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RECENT EXPERIENCES OF BULGARIAN EXTERNAL MIGRATION: A PREFACE TO A SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue of Economic Studies Journal suggests a selection of papers developed in the framework of two research projects focused on the involvement of Bulgarians in international migration since 2007 – the first year of the country’s full membership in the EU. They provide a variety of insights about the external migration of population during the last 10 years in both perspectives – attitudes of Bulgarian residents to out-migrate (potential migration) and actual trans-border mobility of Bulgarian citizens.

The first project entitled “*Migration and Transnationalism between Switzerland and Bulgaria: Assessing Social Inequalities and Regional Disparities in the Context of Changing Policies*” has been accomplished in the period 2013-2015 by an international research team comprising Swiss and Bulgarian scholars –sociologists, demographers, and economists. The project benefited from a grant provided by the Swiss-Bulgarian Research Programme supported by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, co-financed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science. Utilizing the interdisciplinary background of the participating researchers, a comprehensive analysis of Bulgarian migration to Switzerland has been developed focusing on a range of specific issues related to international migration policies, determinants of migration, regional disparities, social inequalities, etc.

The second project entitled “*Bulgarian Diaspora in Western Europe: Cross Border Mobility, National Identity and Development*” has been realized in the period 2011-2014 by a research team at the Economic Research Institute (ERI) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences involving scholars from ERI; London Metropolitan University; University of National and World Economy, Sofia (UNWE); South-Western University, Blagoevgrad (SWU). The project was financially supported by a research grant provided by the “Ideas” Programme of the Bulgarian National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science. A wide range of research questions have been empirically explored in relation to Bulgarian Diaspora in Spain and Germany, particularly their migration experience, social and labour market status as well as their future plans. The project also considered the issues

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of potential and return migration traditionally evaluated by a representative survey of Bulgarian population. Both projects utilize data from representative sample surveys conducted by the Agency for Socioeconomic Analyses (A.S.A.), Sofia.

The article³ authored by Paolo Ruspini (University of Lugano), Marina Richter, and Michael Nollert (both from the University of Fribourg) suggests an analysis of the specifics of return and circular migration in Bulgaria. It is based on the results from quantitative research (semi-structured interviews) carried out in the home country during the summer of 2014 in the framework of the first project. After comprehensively considering the return migration phenomenon – including an in-depth review of the main theories regarding return and circular migration – the article provides diverse insights about a typical biography of a return and a circular Bulgarian migrant.

The paper entitled “*Social Inequalities and Migration. The Case of Bulgaria*” (authored by Irena Zareva from ERI) explores the relationship between social inequalities and external migration of Bulgarians. It examines the social inequalities as an important determinant of migration processes along with some major results of migration itself – e.g. immigrants’ integration and positions in the host countries’ societies. The analysis considers particularly the migrant transfers as a specific premise for reducing social inequalities in a sending country. Using official statistical data about quality of life indicators as well as results from recent empirical studies of Bulgarian migrants, the paper discusses the disparities between Bulgaria and the EU, including some destination countries especially preferred by Bulgarian migrants.

An article⁴ suggested by Vesselin Mintchev, Georgi Shopov (both from ERI), Jordan Kalchev (SWU), and Venelin Boshnakov (UNWE) provides an overview of migration processes in Bulgaria since the start of socio-economic transformations of the country. The socio-demographic profiles of both potential and return migrants are empirically evaluated using large sample data from a representative survey of working age Bulgarian population conducted in 2013. Based on multi-dimensional ranking of Bulgarian regions by their levels of socio-economic development, some regional disparities are considered in respect of the potential and return migration in Bulgarian districts as well as remittances allocation and utilization. The paper suggests rich empirical evidence about the studied phenomenon deriving migration policy implications in relation to the issues of regional distortions.

The paper of Dotcho Mihailov (“*Bus or Plane? Profiles of Bulgarian Travellers to Switzerland*”) provides survey evidence regarding the profiles of Bulgarian migrants travelling to Switzerland using two different means of transport: airways and bus lines. It searches for answers to an exploratory research question about the socio-demographic factors that differentiate the airway travellers from the bus passengers. The article shows how individuals from different social strata – approached by specific sampling methods – evaluate important issues concerning international migration, e.g. employment, education, and social networking. A selection of results from a survey of Bulgarians residing in

³ Article title: “Between Return and Circulation: Experiences of Bulgarian Migrants”.

⁴ Article title: “Migration of Bulgarian Population – Characteristics and Relations to the Regional Socio-Economic Disparities”.

Switzerland reveals an occupational shift characterized by a diminishing level of the qualification required for the jobs taken by Bulgarians after their move to Switzerland.

The article⁵ authored by Vesselin Mintchev (ERI) suggests a range of results from empirical studies of external migration in Bulgaria as a sending country. The purpose of the analysis is to outline the socio-demographic profile of two main groups: returnees and potential migrants. Special focus is put on the attitudes towards international migration and the intentions of individuals to enter such processes. The results support the expectation that migration experience of returnees relates to the attitudes and aspirations of potential migrants. The paper also suggests data concerning the estimates of the country's migration potential for the period 2007-2011. The description of the employment and income status of return migrants during their stay abroad is of special interest of the analysis.

A paper entitled "*The Bulgarian Community in Spain: Will the Bulgarians Return from Spain?*" (authored by Vesselin Mintchev /ERI/ and Venelin Boshnakov /UNWE/) presents empirical results from a representative sample survey among the Bulgarian population residing in Spain in 2011. The sample includes 506 individuals living in 25 different settlements in this country which provides a reliable opportunity for evaluation of the social, demographic, and economic status of Bulgarian migrants in Spain. The transfer behaviour of Bulgarians living in Spain is compared to the practices revealed by Bulgarian return /circular/ migrants during former surveys in the home country. The article evidences about the degree of knowledge of Bulgarian language by the youngest generation as well as the frequency of contacts between the Diaspora and the relatives left behind. The question "*Will the Bulgarians return from Spain?*" is discussed as well.

The last article⁶ (author: Vesselin Mintchev /ERI/) provides a selection of results from a sample questionnaire survey of Bulgarian citizens travelling by busses from Bulgaria to Germany conducted in May 2012. Two main segments of migrants are outlined: Bulgarians that are permanently or temporary residing in this country. The socio-demographic profiles of the two segments are explored and compared, putting a focus on their actual and expected realization on the German labour market. The migration intentions of both types of migrants are described in the context of the current debate regarding the EU-2 (Bulgarian and Romanian) migration flows to Germany.

Finally, we hope that the articles selected for this special issue raise important concerns regarding the external migration of Bulgarians as a complex phenomenon reflecting the global challenges and perspectives of the country's development after its EU integration.

⁵ Article title: "Potential and Return Migrants in Bulgaria – Demographic and Socio-Economic Aspects".

⁶ Article title: "Settlers and Temporary Migrants in Germany (results from empirical survey of individuals travelling by busses from Bulgaria to Germany)".

