

## EXPLANATIONS OF ECONOMIC RATIONALITY CHALLENGED: CONTEMPORARY RETURN MIGRATION TO BULGARIA

*The article addresses one of the most intriguing questions in current migration researches: what drives return migration? It seeks at a micro level to find out what motivates the return in terms of the individual perceptions and reflexions of migrants returning to Bulgaria. The initial hypothesis is that non-economic factors have been the leading ones that have prompted the Bulgarian citizens to return to their homeland over the last decade. The underlying assumption is that the return to Bulgaria is not a failure of individual migration, but should be regarded in terms of the concept of emotional reflexivity and can be examined within the theoretical paradigm of transnationalism. The hypothesis is tested against qualitative and quantitative data from a 2017 national survey and 100 in-depth interviews with Bulgarian returnees. The text is organized in several parts. Following the introduction, in the second part methodological aspects of the two surveys are presented. Next part presents different theoretical paradigms of return migration and distinguishes between economic and non-economic factors of return, and between rationality and emotionality of the motivation. The concept of emotional reflexivity is introduced as an explanatory frame for non-economic emotional motivation for return. In the third part is the analysis of the qualitative sociological data on the returnees' motivation, illustrated by quotations from the in-depth interviews. A comparison is made between qualitative and quantitative data on the motivation and reasons for return. The analysis confirms the initial hypothesis. We conclude that the „return“ of Bulgarian migrants to Bulgaria cannot be comprehended without taking into account the factors related to life cycle and the relationship with home and family, as well as motives related to migrants' emotional reflexivity. The prevailing non-economic emotional and reflective motives for return to Bulgaria carry important implications and opportunities with regard to the development of effective policies and initiatives to encourage and support return.*

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## Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon. In the last century, however, and especially since the end of World War II, migration as an international and global phenomenon has intensified. Among the increasingly visible and attention-focused aspects of this phenomenon are the processes of migrants returning back to their country of origin. Research on these processes focuses on why migrants are returning and what is the motivation for their return. The motivation for return is a particularly important issue in the context of the discussion of what are and what should be the policies and normative mechanisms for managing immigration and emigration and for engaging the countries with their citizens abroad, including questions about migrants' possible return back (to their country of origin) (see Gamlen, 2006).

For CEI and SEE countries, these issues have acquired particular relevance against the backdrop of the so-called „brain drain“ problem, pertaining to the considerable influx of skilled migrants from these regions to the more developed countries of Western Europe and North America over the past decades. There has been a marked growth in the free movement of people in Europe with the EU enlargement processes, and especially the waves of accession of new member states in 2004 and 2007. Despite temporary restrictions in some of the „old“ member states to protect the national labor markets from the possible inundation from the Eastern European labor force, higher living standards and higher wages in these countries are an attractive factor for the steady migratory inflow from East to West in Europe (see for example Lang, 2013). This outflow from Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe raises concerns about the demographic picture in the sending countries (also referred to as „countries of origin“ or „home countries“) and has largely determined the search for ways for potential return of migrants through U-turn or return migration (RM) (see, for example, Gamlen, 2006; Anniste & Tammaru, 2014; Kovacs, 2013; Serban, 2015; Bilgili & Siegel, 2014).

Return policies are part of a country's migration policies targeting emigrants and seeking their possible return to their homeland. These policies should include not only the act of attraction but also mechanisms for reintegration after the actual return (Ivanova, 2015). Where there are such mechanisms in place, migration policies stimulate migrants to return money, return with new skills acquired abroad, provide them even with dual citizenship and rights, and also offer incentives for return, as well as helping reintegrate returnees (see Kovacs et al., 2013: 61). The great challenge to the countries' migration policies is that the national logic they are building on increasingly runs counter to the transnational logic that drives migration (Krasteva, 2014: 493).

For Bulgaria the return of emigrants back to the homeland is a relatively recent phenomenon, and as a „net exporter“ of labor force and especially of the qualified labor force, questions about the return of Bulgarians from abroad are crucial for country's development. Here, „returning“ migrants are Bulgarian nationals who have changed their domicile abroad and have a current address in Bulgaria. Although the growth from external migration remains negative, i.e. emigrants with Bulgarian citizenship are more than those returning to the country, the phenomenon of „returning migrants“ or *returnees* is an undeniable fact that calls for an explanation – both in terms of reasons and consequences.

Understanding returnees' motivation has a direct bearing on the development and implementation of adequate and effective government policies and programs to stimulate return and enhance reintegration of returnees in Bulgaria. The issue is of particular importance, considering that a number of Bulgarian strategic documents envisage priorities for promoting and assisting the return of Bulgarian migrants, but these priorities „have not been adequately supported by specific measures and activities for their effective realization and hence the desired tangible effect in this direction is still unattained” (Zareva, 2018).

This article aims to seek at a micro level a response to the question of what motivates the return in terms of the individual perceptions and reflexions of migrants returning to Bulgaria. Our main hypothesis is that, in the case of Bulgaria, the phenomenon of „return“ is not significantly predetermined by economic rationality and cannot possibly be contingent as much on economic and/or political circumstances as on social and psychological types of motivation. Although scientific literature and research pay particular attention to the economic factors of migration (both outward, i.e. emigration and return), we hold the view that non-economic factors have been the leading ones that have prompted the Bulgarian citizens to return to their homeland over the last decade.

Such a hypothesis logically stems from the assumption that the return to Bulgaria from countries that are economically more developed and enjoy higher living standards (like Germany or Spain) should not be regarded as a failure of individual migration projects or a consequence of targeted policies of the Bulgarian state in the field. Return migration should rather be analyzed with regard to the concept of emotional reflexivity (see Holmes, 2010, quoted in Holmes and Burrows, 2012), and can be examined within the theoretical paradigms of transnationalism. In our opinion, the returnees are important for social and economical development of Bulgaria. Therefore an understanding of the reasons for the Bulgarian emigrants' return to Bulgaria is essential for the development of adequate policies and effective measures to stimulate the return and support the returnees' reintegration

The text is structured in four parts. The first part deals with methodological issues and presents the empirical basis of the analysis – a nationally representative survey and 100 in-depth interviews conducted in 2017 and focused on return migrants in Bulgaria. Presented are the questions from the survey and the interviews that are relevant to the testing of the hypothesis. The second part depicts the different theoretical paradigms explaining the RM and draws the lines of distinction between the economic and non-economic factors of return. Attention is paid to the concept of emotional reflexivity, which is assumed to be an adequate framework for examining the motivation for return. In the third part against the background of more general data on the re-migration in Bulgaria, the gathered qualitative sociological data on the motivation of returnees is analysed. In order to achieve more credible results a comparison is made between both qualitative and quantitative data on the motivation and reasons for return. The fourth part presents the conclusions reached and the possible implications for policymaking.

