this direction remained in socio-economic isolation. Similar is the possibility to build a highway Kardzhali-Smolyan-Devin-Gotse Delchev-Sandanski, which could revive the Rhodopes.

If we focus on the most developed area of our Southwest region, we see than there is development only in Sofia, and the rest of the cities such as Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil and Pernik have either worsened, or have stalled. At the same time, the analysis of socio-economic indicators for the implementation of regional plan developments indicates that there is a serious economic change in southern regions. On terms of GDP per capita, is not

steady increase hasn't been noticed and there is rather a standstill. Measures are taken to attract foreign investments but retaining investors is difficult in some areas. There has been a growth in the revenue from tourism, which is a positive indicator of the increased tourist interest in Southern Bulgaria. However, this is not very helpful for our economy because demographic problems are exacerbated (emigration and aging), the employment rate of the population has decreased by 3.3 IP points for the last years and continues the negative trend of increased unemployment in South Bulgaria continues. We can say that there is a noticeable improvement in the Region, which has averages in almost all major indicators compared to the other six regions in the country. In terms of the GDP and Gross Value Added (GVA), regional economy has also registered stability resistance, close to the average in the country.

Problems in the regional development of municipalities in South Bulgaria are related to the lack of qualified and skilled manpower. For example, in the municipality of Sliven there is a major problem for the expansion of production in large enterprises defined by the lack of skilled work force. The problem is particularly serious for "ZMM Sliven", "Roger Vanden Berhane BG" EAD, the textile factory "Edoardo Miroglio" EAD, the new venture of the Australian investor Lempriere Wool and others. On the other hand, Sliven has an exceptionally rich cultural heritage with many monuments. All have a convenient location and are close to the highway. Plovdiv has emerged as a large investment region. For example, in 2016-2017 year several new factories were built in Plovdiv in the area of "Trakia". The projects have a total worth of about 50 million euros and will create 1,500 jobs. In the economic area near Plovdiv, enterprises already have large companies in the sector such as "ABB" and "Schneider Electric". In addition to the new enterprises, logistics company "DB Schenker", which is already working in the area, provides a large extension. From a regional perspective, the need to improve the infrastructure of the region is noted and is mainly related to the construction of the southern arc of the ring road the Asenovgrad - Komatevo highway. The situation is similar in Haskovo and Kardzhali. In this direction, despite the negative trends, particularly the Kardzhali region has a great potential for development because of its favorable geographic location and proximity to Greece. The common border is about 90 km long and passes through the Pan-European Transport Corridor №9 from Scandinavia to the Aegean Sea. Then the opening of the border crossings Makaza increases the opportunities for cross-border cooperation for the development of tourism, trade and cultural exchange. The port Alexandroupolis is only 170 km away from Kardzhali. All this creates preconditions for attracting investment, enterprise development and the increased interest of domestic and foreign firms for who the proximity with Greece is important. The problems of the region are to improve the service for investors, which requires an adequate infrastructure - industrial zones, logistics parks, etc., as any region currently lacks those but they are set as priority objects. The widening of Makaza checkpoint for heavy vehicles and higher transmission capacity in is on agenda too. In the new conditions it is extremely important to assess the permeability of the constructed routes and roads, as well as the assessment of the passenger traffic. This is necessary because in the 21st century, traffic has tripled compared to the 1990s. Because of the intense traffic in Makaza, the district administration of Kardzhali has provided means for the construction of a bypass road to take on-road passengers to the border. The project is extremely important as it will solve a number of problems, related to traffic safety, the security of citizens and environmental protection.

The diversion of traffic will increase the speed transit traffic and shorten the time to connect to corridor №9. Currently, the technical design of the track is being prepared, which will be about 14 km long. There will be a bridge above the Arda River and several viaducts

that are yet to be designed. This project is strategic for Kardzhali and is directly linked to the development of cross-border cooperation. Along with Makaza, checkpoints Avren – Mirtiski will also be opened in the region, which is also included in the joint Bulgarian-Greek agreement. The distance from the Bulgarian village of Avren to the Greek Mirtiski is only 12 km. Along with the important infrastructure projects and the construction of an industrial zone in the district city, completing the regional center for waste management rehabilitation of main roads, replacement of water supply and sewers socialization of archaeological and natural sites and others are also on focus. However, in Smolyan a new funding model with European funds will be sought through a new approach called "integrated territorial investments". This means going through the realization of projects such as the construction of the ring road Chepelare and the rehabilitation of 14 km of the road Chepelare – Sokolovtsi, the main pedestrian street "Vasil Detchev" and repair the Aegan street and others similar projects. The aim is to also focus on improving the infrastructure, which plays an increasingly important role in international trade and investment, in other areas such as Pazardzhik, Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil.

