

SOCIAL POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA | State and development prospects

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Abstract

Bulgaria passes a phase of severe economic problems and suffers from increasing emigration. The social policy and its prospects are becoming ever more important not only for us but for the entire EU. Examining the development of social policy in Bulgaria will allow us to highlight its positive aspects. The article identifies also Bulgaria's problems and discusses feasible solutions.

Zusammenfassung | Bulgarien durchläuft momentan eine Phase ökonomischer Probleme und leidet unter zunehmender Emigration. Die bulgarische Sozialpolitik und ihre Rahmenbedingungen auch für die Europäische Union erlangen zusehens an Bedeutung. Die Entwicklung der bulgarischen Sozialpolitik zeigt aber auch positive Aspekte. Der Beitrag benennt die Probleme Bulgariens und diskutiert Lösungsvorschläge.

Keywords ► Bulgarien

► Sozialpolitik ► Europäische Union ► Migration
► Diskriminierung ► Roma

1 Introduction | Social policy is related to socio-economic conditions and thus predetermined in its relevance. In any relatively distinct period the theoretical interpretations of the social policy pursued in the country have found their methodological and practical applied solutions (Braiikova 2000). Diverse problems can be identified in the system of the Bulgarian social policy for the period of transition to a market economy and access to the European Union, indicated by ongoing reforms in social policy in Bulgaria and other countries. Due to the dynamics of social reforms in various countries over the past 20 to 25 years and their main differences in preceding conditions, this article examines the practical aspects of social policy solely in Bulgaria without any comparison to other countries of the European Union. Nevertheless, Bulgaria's reforms orient on some European countries' knowledge bases.

This paper also aims to look at recent changes in the legal framework and the institutional structure of social policy in our country and takes some unsolved severe problems into account. Adjustments of our social policy to the European social policy are viewed in terms of the well-established traditions before 1990 and in terms of the development of the social reforms under the specific socio-economic conditions of the transition and access to the EU after Bulgaria's admission to the union in 2007.

In order to achieve this aim we have done the following:

- ▲ outline the theoretical and practical aspects of social policy pursued in the Republic of Bulgaria as a projection of the policy followed in the country under the aspects of the specific historical circumstances, the national socio-economic strategy, the socio-economic priorities and the resources and values, i.e. the national, corporate and individual organisational culture;
- ▲ point out the role and the support of the European Union in bringing the national social policy to conform to the European norms and standards codified in the Lisbon strategy, Europe 2020 and Bulgaria 2020;
- ▲ identify problems in present social policy and possible measures to overcome them, especially in dealing with minorities and the current wave of refugees.

2 Social policy in theory and practice | 2-1 Theoretical foundations of social policy |

Any policy including social policy is the projection of the strategy for socio-economic development which shall be developed and implemented. In this particular case, we examine the social policy of the Republic of Bulgaria as a projection of the national strategy „2020“, an element of the EU-strategy „Europe 2020“. The policy formulates strategic decisions about:

- ▲ the purposes, i.e. the results the country wants to achieve in the next three, five or seven years as they have been laid out in the European and national strategic documents and as set out in Europe 2020 and Bulgaria 2020 (2014-2020);
- ▲ the implementation of European and national programmes in which these measures have been outlined and the available resources for the priorities determined for the periods of the strategy;
- ▲ the forms of coordination and partnership at the European, national, regional and corporate level in

implementing the programmes in order to achieve these objectives.

It should be pointed out that Bulgaria is strictly conform and is obligated to comply with the European objectives, programmes and forms of coordination at the strategic level. These promises are easy to make but difficult to keep, and in some cases not at all kept, as we have seen over the last ten years.

Our research experience and observations of public life in Bulgaria show that the problem lies in the fact that politicians in our country, and to some extent in the European Union, do not realize that the implementation of any policy from a theoretical and especially practical point of view requires three immediate initiatives:

- ▲ build adequate timely structures to implement programmes to achieve the objectives in the future, in our case social objectives;
- ▲ provide and use the resources (material, financial and human) through which the structures will implement the programmes and meet the objectives of the strategy;
- ▲ promote a value system and influence the people's mentality at a corporate and individual level as the key to national, group, corporate and individual organisational culture.

