

THE POTENTIAL OF BULGARIAN AGRICULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The aim of the present study is to outline certain trends in the development of Bulgarian agriculture resulting from the application of the Community policy framework for the support of the primary sector. Given the chosen way of support of the Bulgarian farmers, after 2007 significant structural changes took place in the Bulgarian agrarian sector, which are also transformed into structural imbalances. Over a period of 10 years, the relative share of total production (TP) from the crops sub-sector has been steadily growing, while the TP from the livestock sub-sector has been steadily decreasing. Imbalances also occur at the subsector level. Subsectors "Livestock", "Vegetables" and "Fruit" are categorised as "vulnerable subsectors" and are subject to bound support. These subsectors have great potential as Bulgaria has monopoly natural assets, which are a prerequisite for creating products with high added value. Under CAP 2020+, national advantages are prioritised, which creates opportunities for restoring the importance of agriculture in the national economy.
JEL: A12; Q10; Q18

Introduction

Bulgaria has been a member of the European Single Market for more than ten years. This political act has a positive overall impact on the national economy and improves the economic conjuncture in the country. Despite these undeniable benefits, a detailed review of the state of agriculture, as a significant sector of the economy, reveals discrepancies between potential and economic performance.

1. Production conditions in agriculture

1.1. Agro-ecological potential

The set of resources, factors and conditions necessary to achieve a particular goal is an immanent essence of the existence of potential. Different spheres of material production imply/presuppose a need for a specific configuration of quantitative and qualitative

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parameters. Economic activity in agriculture is directly dependent on agro-ecological conditions, production factors, institutional environment, agricultural policy, market conjuncture, etc. Production in the primary sector also includes the process of reproduction of the substances cycle. This symbiosis highlights the importance of agri-environmental potential for the final economic results. The process of photosynthesis creates plant mass. Upon its incorporation in economic turnover, from a biological product, it is transformed into a product of economic importance. The process of realising new value and expanding value-added production is of paramount importance for the production unit, regional and national economy.

1.2. Institutional environment

Changes in the institutional environment, brought by the transformation of the social model of society, affect production conditions and the economic system as a whole. The changed economic conjuncture modifies the state of structural links and the behaviour of the economic subjects. These processes have been ongoing in Bulgaria for almost three decades.

Part of the problems in the Bulgarian primary sector are rooted in the imposed liberal way of “democratising” the socio-economic model of the society. Planned economy was replaced by free market rules. The transition in Bulgaria as well as in the other Central and Eastern European countries and the resulting changes in the economic systems were accompanied by questions about the meaning, direction and response to a global challenge. For decades, Assoc. Prof. Bernard Munthyan explored and analyzed the complex processes of the “great transition”, studying the influence that this transition had on society and man. He made a profound cut of the functional system of society, differentiated horizontal and vertical social relations and highlighted their role in the types of societies. (Mitev, 2017, p. 51). The transformation in Bulgaria was dominated by political decisions. There was no economic justification for the necessity and feasibility of the changes. The absence of economic analysis had a negative impact on the development of agriculture in Bulgaria.

Upon the transition from planned to market economy, the specific potential of the Bulgarian agricultural conditions was not considered as a fundamental factor. Rather, political decisions were determining the way ahead. The political will was “justified” with moral motives, to the end of restoring justice (Mihaylov, 2001, p. 5; Popov, 2011, p. 15). As a result, Bulgaria conducted a unique “*real boundary*” restitution and restored land ownership on the principle of “*everyone at the grandfather's land plot*” The result of neglected economic and social motives and overestimation of ownership as a driver for agricultural development is a 10-year period of land restoration, abandonment of arable land, fragmentation of land ownership between 2 million landowners, broken sector structure and complicated production relations (Risina, Dimitrov, 2002, p. 25-26; Ilieva, 2012, p. 130; Yovchevska, 2016, p. 52). The 10-year transformation period in the 1990s did not lead to positive changes in agriculture. The oversupply of small and fragmented land plots, the unsettled property relations, the division of land and the labour force as factors of production (Risina M. held the prices for selling and renting agricultural land in Bulgaria.

All these factors limit the investment activity of entrepreneurs in Bulgarian agriculture (Valchev, Petkov, 2006, p. 73).