## **Methodology and Surveys**

In order to test our hypothesis we have use qualitative and quantitative data on the return migration obtained from a representative survey and interviews with return migrants conducted within the scientific research project „Returning Migrants: Segmentation and Stratification of Economic Mobility”<sup>3</sup>.

The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to gather information on migratory trajectories (routes), return motivations and the current problems of different categories of returning migrants. The questionnaire contained two blocks of questions and a demographic section. The first block „Migration Biography“ covered contained questions about the period, destination, duration of migration or migrations, pre-departure status, reasons for departure and assessment of the stay. In the second block „Period in Bulgaria after the last return“ questions pertain to the reasons and motivation for return, evaluation of the return according to different criteria, reintegration in Bulgaria, new migration plans, among other issues. The questions in the in-depth interviews were focused on respondent’s biography, subjective experiences, assessments and opinions, giving the respondents maximum freedom of speech so they could dwell on the reasons and motives for their decisions and actions.

Altogether 100 in-depth interviews were made with returning migrants of legal age and of Bulgarian citizenship, who for the last 10 years (i.e. after 2007) have lived abroad at least once for a period longer than three months. The respondents were from different types of settlements throughout the territory of Bulgaria: Sofia, regional districts (Plovdiv, Razgrad, Kardzhali, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Montana, Vratsa, Yambol, Gabrovo, Varna) and from smaller settlements (Saedinenie, Asenovgrad, Yakoruda, Gotse Delchev, Kozloduy, Varshets, Sarnitsa, Dimitrograd, the village of Kukorevo). The selection of respondents was based on two mandatory conditions: a) adult Bulgarian citizens who have been once or several times abroad for three months for the purpose of work, training, attending children of relatives (for example or more grandchildren), escorting a member of the family; and (b) persons who have finally returned or periodically return to Bulgaria due to the nature of their engagement abroad (circular migrants). Different respondents in terms of age, gender, education and length of stay (both abroad and in Bulgaria after return) have been interviewed.

In order to test the hypothesis we have also analysed the results of the one-dimensional distributions on the following question from the survey<sup>4</sup>:

No 18A.1/2/3 „Range by importance up to three main economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria the last time - first, second and third place“;

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<sup>3</sup> The research project „Returning Migrants: Segmentation and Stratification of Economic Mobility“, funded by the Scientific Research Fund (Contract No. DN 05/6 of 14.12.2016), is implemented by the University of National and World Economy and the Institute of Economic Research of Bulgarian Academy of Science. Coordinator of the research team is assoc. prof. Andrey Nonchev.

<sup>4</sup> For description of the national representative survey see Nonchev, Hristova, 2018.

No 18.B1/2/3 „Range by importance up to three main non-economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria the last time - first, second and third place”

From in-depth interviews, the answers to similar and related questions are considered:

Question No. 8 „Why did you come back? Identify all significant (family, economic, political, other) reasons”, including sub-questions about the awareness and importance of possible return policies when deciding to return. In some cases, the answers to question No 8 are presented in the context of the answers to one of the supplementary questions to question No 2, namely „Did you intend to return to Bulgaria? If so, after how long a stay and under what conditions?”.

Question No 12 „How would you describe your return to Bulgaria? Voluntary or forced? A progress or a backslide?”

The answers to the following questions are also considered since those questions are seen as „auxiliary“ for the testing of the hypothesis:

Question No 19 „What has changed in comparison to the time prior to your departure? With regard to family/friends?;

Question No 6 „How do you rate your stay in the country of the last migration? Did you succeed to adapt to the country and integrate into the local community?”;

Question No 7 „Did you help relatives and friends in Bulgaria? - How? And how did you keep in touch with them?”.

In the third part of the text the answers to these questions from the in-depth interviews are classified and a typology is made according to the length of stay abroad and according to whether the respondents indicated mainly economic or mainly non-economic reasons for their return, as well as according to the specific non-economic reasons they identified. The analysis is illustrated and backed up with quotations from the in-depth interviews, and the respondents are marked by gender, age, and place of residence in Bulgaria.

## **Theoretical and Analytical Framework**

In the contemporary literature on migration issues, one can note a decline in the interest in the economic interpretation of cross-border migrations. Researchers have their own contributions to this tendency (Petkov, 2009). As Castels & Miller (2009) point out, the neo-classical theory is no longer able to adequately reproduce birth mechanisms, intermediate situations and end effects related to international labor mobility. As part of the more general „migration“ phenomenon, RM is considered within several theoretical paradigms that give different explanations of the return, the returnee, and the effects and implications (Cassarino, 2004): **neoclassical economics** (NCE), **new economics of labor migration** (NELM), **structural approach** (SA), **social networking theory** (SNT) and **transnationalism**. In each of these paradigms, a different focus and explanation is given to

the factors motivating micro-return in terms of individual perceptions and reflections of returnees.

**The NCE** sees migration as an investment in human capital and an attempt by individuals to maximize their usefulness by relocating to a place where they can be more productive (Todaro, 1969). The longer migrants remain in the recipient country and the better they are integrated into it, the harder and less meaningful it is for them to return to their country of origin. However, if they do not find work and migration does not improve their lives, individual migrants are more likely to return. Hence, in this paradigm, the *return is seen as a result of structural – educational and economic – integration failure* (see also de Haas & Fokemma, 2011). It is the result of an unsuccessful migration project and is considered as an anomaly and the returnee – as a failure („winners“ settle, whereas „losers“ return home) (Cassarino, 2004). The main assumptions of NCE are embodied and developed in the so-called Push-Pull Model (see Lee, 1996 quoted in Smoliner et al., 2013: 13-14), according to which *the motivation for emigration or return depends mainly on economic factors*, and in particular the different levels of pay and unemployment rates. In this way, the NCE sets a narrow rationalist understanding of return and its motivation (mainly economic and financial), while the focus is strictly individualistic whereby returnee is examined disregarding the more general context of family and community ties.