In our opinion, social policy is the most important condition for the transition from a centrally planned system to a market economy and a democratic level of society. We can assume that the transition to a free market is completed to a great extent, but lacks in terms of an ethic value system at any level, especially concerning minority groups and refugees. In the following we will examine the reasons for this deficit by enquiring the status of the Roma population and the refugees in Bulgaria. Here we will consider the phenomenon of a mentality which can be described as „you just act, there is no money“ mentality adapted from socialist era.

The motto of communism could be described as „from 'each according to his ability', to 'each according to his needs'“. That motto taught us all to promise and to expect to receive more and work less for the attainment of our goals. Regarding the resources and according to the respective value system of the society, the social policy affects key factors such as

the standard of living, quality of life, income, social security, social cohesion, industrial relations and social dialogue (*Braikova* 2000). These factors, set out in the social strategy as objectives, can be achieved through an appropriate social policy which is closely linked with the economic, fiskal, external and internal policies, with the regional development and the legislation. If they do not work concordant, even the best strategies, programmes and action plans will fail. It is hard to implement a good social policy, if the economy does not create the necessary growth or provide resources. The economic policy should be framed so it doesn't only promote the accelerated sustainable growth set in 2020 and reduces disparities, but is supplemented by the appropriate social policy. Neither of the two work independently nor compensate for the failures of the other.

The neglection of the role of dominant values and the mentality of a nation and its groups has been described by the Iranian scientist *Farhad Nezhad Haj Ali Irani* (*Irani* 2011): Social policy aims to improve people's welfare and fulfil human needs according to the dominant values of a society. Value systems are different between nations, social groups and individuals and organisational cultures have different values and measurements.

The failure to understand these values and characteristics leads to failures in the European and American efforts to democratize other countries and communities. We think that the error of forcibly imposing the European and American democratic norms and standards recognized by us as democratic values on other national, group and individual of valuesystems has led to enormous problems, for instance in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

In our opinion this aspect of the implementation of social policies should be taken into account for an analysis of the situation in Bulgaria and other European countries in providing social care for immigrants from Syria and other regions of the Arab world. It is possible that some of the Arabian understanding of family issues and the concept of a nation will be a major obstacle and a problem for their integration into European societies. This assumption could possibly be made responsible for German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* admitting that Germany has failed in its integration policy in a television interview last year.

According to *Petkov* (2009) the European community is going on a long way of convergence of national economic, political and social systems. On the basis of the research findings of *Robert Geyer* about the evolution of European social policy, *Petkov* comes to the following generalizations on which we are basing our study:

- ▲ the need to mitigate the „excessive“ and fantasized national differences;
- ▲ the need to overcome the „artificial“ left-right dispute.

These requirements are especially true for Bulgaria, where irrelevant and pointless national differences are still discussed, especially now and in relation to the refugees and legal as well as illegal immigrants from Syria and elsewhere. The „left-right“ dispute which was taken up at the start of the transition to market economy and democratic social development is still vivid nine years after Bulgaria became a full member of the EU. Our understanding of an evolutionary development of social policy rather than a „left-right“ confrontation requires that we discuss also the positive aspects of the social policy in the country until 1990 which we should keep and develop, and the flaws and the distortions that should be dealt with and replaced with new European values and characteristics of social policy.

2-2 Social policy before 1990 | Positive attributes of the old system were the virtually complete coverage of the population in the sphere of social policy and social protection. It included a compulsory pension insurance for all citizens with sufficient payments to defy poverty. The benefits were quite adequate for the standard of living. Every citizen was insured against unemployment and for medical care as well as against personal loss and damage. Everybody had free and complete access to health-care, education, administrative services, recreation and other social services. Housing policy enabled more than 90 percent of the population to become homeowners, a quota which lasts until today.