Meeting the huge needs of the developing regions in Bulgaria for infrastructure such as roads, ports and electricity is a major challenge for the private sector and for attracting funds from abroad. Market growth, market size and access to international and regional markets are among the most important factors that influence the choice of location for investment by companies, followed by the quality of the business environment, including the availability of skilled labor, suppliers and adequate infrastructure. Embedding Bulgarian regions in the economy on an international level can be done by delivering products at competitive prices and providing good quality electricity, telecommunications and transport networks and without the presence of other key factors such as mass access to drinking water. This means that regional development of Bulgarian territory must have its focus and adequacy that leads to the improved well-being of our environment so that the participation of large corporations in concessions, such as "build - acquisition – service" or for management contracts to become real and to create conditions for the permanent presence of economically active people in order for Bulgarian regions to develop a specialized Bulgarian regional economy.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of conducting regional policy is related to finding opportunities for purposeful impact on the territory through tools and activities that should highlight regional development as a national priority of the contemporary modern state. Practically, regional development means a balance between the priorities of municipalities, districts and planning regions and looking to solve the most important issues, related to national priorities and understandings of development regions as separate territorial communities. In practically, the creation of conditions for a balanced development of different regions of the country and supporting territorial bodies and activities through financial, credit and investment policy means that regional development must be the foundation of regional economy and outlines its contours through effective policies for regional development. This can be a sufficient condition for our country to be suitable for foreign companies, along with stable tax policy and lowest corporate tax rate of 10% in Europe.

As a positive fact, it can be mentioned that there are 600 million euros invested in production facilities, but good infrastructure is also necessary to facilitate investors. It is expected to simplify the bureaucratic procedures for large investors and long-term programs bringing Bulgarian specialists back to the country. Therefore, conducting the policy of



regional development is an important strategic task of the government, especially villages and small towns (in terms of population) that remain outside the national definition for rural areas that should enjoy the same rights and opportunities for social, economic and financial programs. This should be done through constant and quality zoning and modeling of spatial development of the various territorial communities. The combination of sustainable development models, based on the potential for modernization and efficiency of their development poles, providing a high level of competitiveness; it is a prerequisite for a long-term growth and prosperity. In practice, applying the agglomeration policy, a new model of spatial assessment of territorial systems must be introduced. An important model for the development of the regional centers and the capital is their zoning and construction of a new public environment for their optimal functioning. Practically, poles of development play an important role in the relationship with their wider ambient areas, covering suburban and rural areas and they are a subject to appropriate management and administration. Poles create development impulses that transmit through their environment and, thus, have an effect on its development. Another important measure is to overcome the adverse developments for the backwardness of rural areas. Thus, the policy for regional development must motivate the implementation of targeted and targeted programs that will develop the available demographic potential in the individual settlements. A differentiated approach to the population at the level of towns and villages is needed in order to improve the level of public works and communal services. On the other hand, it is necessary to preserve and preserve their territorial appearance taking into account the peculiarities of urban systems and the available resource potential of rural areas.

As a result of the general negative demographic trends in the country, the majority of districts in Bulgaria have had a decrease in their significant demographic and socio-economic potential. This reflects on reducing regional significance of various territorial communities to be sustainable over time. This practice tends to reduce the territorial basis for the realization of large-scale regional infrastructure projects. This negative impact is understood by regional business and it's seeking a solution to their problems on larger territorial levels (beyond regional boundaries) by participation in various economic or political projects. Thus they accept that the more successful will be able to influence regional policy, pursued by the central government, in larger-scale regions. This is a very important confirmation for the thesis that today's zoning and regionalization of the country is rather inappropriate and does not have the sharpness and the territorial basis for the formation of government in the country on a regional level.

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