Unlike the individualistic rationalism of the traditional NCE, **the NELM** analyzes migration processes at the household level by introducing the idea of family strategy and highlighting the interdependence between migrants and their families. In this paradigm, capital is not only human on an individual level but networked and generic (i.e. social) capital, and migration is a form of social security (see Stark, 1991 and Stark and Bloom, 1985 in Piche, 2013). Thus, for NELM, return is part of a well-prepared migration project and is a logical consequence of a „calculated strategy“ defined at the migrant’s household level and stemming from the achievement of the migration objectives, while the returnee has succeeded and achieved their goals and returns to her homeland because of the strong attraction to home and relatives (Cassarino, 2004). Although it goes beyond the strictly individualistic focus and considers the return as part of a strategy formulated at a family level, the NELM remains a rationalist approach and considers *the motivation for return as fundamentally determined by economic and financial factors*. Both traditional paradigms (NCE and NELM) do not take into account the importance of the micro-level decision making and their main limitation is the primary focus on economic factors in the success-failure dichotomy and on changes in the conditions of different types of markets – labor, capital, insurance, etc.).

In sharp contrast to these understandings, according to the **SP** migratory processes, migration and return decisions can be understood only in a more global context in which all elements likely to impact migration and return are identified: factors ranging from economic environment and technology, to social and political environment. Migration is not a linear, one-way movement but a circular phenomenon (including circular migration) embedded in a system of interdependent variables and indisputably linked to globalization (see Petras, 1981 and Simmons, 2002, cited in Piche, 2013). Migration takes place in „migration systems“ linking countries and regions. Migration systems therefore facilitate not only outward migration but also returning migration, which is increasingly common in

the age of transnationalism, with increasingly cheaper and faster transport (see Bartram et al., 2014: 122). The main criticism of the SP is related to the structural dichotomy assumption that there is little information and exchange between the two worlds of the host and sending states, and hence the understanding that *return occurs in incomplete information about the homeland, while expectations from return are clarified against the structural context of the home only upon arrival there* (Cassarino, 2004).

**Transnationalism** is characterized by its focus on the dynamics and the maintenance of regular contacts and migration links between the sending and receiving countries, where migration is the result of the interaction of social networks in these two places (see Schiller et al., 1995). Hence, the circular nature of transnational migration processes, consisting of several stages in each of which a decision is made on migration or return (Haug, 2012). Issues of return are set in the context of maintaining cross-border ethnic and kinship relations between the country of origin and the host country. Return is a stage of the migration process, not the end of the migration cycle. It is part of a circular system of social and economic relations and exchange that facilitates migrants' reintegration and through which knowledge, information and forms of belonging and participation are transferred. Return and subsequent reintegration at home are prepared by returnees by maintaining strong ties with the country of origin, regular family money and visits to the country of origin. *The motivation of returnees stems from their attachment to home and household, and family ties are essential* (Cassarino, 2004). Criticisms of transnationalism include: excessive use of the term and its interchangeability with „international“, „multinational“, „global“ and „diasporic“; the assumption that all migrants make transnational connections; the lack of clarity as to the genuine nature of these connections; lack of clear distinction between transnational, trans-national and translocal processes; technological determinism; large variations in transnational practices; generational constraints, etc. (Vertovec, 2004: 3-4).

Similar to transnationalism, **the TSN** considers the return as a first step in completing the migration project and returnees – as carriers of tangible and intangible resources, assuming that they maintain strong ties with previous locations in other countries. But these links do not necessarily depend on diasporas, as transnationalism claims. Rather, according to the TSN, *these links reveal the experience of migration, which can substantially support returnees' home-based initiatives. Social structures increase the availability of resources and information by ensuring the success of the returning migrants' enterprises*. Reasons for return are related to social, economic and institutional opportunities at home, as well as to the applicability of one's own resources. The organizational characteristics of cross-border social and economic networks are sensitive to the economic, social and political context of host and home countries. In other words, the TCM allows for a link between the organizational structure of the networks and the meaning that actors attribute to their inclusion and membership in such networks (Cassarino, 2004: 268).

The presentation of the main theoretical paradigms for explanations of RM reveals the need to contextualize the return and identify the various micro and macro factors that influence it and shape its configuration under different conditions. These factors can be distinguished in two large groups – economic and non-economic. Factors for return can also be dealt with by their level: some are at macro level and concern the macroframe of economic and/or

political conditions in countries or regions (a.k.a. structural factors); others are at meso-level pertaining to community intra-group and inter-group relations within and across borders; at the the micro-level the focus is on the individual and factors at this level are related to idiosyncratic features and personal (including emotional and identity) factors and family relations.

In an attempt to propose a typology of factors motivating return, Russel King (1986; 2000) identifies four groups of return factors, presented in the format of the push-pull model:

A/ Economic factors:

- push from the host country (such as recession, stagnation in the labor market and unemployment, permanent deterioration of economic conditions, negative trends in labor policy regarding immigrants and unprotected labor market status, etc.).
- pull to the country of origin (economic growth, improvement of the labor market and others).

B/ Social factors:

- push from the host country (negative discrimination, racism and the like, leading to difficulties in adaptation and integration in the host country);
- pull to the country of origin (opportunities to achieve higher public status and higher productivity in the country of origin, for example on the basis of migration or education acquired through migration, changing social conditions and the overall societal macro-climate).

C/ Political factors:

- push factors - repatriation from the host country (from forced expulsion, to changes in migration policies that restrict rights and opportunities related to change of job, family reunion, citizenship, etc.), including in the form of policies targeting return, e.g. aid for certain taxes and social security contributions and reintegration grants in the sending country);
- pull factors - re-engagement (recommitment) to the country of origin (change of political conditions and the state of the sending country, e.g. de-escalation of ethnic conflict or civil war, change of political regime and the like). A special aspect of political factors of pulling is related to the changing international political and legal status of home countries as an outcome of membership in international structures (e.g. in the EU), as well as more generally to the role and importance of international factors in migration processes.

D/ Family factors:

- they are related to the life cycle and to the relationship with home and family and are based on kinship and social relationships. The motives related to family factors can be: nostalgia for home, return after retirement to spend the rest of their lives in their homeland; care for elderly or sick parents/relatives; finding a partner; education in their native language for children and others.



The array of return factors in King's typology cuts across the full spectrum of theoretical paradigms of RM. Economic factors for return are considered by all the paradigms – exclusively for the *NCE*, in the context of the family strategy in *NELM*, and alongside other non-economic factors for the rest. Non-economic factors for return (which are rather varied since this group covers all other factors except the economic ones) are pertinent to the *SP*, *transnationalism* and the *TSM*, although they operate at a different level depending on the level of analysis and explanation of each paradigm. The *NELM* represents a questionable case, since it does indeed introduce the idea of family strategy and highlight the interdependence between migrants and their families, thus hinting towards the importance of the family. However, unlike *transnationalism* where family and kin ties are essential for the motivation, within the *NELM* the motivation for return is fundamentally determined by economic and financial factors, which underlie a calculated strategy at a family level.