The system's weakness laid in privileges for the leading class: Access to social services depended on one's party affiliation and an authoritarian manner of the distribution of social services. It also fostered a consumptive attitude among citizens, caused by the lack of incentive to work, produce and create wealth.

Party activists who followed the motto of communism sought and received as much as they wanted but gave little.

3 Strategic objectives of current social policy

After the beginning of the transition to market relations in 1990 we assumed that the positive aspects of the social policy before the transition would be preserved. The weaknesses should be dealt with and the new European democratic principles and measures of social policy would be implemented. Nevertheless of the new democratic aspects of an European oriented social policy some of the old defects were preserved and new distortions were created. In the following we will look into some of the problems of social policy in Bulgaria today as we consider the status of the social policy in its various aspects.

3-1 Social targets in the sphere of pension security

One of the main objectives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) is to improve the quality and security of labour through the protection of the social security rights of individuals. Bulgarian security legislation continues to improve labour standards by concentrating efforts to find balanced and sustainable solutions on a wide range of issues in order to increase revenues in the insurance system (which would guarantee its adequacy and sustainability) and keep down the expenses. An important task is to make the pension system compliant to the demographic and socio-economic structure of the country and to ensure sustainable increases of pensions along the pace of economic growth (*Republic of Bulgaria* 2014).

The problems in defining the objectives of a pension security largely depends on the level of deficits in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and the income of the working citizens of a country. According to the budget of the State Social Insurance (*DV BG Parliament* 2017) the average pension is expected to amount to 341,57 leva (171 euros). The minimum pension in 2017 will be 161,38 leva (82 euros). It is obvious that 82 euros per month are insufficient to secure a decent living standard and it is also doubtful that a pension of 171 euros a month is sufficient for the average Bulgarian pensioner, bearing in mind the fact that the prices for groceries and medicine are at the same level as in Germany.

3-2 Aims of social assistance | The objectives of social assistance in Bulgaria are generally the same as anywhere in the EU (*European Parliament* 2013). The material and financial benefits in the form of payments or goods to meet the basic needs are given to those who are unable to support themselves by their own labour or assets. These benefits follow

- ▲ the regulations for the implementation of the Social Assistance Act. They are provided monthly and must be tailored to meet designated goals;
- ▲ ordinance No. RD 07-5/2008 as targeted benefits for heating according to the type of heating;
- ▲ the Social Protection Fund as a source of temporary support.

3-2-1 Characteristics of persons assisted | Those eligible for social assistance are Bulgarian citizens, families and cohabitating persons who, due to their health, age, social or other reasons beyond their control, cannot meet their basic needs through their own labour, through income or through the support of people as obliged under Art. 140 of the Family Code. Other groups eligible for social benefits are foreigners with long-term or permanent residence permits, foreigners who have been granted asylum, refugee status or humanitarian status, “temporary protection” beneficiaries and persons who are entitled as provided for in international treaties to which Bulgaria is a party.

The social assistance system is built upon the principle of subjective will, i.e. upon the explicit statement of a person in need to the effect that he or she is seeking help from the state. The call for help triggers the procedure of verification, evaluation and decision in each particular case. The system is adaptable to changes in the individual economic environment and allows for a quick response in providing adequate social protection whose concrete realisation depends on the financial capacity of the state at the moment.

We can obtain an idea about the amount of social benefits in 2014 by a look at the maternity benefits paid by the National Social Security Institute (*DV BG Parliament* 2017). If a mother has no claim for unemployment benefits, she is entitled to a monthly social benefit for her child’s first year of 341 leva (173 euros) by the Social Assistance Agency. 173 euros per month is definitely not enough money for a young mother to make a living.

The pensions for the disabled are even lower or around the minimum pension:

- ▲ For persons with permanent disability or a grade of disability exceeding 90 percent, the pension is 120 percent of the pension for retirees. It equaled 138 leva (70 euros) in July 2015;
- ▲ For persons with permanent disability or a grade of disability between 71 to 90 percent, it is 110 percent of the pension for retirees. This pension amounted to 127 leva (65 euros) in July 2015 (*National Statistic Book* 2015).

3-3 Aims and problems in securing employment | The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) implements the government policy on the labour market. The ministry also ensures the protection of the national labour market, the training of the workforce and the integration of disadvantaged groups into the labour market. It analyses information about the labour market and about the impact of active policy on the labour market and it conducts studies of employers’ needs for labour with specific qualifications. It has a leading role in the development of legislation related to the labour market and in realising the Employment Strategy, the National Reforms Programme and the national action plans for employment. Furthermore, the ministry updates and maintains the National Classification of Occupations.

Employment policy includes the development of programmes and measures for employment and for the training of the workforce as well as the application of methodologies for increasing the effectiveness of adult education and of other policy instruments. It is involved in the coordination and supervision of the implementation of programmes, measures and projects aimed at the labour market.

An important factor for social policy is the level of employment and unemployment and the level of poverty related to them. According to official statistics unemployment rate decreased by 0,9 percent in 2014 compared with the previous year, thus reaching 11,4 percent. The long-term unemployed (for one year or longer) are 60,5 percent of the overall number of unemployed (*National Statistical Book* 2015). Of higher importance for an overall evaluation of the situation in Bulgaria is the availability of public and individual resources for meeting the objectives for employment and dealing with poverty.

In order to properly evaluate social policy before and after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the level of income and the standard of living over the years have to be evaluated and compared with the levels of poverty in other countries of the European Union. Even before its accession to the EU, Bulgaria had adopted the main European anti-poverty programme. In October 2003, the government adopted a "Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion" for the period between 2003 and 2006. Other initiatives were two national plans to combat poverty and social exclusion in 2004 and from 2005 to 2006. The overall objective of the above-mentioned strategies targeted at reducing poverty and avoiding the risk of social exclusion. The first step in the implementation of the strategy was the adoption of the official poverty line which was set at 152 leva (78 euros) in 2007, 166 leva (85 euros) in 2008, and 194 leva (99 euros) since 1st January 2009. The average monthly household income in 2014 was 214 euros (*National Statistical Book 2015*).

The average household income itemised per person should be compared with the current volume of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person employed in Bulgaria. According to the Nacionalnia Statisticheski Institut's (NSI) data for 2014, the GDP amount per person is 5 962,48 leva (3 044,72 euros). Thus, one person created an average of 14,27 leva (7,28 euros) per working hour (*National Statistical Book 2015*).

The low rate of GDP correlates with the huge level of poverty of large sections of the Bulgarian population and especially of the Roma community where unemployment is high. The data on poverty rates presented in Tables 1 and 2 (*National Statistical Book 2015*) shows the proportion of the poor below the poverty line which is set at 60 percent of the median equivalent disposable income of the Europeans (*ibid.*).

The high proportion of „working poor“ is striking. Their share amounted to 33 percent in the post-crisis period in 2008, as it can be seen in Table 2 (*National Statistical Book 2015*).

The low level of education is one of the main factors behind poverty and social exclusion. Data on the levels of unemployment among people with low or no education indicate that they are the main group among the long-term unemployed. After the last

Table 1: Percentage of people below poverty line¹

	2010	2011 ²	2012	2013
employed	7.7	8.2	7.4	7.2
out of a job	32.4	33.5	31.3	30.9
unemployed	48.3	52.2	48.5	47.6
retired	30.0	28.6	26.2	25.9
other non-active	24.4	27.6	27.4	25.1

Table 2: Percentage of working poor

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
full-time employment	24.4	30.3	33.0	27.9	20.9
part-time employment	6.2	6.4	7.0	6.6	6.4

census in 2011 for the first time national statistics introduced an indicator „never attended school“, which shows that 1.2 percent of the population over seven years, i.e. about 81 000 people have never been instructed at a public school. Thus, 1.5 percent of the population over 9 years of age is illiterate. More than 112 000 people – the majority of this group – are members of the Roma community (*National Statistical Book 2015*).