The latter considerations prompt a distinction between factors, causes and motivation for return. Although in research they are often used as synonyms, they vary according to the degree of subjectivization. Thus, the causes are objectively existing environmental factors or conditions that can turn into motives for return to the extent they are internalized and subjectivized by the migrant. In other words, not all existing factors (or causes) for return are turning into motives for return, and motivation pertains to the way the migrant perceives and interprets reality.

Building on King's typology one can differentiate the motives for return according to their rationality or emotionality, while distinguishing among the levels at which motivating factors operate. Thus economic motives for return are rational in nature and can be related to factors at all three levels. Social factors are mainly at the meso-level and can be related both to rational and emotional motivations. Political factors are at the macro and meso-levels, and the motives related to them are mainly rational, although it is also possible to have emotional political motives. Life-cycle and home-family factors are at the meso- and individual/micro-level, and the resulting motivation may be emotional but in some cases with rational elements too.

In the rationality-emotionality dichotomy, the rationality of return motivation is associated with cognitive and rationalist assumptions of people's reactions and actions (rational goal setting, calculation, and goal maximization), while emotionality focuses on the importance of emotions and experiences for people's actions and relationships. These alternatives (to economic rationality) views are based on the understanding that, in the complexity of contemporary social and personal life, people often have to rely on their emotions to direct their thoughts, actions and relationships (Holmes, 2010, quoted in Holmes and Burrows, 2012). Part of the non-economic motives for return is related to family factors (such as a sense of commitment and commitment to family and relatives, sense of „loss of roots“ and identity, lack of belonging to a place or in a group, nostalgia for home or homesickness). They are interpreted in terms of the concept of *emotional reflexivity*, understood as an inherent cognitive process of interpretation and action based on one's own feeling and feelings of the others. This cognitive process is considered to be central to one's lifestyle. Emotional reflexivity is such a type of reflexivity, where relations with others are of paramount importance (Ibid.).

This concept of emotional reflexivity as an explanation of return migrations clearly falls within the current tendency of questioning the preeminence of economically-based explanations of migrants' decision to return. Indeed, in a number of recent case studies, it is argued that non-economic factors are generally more relevant to the motivation to return than the economic ones. Thus, some studies on the return of migrants highlight the importance of social ties and their influence on patterns of movement and establishment. In a study of the motivation of Bulgarian nationals who have returned to Bulgaria after living for at least five years in an EU country (during the EU-15), Maleev concludes that the reasons for return range from pragmatic to ideological, the most important factors being socio-psychological in nature, such as nostalgia, dissatisfaction with the relationship with the host society, the feeling of nationality (Maleev, quoted in Ivanova, 2015). According to the „Family patterns and migration“ study carried out by the Agency for Social and Economic Analysis in 2007 (Mihailov et al., 2007), the main reasons for returning to Bulgaria in the 2002-2006 period are related to affection for family and relatives (80% of returnees) and difficulties in finding a legal job and the impossibility of a stable professional realization in the country of emigration (40% of returnees). Next in order are such reasons as the positive prospects for good work and business in Bulgaria (at that time related mostly to the then forthcoming EU accession of Bulgaria).

Other case studies also conclude that emotional factors are more important to return motivation than structural issues such as jobs, housing and general economic conditions. For example, a number of British return migration studies (cited in Holmes and Burrows, 2012) show that British immigrants often suffer from homesickness, which is a major motive for return. The sense of belonging and, respectively, the lack of belonging, the sense of being at home and the lack of home, as well as disillusionment and unrealized dreams, are particularly emphasized. In a survey of Albanian immigrants in Greece, the leading motives for return are home nostalgia (48.1%) and family reunification (22.2%) (Gialis, 2012).

According to a number of authors, the family and life-cycle factors are more important as a motivation for return than the initial emigration (see for e.g. Black et al., 2004, Nonchev & Hristova, 2018). Factors such as marriage, childcare, and responsibilities to older parents and relatives can strongly motivate migrants to return to their home country. The results of case studies reveal that in many cases family-related reasons, and especially the desire to reunite the family, are the most important ones, followed by work-related reasons, and especially the desire to start their own business (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Piotrowski & Tong, 2010).

As an explanatory frame for return motivation the concept of emotional reflexivity fits best with the paradigm of *transnationalism*, because of latter's unambiguous focus on human linkages. Within *transnationalism* family and social relations between sending and receiving countries are considered essential, stressing the importance of migrants' maintaining strong ties with their home country. It is this idea of the importance of emotional reflexivity that can shed light onto one of the core assumptions of *transnationalism* – the motivation of returnees stems from their attachment to home and family.

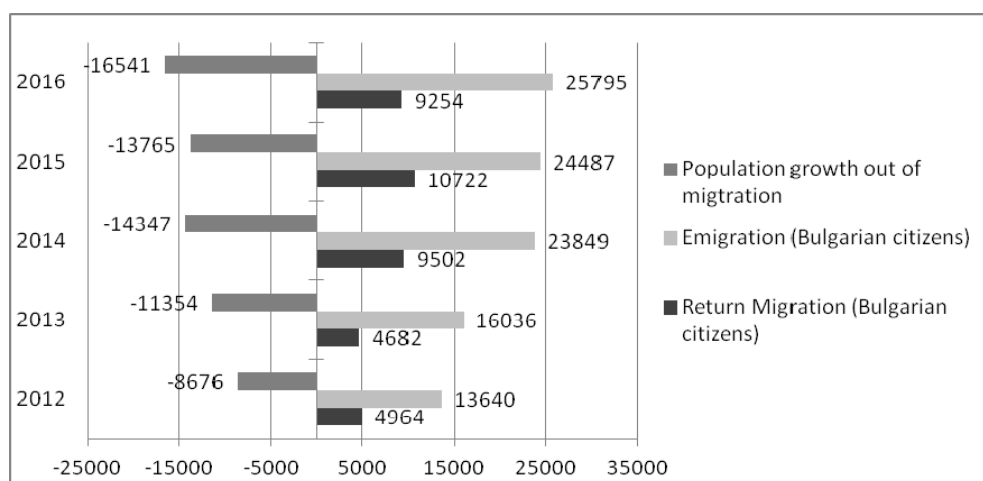
### Remigration to Bulgaria: data analysis

Between 1980 and 2011, a total of 214,553 Bulgarians returned to live in Bulgaria after a stay abroad. After 2006 there emerged a rising trend in the number of Bulgarians returning to the country. Thus, in 2006, 9 467 (4.4%) Bulgarian citizens returned to the country, 15 288 (7.1%) in 2008, and in 2010 their number reached 23 811 or 11.1% of outgoing migrants. However, net migration during the period up to the last census in 2011 is minus 24,190 people (see *Aktualizirana...*, 2012: 22-15). The dynamics of the number of Bulgarian migrants returning to Bulgaria generally follows the same trends in the period after 2011, although the number of returnees decreases annually compared to 2006-2011 (see Chart 1).