Therefore, the priority is to promote active inclusion of those furthest from the labour market: economically inactive young people, long-term unemployed, people depending on social security, people with primary or lower education, people without professional qualifications or key competencies, people with permanent disabilities, older workers, minority groups such as Roma and others. The implementation of integrated strategies for active inclusion of those groups at risk is a key instrument for reducing poverty and social exclusion. The combination of measures for access to the labour market, provision of quality social services and adequate income is an approach to social inclusion which covers the whole cycle of human life and contributes to the prevention of inter-generational transmission of poverty. It is obvious, however, that to achieve the relevant objectives it is necessary to develop economic activities with a potential for creating new jobs and sustainable economic growth.

¹ Ratio between the income of 20 percent of the poorest and the richest households.

² The data for 2011 have been revised due to changes in the statistical manual "family benefits" (according EUROSTAT).

4 Integration of Roma | To provide an answer to the question of how to achieve inclusion it is necessary to pay particular attention to the Roma community where socio-economic problems are quite serious. When addressing the problems of this community, we need to consider its organisational culture (values), both at the group level (ethnic group „Roma“) and at the individual level of some of its members who seem to expect the state or other institutions, including foreign entities such as NGOs and organisations like „Open Society“, to take care of them instead of being their own masters and solving their problems on their own. An important argument of members of the Roma community are the allegations that there has been “growing anti-Roma talk and levels of discrimination” by the governments of the country in different periods as well as by Bulgarian citizens (Dimitrov et al. 2013). The report, financed by the Organisation „Open Society“, also states that „Bulgaria is one of the EU member states with the largest share of Roma population“. To supply evidence for that supposition it states „On the basis of other methods of identification, other than self-identification, the Roma people represent 10,33 percent of the Bulgarian population“ (*ibid.*). That notable figure shall ensure privileges from the EU and from other European and international donors supporting the integration of Roma under the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” initiative.

In contradiction, the total number of ethnic Bulgarians was 5 664 624, the number of ethnic Turks was 588 318, the number of Roma was 325 343 (4.9 percent), the number of those who define themselves as belonging to other ethnic groups was 49 304 and the number of those who did not identify themselves by ethnicity was 53 391, all figures according to the official data of the *National Statistical Institute* (2012) from the census in 2011 and according to the principle of self-determination of ethnic origin. Taken the difference into account we have to ask, how the „methods of identification other than self-identification by the Roma people themselves as defined by some Roma representatives to be valid“ can be considered valid. Who could define those Bulgarian citizens as Roma who have self-identified themselves as belonging to another ethnic group than that of the Roma?

By monitoring socio-political events in Bulgaria especially during elections, by observing massive individual violations of members of the Roma community

both at home in Bulgaria and in other EU countries, and by assessing the reactions of the public in these states, internal and external observers can understand that the discussions and controversies between communities are caused by the desire for equal rights, citizenship and responsibility for every Bulgarian regardless of any ethnic background. All people in Bulgaria, including myself, regard the Roma ethnic group as worthy Bulgarian citizens and we expect them to demonstrate the same tolerance and respect for the laws and regulations of the country as all other ethnic groups do, and not to allow their own members to seek advantages for being a minority and as a result violate the law. Only a very small part of the Roma minority causes problems in some European countries by breaking the law. However, these individual cases of violations of the laws and the abuse of social benefits by this small part of the Roma community should neither be used as a basis of generalisations about Bulgaria and Bulgarians, nor as a justification of negative media coverage. There are offenders among the citizens of each other European country, too, and there is evidence of this both in our police chronicles and in theirs. Yet no one in our country is making generalisations about other countries on the basis of individual acts of citizens of these countries and it is evident that the European media should act in the same democratic way.

We will not elaborate this point further since it is more of a political problem than an integration problem between ethnic communities, but we will pay special attention to the measures the Bulgarian government has been taking since 2007 as it was supported financially and organationally by the European Union in support of the Roma community to enjoy equal rights as other ethnic groups in Bulgaria.