Although Bulgaria continues to be a „net exporter” of migrants and the growth from external migration remains negative (i.e. emigrants with Bulgarian citizenship are more than those who return to the country), the return of migrants to Bulgaria is a lasting trend that raises the question of returnees’ motivation. Considering that, according to the 2011 surveys, the so-called „returning” and „present” emigrants have contributed more than EUR 690 million to the country (Minchev et al.: 2011), the question of the motivation of returnees really acquires particular significance.

Chart 1

„Outgoing” and „incoming” migration of Bulgarian citizens (2012-2017)



Source: INFOSTAT, National Statistical Institute (at <https://infostat.nsi.bg/>)

The field data from 2017-2018 draw a complex picture of re-migrants motivation to return. The returnees’ motivation to return to Bulgaria is revealed mainly through the answers of question No 8 „Why did you come back? Identify all the major causes (family, economic, political, etc.) with guiding questions about a specific event that provoked return, as well as

about the importance and awareness of national and regional policies and measures supporting return. The answers to this question show the presence of both economic and non-economic reasons and factors motivating return.

**Economic factors and motives** can be grouped as follows:

- Termination of the employment contract or seasonal work – mentioned in 14 interviews;
- Change in the economic conditions – the (mostly economic) reason for staying abroad is no longer valid or has dropped altogether (e.g. becoming jobless after the passing away of the elder person who is taken care of; change of the economic conditions) - mentioned in 12 interviews;
- Expectation of or better prospects for employment in Bulgaria, incl. starting one's own business - mentioned in 9 interviews;
- Completion of education or internship abroad (and not finding a job afterwards) - mentioned in 5 interviews;
- Lower living costs in Bulgaria (own housing, no rent paid) and/or equivalent pay (abroad and in Bulgaria) for the same position - quoted in 4 interviews.

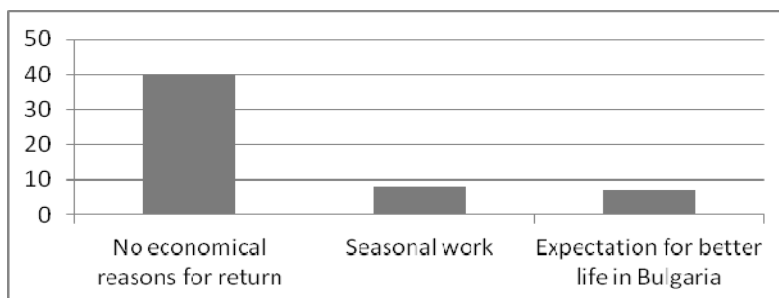
**Non-economic motives** can be divided into two large groups – specific reasons of family nature and personal reasons:

- Specific reasons of family nature: such as taking care for elder or sick relatives, marriage, living together with a partner, taking care for one's children or grandchildren – mentioned in 26 interviews;
- Personal reasons such as like homesickness and nostalgia; feeling sadness for being away from children and relatives; health problems; a desire to start a career in Bulgaria; a desire to study in Bulgaria; a desire to be with one's family and friends; old age; a desire for change of one's life – mentioned in 44 of 100 interviews.

It is evident that the non-economic motives for return to Bulgaria definitely predominate. Such a conclusion is also confirmed by the results from the representative survey. Indicatively, two-fifths of the respondents answer „I did not return for economic reasons“ to a question that asks them to point out the three most important economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria (Graph 2). At the same time, as the first and third non-economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria, the respondents put „Affection for the Family“ and „Nostalgia for the Country“ (Graph 3).

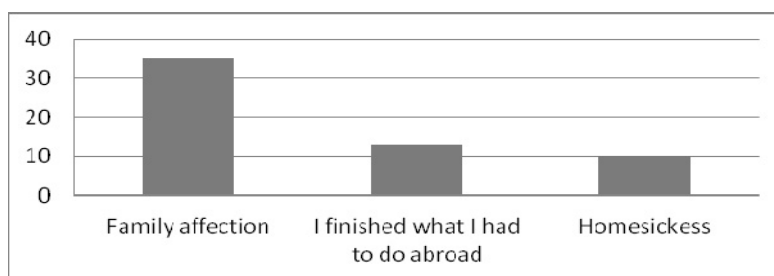
Graph 2

The three main economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria the last time (% of the answers)



Graph 3

The three main non-economic reasons for returning to Bulgaria (% of the answers)



In addition to quantitative data, in the results of the in-depth interviews, **the complex nature of the motivation for return** clearly surfaces. Interviewees mention **combinations of economic and non-economic motives** and in some cases – contrary to our hypothesis – economic motives are indeed the more relevant ones:

*„Mainly economic reasons - I did not have the means to buy a home, and to rent a place was also very expensive. There were also family reasons - I realized that my father and mother would like me to be closer to them, to be back in Bulgaria” [man, 30, Sofia].*

*„I returned mainly for health reasons. ... At the same time, I felt nostalgic. I realized that it is not worth it to be away from my family for this miserable money and under such harsh conditions” [man, 61, Razgrad].*

It should be noted that health problems as motives of a personal nature are an example of the implicit multiplicity of some motives which, although non-economic and personal in nature, may also contain a subtle economic component. For example, in some cases, health-related motives for return are tied to economic arguments for the cost of medical treatment - higher in the host country and lower in Bulgaria: *„We returned because of my husband’s*

illness. ... He had to come to Bulgaria for treatment and surgery. We made the judgment that the means we have will not get us there for treatment and surgery. There everything is much more expensive. It was urgent and we quickly got home” [woman, 58, Saedinenie]. In other cases, these economic aspects of health-related motives for return are lacking, and it is about climate or quality of health services: „I went back to Bulgaria because I was permanently ill. The humid climate in Italy had a bad effect on my liver and the condition of my joints” [woman, 59, Montana] or „I had to do a very serious medical test in Bulgaria, I did not want to trust the Greek doctors” [woman, 52, Vratsa].

The story of a woman who lives and works for 13 years in Greece seems indicative of the interplay of economic and non-economic motives for return: „I was content until the crisis also came to Greece itself. The wages were severely cut. The work increased because of staff reduction and one nurse was forced to do the work of two. ... I just could no longer stand the strain. Nostalgia was overwhelming for the reason that I could no longer stand being away from my children. That’s the main thing that made me go home. And the low wages that were merely enough to make both ends meet. It just was not worth it. I had to work on two jobs. And at one point you say to yourself: 250 Euros an average salary and if you are good and willing to work, you can also get it in your own country and be at home with your children, in your motherland, and have the feeling you are where you belong” [woman, 52, Vratsa].

Another example where non-economic motives prevail are the words of a young man who, for about two years, had enjoyed a high paid and motivating work abroad: „I realized that the material wellbeing I had achieved abroad did not bring me the happiness I saw in the eyes of my friends and colleagues with whom we have studied or grew up together. ... I was in an environment where entertainment was reduced to a minimum, if not non-existent. I had no time. ... At one point I became aware I can neither have a serious relationship at a distance, nor go out and have fun. I missed weddings, births of children of my very close relatives and friends. I missed pretty important things for me. I just realized that money is important, but not everything, and that if I can work in Bulgaria and make a living. So I will come back and give it a try” [man, 27, Sofia].

There are also cases in which specific family-related and personal reasons combine, and in which economic factors are seen as belonging to the general environment and not as an element of personal motivation: „I was nostalgic for Bulgaria and I missed my girlfriend ... I returned to Bulgaria mainly because of my girlfriend – for us to live together and create a family. Here, [in Bulgaria] economy has already started to recover and there has been a demand for cadres on the labor market” [man, 40, Montana].

An interesting example of a combination of family and personal motives for return but with a clear extension of motivation in the *pro bono publico* direction is seen in the words of a young man who, since his school years, has lived, studied and worked in Italy several times and although his parents are still living in Italy, he decides to return: „At the beginning I liked the idea of living abroad, getting to know the foreign culture, history. However, over time, nostalgia appeared. ... Overall, the idea of my departure was my development, both professionally and personally. And the idea of my return was exactly the same. After having gained some experience and having embraced the foreign culture, I decided that upon return, my knowledge could help both my country and myself to develop in different

*environments. I realized I could share the experience I had gained and develop positively to my benefit and for the sake of society at large... from the point of view of a family, it is very difficult for a person to be abroad and to get to know the right person and start living with someone. And one of the reasons to come back is precisely the idea that I am already growing up, and I feel I am ready to make my own family and meet the right person ... in Bulgaria ... I will find the right person for me” [man, 26, Sofia].*

Secondly, it should be noted the importance of **migrants’ preliminary awareness of the fact that they are going abroad for a fixed and usually not too long** (several months to a year) **period of time** and will return to Bulgaria after its expiration. Migrants with fixed migration periods are, for example, students going to a brigade abroad during the summer, or people who find seasonal jobs or go for fixed short periods. In such cases, homesickness and nostalgia for one’s country are irrelevant to return. Even though there may be sadness about family and relatives, migrants are well aware they have a time limit and will shortly go home. Illustrative of this finding are the words of several returnees:

*„My school year was starting, and the season was over. There was no reason to stay any longer. The specific occasion for my return was the beginning of the academic year” [woman, 25, Razgrad].*

*„The purpose of my trip was to spend 4 months during the high season in the resort so that I earned lots of money to live on until I found a job. This was money that I could invest in my education” [woman, 32, Saedinenie].*

*„My family is here and I have never considered staying [there]. What is more, I had arranged a job for 6 months. ... I have always wanted to come back. I have always stayed there for a fixed period of time, in compliance with the legal leave in Bulgaria so that I keep my job [in Bulgaria]” [woman, 41, Plovdiv].*

*„I came back because I had gone there for three months. The time has over and that was it” [woman, 49, Kukorevo village].*

In the light of the established relation between the length of stay, the migrant’s awareness of leaving for a fixed short period of time and the nature of the motivation to return, the research interest should focus on **the motivation of a specific group of respondents: those who had lived and worked for a longer time abroad (5 years and over), who enjoyed integration in the environment there and had set a decent life there, but nevertheless decided to come back to Bulgaria**. According to the NCE the longer migrants remain in the recipient country and the better they are integrated into it, the harder and less meaningful it is for them to return to their country of origin. The empirical findings of the in-depth interviews, however, contradict this theoretical assumption.

Of the 100 in-depth interviews, 17 are with returnees to Bulgaria, who have lived for a long time in the same place abroad before returning. Except for one, *all others have identified non-economic motives for their return pertaining to the aforementioned concept of emotional reflexivity, in which one’s own feelings and relationships to others are of paramount importance* (Holmes and Burrows, 2012). In three of the cases there is a mixed economic and non-economic motivation; in two other interviews the motives fall within the specific reasons of family nature, while in the rest of the interviews motivation is mainly

driven by personal reasons. There are several cases of motives for return related to emotional reflexivity, and the following two examples from our research deserve particular attention.

The first case involves a man who lives for nearly 7 years with his family in Switzerland, has his own company for construction repairs and has a very good income. As he himself says, „*Generally speaking, I had no intention of coming back [to Bulgaria]. I had the intention of settling there. Even my whole family came over. But my daughter felt seriously depressed there for some reason, and I decided there was no point in torment my child. And it would be better to come back with her to Bulgaria. So overnight I took the decision to return ... My daughter didn't feel OK at school. She had entered the difficult age of puberty. She would shut herself in her bedroom and weep. They say children should not be listened to when living abroad, but I do not think so. I cannot torment my child. What should I do – depress further my kid? I could still stay there, given that I had lived for two and a half years without my family in the beginning. My children are growing, and I saw them only twice a year – I didn't feel like doing this again*“ [male, 46, Plovdiv].

The second case concerns a woman who lives in Spain for 15 years. Initially she goes there on an excursion but it happens so that she stays there. And although, as she says herself, „*after the first year I started feeling homesick for Bulgaria and wanted to come back*“, she lives there for years, marries a Catalanian, and has a child with him. She appreciates her life in Spain very positively, and **the only reason for return**, as she herself says, **is nostalgia**: „*Only that, nothing else.*“ Even though the respondent sees the return as „*voluntary, greatly desired*“, she nevertheless regards it „*as a step back, regrettably. I come back and I feel as if I am 15 years back in time with regard to the people's psychological makeup and mentality. Regarding the standard of living and career development, there is also a drawback. I can see how my fridge is more modest here (figuratively speaking), food as price and quality is worse and other such things*“ [woman, 45, Sofia].