The integration and social inclusion of Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin is a long-term challenge that requires the mobilisation of all institutions and of the civil society to achieve progress in a number of spheres: initiatives against poverty, measures for employment, education and vocational training, health, public works and housing, culture and non-discrimination. It’s my opinion that the most important element of these measures is the educational system through which we can patiently and persistently change some distortions and vestiges of the past and reduce their influence on individuals, on groups and on the national

value system, to promote integration. This is the biggest challenge and its realisation will spare our future politicians having to admit that we have failed to integrate the Roma community.

The European support in terms of the Operational Programme „Human Resources Development“ (*EU Structural Funds* 2014) in the years between 2007 and 2014 focused on solving the problems of the most vulnerable groups of society which include ethnic minorities and in particular Roma people. It must be highlighted that until today the HRD OP is the only programme containing a separate section for the support and integration of the Roma community. Equal access of representatives of the Roma ethnic group to the activities financed under HRD OP has been ensured by strict application of the principle of non-discrimination of any kind.

In preparing the review of Bulgarian social policy on integration and social inclusion we have used the annual accounts of MLSP on the implementation of the operational programme “Human Resources Development” for the years 2007-2013 and on its effects (*Republic of Bulgaria* 2014). With respect to achieving the target values of the indicators of the operational programme “HRD” as mentioned in its Chapter 6 „Spheres of action concerning the Roma community“ (*ibid.*) we need to outline several key points resulting from the specifics of the value system of the Roma ethnic group. It is evident from the data of the MLSP (*MLSP* 2017) that under the scheme for training of members of the Roma community to adapt to the requirements of the labour market 14 673 people were trained in entrepreneurial skills and/or received counselling for setting up their own business. The number of Roma people who received employment brokerage services for the period of the implementation of HRD OP 2007-2014 is 30 000, but we should bear in mind that this indicator largely depends on scattered initiatives.

At the beginning of 2015 (the projects were completed by the end of 2015 but still there are no final reports and reviews) the proportion of people who received intermediary services and started to work was below 30 percent. This low proportion appears to be a consequence of an observable lack of interest and willingness to work which can be seen as a specific expression of individual and group organisa-

tional culture. Although there are no final reports about the implementation of the programme, our assessment indicates that the target for teachers and trainers involved in programmes for intercultural education and work in a multicultural environment has not been achieved for the same reason. Moreover, there are indications of failure of programmes aiming at the desegregation and the intercultural education of Roma children. It should be noted that the results of the projects under which campaigns are run and in which people of Roma origin are involved, are extremely difficult to assess, since no HRD OP tools for monitoring are used. This is why further studies should be carried out after the completion of these activities in order to calculate the number of Roma people involved.

5 Migration and emigration as a challenge for social policy | 5-1 Emigration |

In 2013, 19 678 people left Bulgaria and moved abroad. Compared to 2012, their number increased by 3 063, and compared to 2011 by 10 161. In 2014, approximately 38 000 Bulgarians emigrated to Germany. 50 percent of those who left the country are men. Nearly 56 percent of the emigrants are aged between 20 and 39. In the age group of 40-59, the relative share of emigrants is 21.5 percent. Emigrants under 20 years make up to 14.2 percent, while those over 60 amount to 8.9 percent (*National Statistical Book* 2015). The share of emigrants between 20 and 39 is rising and reaches already 56 percent of all emigrants (*Kostadinova* 2007).

5-2 Immigration | In 2013, the employment agency issued 706 work permits for Bulgaria to citizens from other countries. In continuation of developments in 2015 the number of refugees is still rising dramatically due to the recent events in Syria, Turkey and Europe and due to the fact that some European countries have closed their borders.

5-3 Mechanical growth | The net balance of emigration has had a significant impact on the number and structure of the population and is negative by 1 108 people. It is defined as the difference between the number of people who have settled in the country and those who have left the country. In 2012, the mechanical growth was minus 2 512 people, in 2011 minus 4 795 people and in 2010 minus 24 190 people.

Table 3: Transfers from Bulgarian emigrants in billion euros (own calculations appealing on annual reports of the World Bank, on information by the Bulgarian National Bank and on Bulgarian press reports) at an exchange rate of 1 euro = 1,9583 leva.³

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	total for 2008-2014
official bank transfers	1.58	1.37	1.40	1.30	0.9	1.00	1.51	29.06
actual receipts of cash	2.21	1.91	1.96	1.82	1.26	1.40	2.11	12.67

Contrary to the public opinion, statistics indicate that the majority of people have secondary education. One reason is the availability of powerful migrant networks that provide information and support. Migrants who belong to those networks don't need substantial additional knowledge (which graduates usually have) and thereby have no encounters with the indigene population. Also, most immigrants initially operate in the informal economy of the host country (*Kostadinova* 2007).

In an interview for the German broadcaster "Deutsche Welle" Professor *Iskra Hristova Balkanska* from the Institute for Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (*Balkanska* 2014) explained that higher qualified Bulgarian emigrants transfer much more funds from Germany to Bulgaria than migrant workers of a lesser qualification. The majority of the qualified emigrants are nurses and medical doctors. Most of the emigrant physicians work in private German hospitals during holidays and weekends when they need to replace absent colleagues or just to fill duty rosters. These migrants send up to 40 percent of their earnings back home to support the family budgets. In most cases, the decision to migrate is taken family-based. The majority intends to return back to Bulgaria. (*Kostadinova* 2007).

6 EU support for Bulgarian social policy |

A conclusive proof of the role and the contribution of the European Union in the implementation of social policy in the Republic of Bulgaria is the overall amount of its financial support for the period between 2007 and 2013 and the financing from the European Social Fund HRD OP in particular as demonstrated by the data below (*National Assembly* 2014). At the end of 2013, the amount of contracted funds under HRD OP amounted to nearly 2 328 billion leva (1 186 232 957 euros), which is 98 percent of the total budget of the programme. For the year 2013, the contracted funds

³ Our estimates and those of other researchers indicate that at least 40 percent of the transfers took place when emigrants returned home or when their relatives were visiting them.

were increased by 15 percent or 300 million leva. 1 463 billion leva were paid which is 60 percent of the total budget of the programme. The disbursement of funds increased by 91 percent or by 682 million leva. Verified expenses totalled 1 275 billion leva (54 percent of the programme budget) and in 2013 they were increased by 130 percent (720 million leva). Certified expenditure amounted to 1 083 643 165 leva (553 359 120,10 euros, with an EU funding of 54 percent), and in 2013 the EU funding was raised by 149 percent (763 million leva). As a result of the excellent financial performance during the year, the risk of automatic decommitment under the „n + 2/n + 3-rule“ was totally eliminated.

The money sent home by Bulgarians working abroad is another significant contribution to the economic development in the country. In poorer areas, entire families are almost completely dependent on transfers by their relatives. The funds provided by Bulgarians from abroad in 2013 were 1,4 billion euros (Table 3). The aggregate national and European funds allocated for the implementation of social policy in the Republic of Bulgaria are 1 106 718 240 euros in the same period, a significantly lower sum. The problem, however, is that much of these funds go to a small number of people and that in some cases they fall into criminal hands.

7 Conclusion |

In summary, we can say that the main objective of social policy in Bulgaria should be aimed at combating poverty and at the social inclusion of minorities. Legal residents in the country should be included as well as refugees from Syria and elsewhere. We cannot consider a social policy to be modern and European-oriented in a country where the average monthly income per person does not exceed 250 euros, where, as happened in fall 2015, the police blocks the roads to protest and demand for benefits they indulged in socialism, and where members of the Roma community enjoy impunity after

committing burglaries or selling their votes in the elections in order to survive. It is obvious we not only need goals and individual initiatives, co-financed by EU funds and programmes, but real action to stimulate business and entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship in order to develop an economy based on knowledge and innovation and to create an aggregate gross social product and income comparable with the average one in Europe. A rise in GDP could make it possible for individual income to grow and comply with the Maastricht standards. It could allow the state to allocate greater resources for the integration of individual and group value systems into a single integrated national system of values of the citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria as a fully-fledged member of the European Union.

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