**The motives related to emotional reflexivity** are often described as nostalgia and grief over home and relatives, and the feeling that something is missing or abandoned in the country of origin. In the context of the motives for returning to Bulgaria, **nostalgia** in its meaning of „*painful sadness over one's country and relatives*“ occurs 13 times in 10 of the 100 interviews, and the synonymously used *sorrow, suffering, sadness, missing something/someone, loneliness* occur 18 times in 13 of the interviews. In a number of interviews, the words of the returnees unambiguously reveal the lack of home and the sadness over relatives and friends as the main reasons for returning. The words of a young man who worked for two years in the United States aptly summarize the feelings and motives for the return of many of the respondents in the in-depth interviews: „*My nostalgia and my love for Bulgaria and for my relatives brought me back here*“ [man, 29, Sofia].

The most emotionally loaded cases are of mothers who have left children in Bulgaria. After more than 10 years abroad, a woman said: „*Nostalgia has overwhelmed me because I could not stand the separation with my children. That's the main thing that made me go back home*“ [woman, 52, Vratsa]. Another mother is also very emotional and even though she did not spend a lot of time working abroad, she had a hard time because of the separation with her children: „*I returned mainly for family reasons. I desperately missed my children and suffered for them. My job required a lot of patience and attention. I was taking care of*



*other children, while my own children were crying for me. No, there was no specific reason [for returning] except the grief that did not allow me to effectively work or rest*" [woman, 52, Razgrad].

Another example is a woman who lives and works for 6 months in New Zealand. Moreover, she is not alone there but has the support of her brother who has long been living there: *„After half a year I decided to return. I do not regret doing so. My stay there changed my thinking. There is nothing better than the native land and the place where your kin is. Many people think I am crazy for coming back. But they never understand it unless they go through the same experience*" [woman, 56, Kardzhali].

The words of a young woman who was four times in Germany and Austria, attending for a few months each time specialization and training, expose emotional reflexivity as a driver of motivation: *„When the time to go back to Bulgaria came, I spoke with my direct superior about whether they were happy with my performance. He told me they were very pleased, and that they were even considering a job offer at their office in Germany. At first, I was happy, but then I gave it a second thought and decided to turn down the offer. I would be missing my friends and family. I had no strong reason (material or personal) to stay there. In Bulgaria, I feel better and complete. There [in Germany] I made several friendships, but they were not the same as those in Bulgaria*" [woman, 30, Kardzhali].

For most of the interviewed returnees, Bulgaria is very attractive, because it is **home** – conceived both as a family and relatives, as *the house* - the physical place of habitation, and also as a geographical concept. A young man who works abroad twice for periods of more than six months, says: *„Here is my home. My house is here. My parents were also in the Czech Republic, but they came home, and now they are here too. I came home for the holidays and decided to stay here in Bulgaria too. I want to find a normal job and do not go back there*" [man, 21, Sliven]. Another returnee, who worked abroad for 10 years, argues: *„I always wanted to go back. I have never set myself the objective of being abroad and living abroad. Abroad is not home. My home has always been here. It was a matter of time. ... The home. Here is my family. Here I breathe my air. I love my family, and this brought me back home*" [woman, 40, Saedinenie]. For some of the returning migrants, Bulgaria is the home where one comes back to „have his batteries recharged": *„The reason I came back was that during these 6 years I probably got exhausted and I decided to go back to Bulgaria and start all over again. After all, here is my family and my relatives*" [woman, 26, Dimitrovgrad]. The following statement fully summarizes this type of motivation for return: *„Our relatives are here. First and foremost because of them. Second, this is our country and, no matter how we look at it, here is best for us. These are the main reasons why a person returns*" [woman, 26, Plovdiv].

Changing the perspective, some respondents have identified the ways in which they felt abroad as a negative motivation for return thus falling a bit in line with NCE postulation that unsuccessful integration and adaptation in the host country may prompt return. A young woman who worked for one year in Germany and whose sister lives there for ten years, explains her motivation for a comeback as follows: *„I did not feel at home in Germany. I felt like an outsider. I did not feel well there*" [woman, 26, Varna]. Other respondents share: *„[I returned] Because of the social life. I felt bored, it was monotonous. I am much better in*

*Bulgaria” [men, 26, Gotse Delchev]; „I could not find what I was looking for in America. I preferred to go back and look for it in Bulgaria” [man, 29, Sofia]; „Before going there, I thought I would stay there for good. But after a week there, I was sure it was not my place. Right from the start, I wanted to go back. ... Well, the main reasons are that I really felt I could not live there” [woman, 27, Vratsa].*

The argument about the great importance (high relevance) of social relations expressed in the attachment to family and relatives falls clearly within the paradigm of *transnationalism*. This argument is also indirectly supported by the answers to the question about money transfers and maintenance of contacts with relatives and friends in Bulgaria while being abroad (Question No 7). Sending money „home” might have been a migration goal or a function of the migration project, but for emigrants it is also a form of keeping in touch with the loved ones and friends in the home country. Even when it comes to student brigades or young people who go to work abroad for a few months to make some money, the relationship with relatives is still present in motivation. A student who goes to work for 6 months in England notes: *„I was not able to help [by sending money] and it was not my goal. I am a student and I just wanted to make extra money and not burden my parents with expenses during those six months”* [woman, 24, Sofia]. With regard to keeping in touch with relatives and friends in Bulgaria, there is not a single respondent who replied that he did not maintain a regular contact. In many cases, contacts were regular on a weekly or even daily basis, maintained mainly through phone and Skype, in rare cases social networks such as Facebook and mobile applications such as Viber.

It is noteworthy that **no political non-economic motives** are mentioned in **in-depth interviews** as opposed to other recent surveys at meso- and macro-levels that clearly highlight the political factors (for e.g. on the return of Bulgarian Turks from Turkey in particular see Kutlay, 2017; İçduygu & Sert, 2015). Except for three interviews, in all the other 97 interviews the respondents either do not respond to the sub-questions about policy or else argue that they are unaware of any policies and initiatives of the Bulgarian state and local authorities targeting returnees and even if such existed, they did not have any influence on the decision to return.

Of the other three respondents, one answers that he has heard and participated in such initiatives: *„No, to be honest, I must admit I was not familiar with them [return policies]. But while I was in the UK, I had the opportunity to visit the „Career in Bulgaria - why not” forum. A high school classmate of mine was in charge of it. And the main target group of this forum was the Bulgarians abroad. They had the opportunity to meet with employers. You can also get advice on how to write your resume. I was also acquainted with „Here and there BG” who organized cultural events and parties for people coming back from abroad with the idea to help them overcome the so-called „reverse cultural shock”* [man, 30, Sofia].

Another respondent makes a connection between his return and Bulgaria’s membership in the EU: *„Absolutely no impact [do policies and initiatives have on the decision to return]. Rather, in regards to the accession to the EU, there was some misguided optimism on my part that things would be developing in a positive direction here and there would be a demand for people with my knowledge, skills and competence to do some work”* [man, 35, Sofia].

Social causes and reasons for return are implicitly and indirectly referred to in the sub-questions of Question No. 6 asking the respondent **to assess his/her stay in the host country**: „How did they treat you? Have there been any cases of discrimination, violation of rights, manifestations of xenophobia and intolerance?” and „Did you manage to adapt to the country and integrate into the local community?” In just four of the interviews did respondents say that they had experienced discrimination in the host country („Yes, it happened after hearing that I am Bulgarian” [woman, 26, Dimitrovgrad]). In 38 of the interviews it was argued that there was no sense of discrimination in the host country and 18 respondents expressly noted they could feel the good attitude of the local people during their stay abroad („Great people, in no way did I ever feel alien to those whom I contacted. I felt like a local” [man, 26, Sofia]). The responses clearly show that a sense of discrimination in the host country was not one of the reasons behind return.

The answers to the question of migrants’ successful adaptation and integration in the host society are not so conclusive. The answers are equally distributed between „I adapt and integrate well/fast” and „I cannot (very well/quickly) adapt”: „If I had not been alone I could have been able to adapt myself but because there was no close person next to me, I did not succeed in joining in the community” [man, 27, Razgrad]; „For two years I adapted a little by little” [woman, 67, Yambol]. Poor or too slow and difficult adaptation to the host community renders stronger some of the motives pertaining to emotional reflexivity (nostalgia, feelings of inattention, etc.) and can indirectly motivate return. Again, the significance of the time factor stands out - logically, the longer he stays in the host country, the better the migrant has presumably adapted. Also, circular migration and re-entry and subsequent stay in the same migration destination inevitably facilitate and enhance the process of adaptation.

The nature of return motivation is strongly contingent on **return assessment** (Question 12) - whether it is seen as *voluntary* or *forced*; whether it is perceived as *progress* or as *backslide*; and whether it is considered *temporary* or *permanent*. The motives related to emotional reflexivity are ambiguously related to the return assessment. It could be assumed that return is driven by nostalgia over home and country, the desire to be with your relatives, willingness to live in Bulgaria, among other motives, would lead to an appreciation of the return as a voluntary one. Indeed, in almost half of the interviews, return is defined as *voluntary*, sometimes adding “*strongly desired*”. The exception is when the return is related to taking care of a sick parent/relative or the failure to find a job in the host country. Then the return is defined as *involuntary*.

The perception of return as *progress* or *backslide* is related, and in some cases even stems from the nature of the motivation for return. In 21 of the interviews, return is unambiguously defined as a progress „in every respect” [man, 39, Kozloduy] - for economic reasons, because of the experience gained abroad, which can be used in Bulgaria, but also for reasons related to family, social and emotional-psychological reasons. Return is regarded as *backslide* in 16 interviews mainly for economic reasons, but there is also the understanding that it is „setback in terms of the way of thinking and mentality in Bulgaria” [woman, 45, Sofia]. For one-tenth of the respondents in the 100 in-depth interviews, the return is neither progress, nor a step backwards: things are either as before (for short-term migrants) or different at different moments after return, or respondents cannot define it

precisely. Regarding whether the return is permanent or temporary, the answers are *permanent* for more than two-fifths of the interviews, often with the provision *for now*, or adding *definitely permanent* in some cases. This is a logical consequence of the predominant motives of return associated with emotional reflexivity.

## Conclusion

In the modern world, the motivation of individuals to migrate is becoming increasingly complex and involves a combinations of economic and non-economic factors, both rational and emotional in nature. The empirical data from the national survey and the in-depth interviews clearly reveal the complex nature of the motivation for return to Bulgaria. After testing it against the data, our initial hypothesis of the foremost significance of non-economic factors in the RM to Bulgaria has been largely confirmed by the empirical evidence. The analysis, however, prompts a number of qualifications to the initial hypothesis.

First, in the case of Bulgarian returnees from the last decade the non-economic factors are narrowed down to reasons of family nature and personal reasons. Social and political non-economic factors (as described in King's typology) seem to be irrelevant to the return motivation of Bulgarians abroad.

Second, the emotional strand in the non-economic motivation clearly prevails – *homesickness* and *nostalgia for the country and kin* are the kernel of the desire to return to Bulgaria and this is even more so for migrants who had lived and worked for a longer period abroad and had set a decent life there, but nevertheless decided to come back to their home country. Along this emotional strand and despite returnees' rational appreciation of the situation in the country, Bulgaria seems very attractive because it is *home*, conceived both as a family and relatives and as the physical place of habitation.

Third, there is a connection between the duration of stay abroad, migrants' awareness of it and the return motivation. When migrants are aware that they are going abroad for a fixed and usually not too long period of time and will return to Bulgaria after its expiration, homesickness and nostalgia for one's country and kin are irrelevant to return.

The phenomenon of „return“ of Bulgarian migrants to Bulgaria cannot be comprehended without taking into account the factors related to life cycle and the relationship with home and family, as well as motives related to migrants' emotional reflexivity. The role of non-economic factors and motives for the return of Bulgarian emigrants is so significant that it may even seem that the decisions based on such motives are essentially emotional. This is not so. In the motives of emotional reflexivity there is a deep rationality that is not economic in nature.

The prevailing non-economic emotional and reflective motives for return to Bulgaria carry important implications and opportunities with regard to the development of effective policies and initiatives to encourage and support return, through the transformation of the state and its institutions into a significant factor in the management of migration processes. The great importance of social and emotional-reflective motives for return allows the

development of complex programs to attract back Bulgarian emigrants and their reintegration into the Bulgarian society and economy, similar to the policies and programs developed in countries like Poland, Slovakia and Hungary over the last decade.

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