The next stage of the development of agriculture in Bulgaria, predetermined by the “real boundary restitution”, is the process of preparation and implementation of the common agricultural policy. In the absence of a preliminary assessment, it was administratively decided that the easiest means of direct support for the farmers will be applied – single area payment. The fallout was accurately foreseen by members of the scientific community: *“...it is not clear what will be the behaviour of producers in these circumstances. It can be expected that some of them will be redirected to extensive production. Hence, part of the comparative advantages of the country in vegetable and fruit growing will not be realised”* (Popov, Valchev, 2005, p. 209). Ten years after the implementation of the Community policy in our country, the researchers' assessment is that attention is directed to the resources that come from EU funds and programmes. The correction of achieved results is not among the priorities of the Bulgarian CAP implementation administration. Some of these results *“... reflect ... how the approach in the implementation of well-designed policies did not ensure continuity and adequate use of the experience accumulated in our country and did not lead to the desired positive changes that would strengthen the competitive advantages of our own resource base. The existing favourable natural conditions are not utilised to fulfil its potential as a provider of a significant part of the population's nutritional needs”* (Grozdanova, 2017, p. 217).

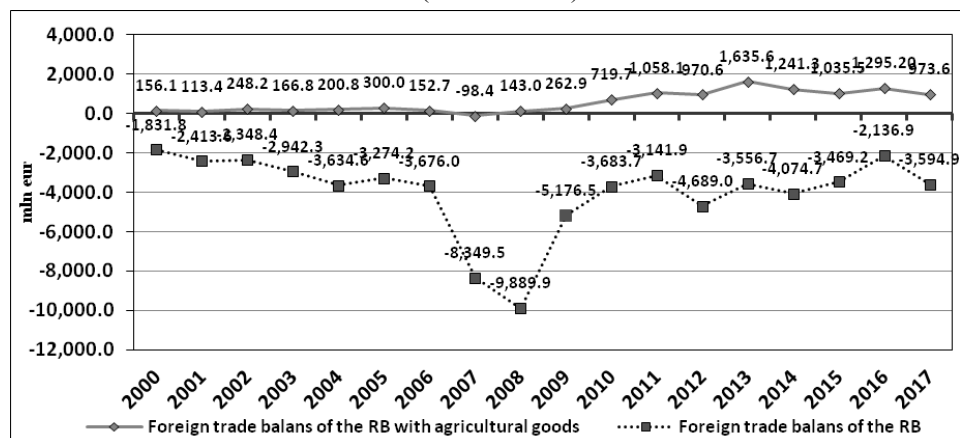
The absence of a meaningful scientific debate in changing the socio-economic model of society as well as the incorporation of new institutional norms in the national economy is due to a deficit of expert analysis in the study of the broken system connections. This also resulted in underestimation of the economic changes, some of which amount to imbalances. The elimination of pluralism in the field of economic theory and the depreciation of scientific expertise are a means of affirming the *“established monopoly of a single doctrine”* (Mladenova, 2017, p. 31). The directions of economic theory related to the social sciences are giving way to the expanding influence of the increasingly mathematical economics applied to serve the market doctrine.

The economy is a dynamic and open system, susceptible to influences from exogenous and endogenous factors. These affect the equilibrium and lead to disturbances in the economic system. The production process in the agriculture sector, which also includes biological organisms, is a complex conglomerate of natural environment, living matter and economic activity. The interweaving of laws of different types and sectoral characteristics require interdisciplinary knowledge and a comprehensive approach to the study, research and analysis of the processes taking place in the primary sector in Bulgaria.

2. Economic importance of agriculture

The graphical presentation of information of fig. 1 reflects the importance of agriculture for the development of the national economy. The primary sector in Bulgaria creates value and is a source of foreign currency revenues for the country.

Figure 1
External trade flows total for the country, incl. agricultural goods in the period 2000-2017
(million euros)



Source: Information processed from NSI data www.nsi.bg and Eurostat www.eurostat.com.

In the case of foreign trade flows, Bulgaria recorded a permanently negative external trade balance, while in the trade in agricultural goods the balance was a positive figure during the monitored period 2000-2017. An exception was observed in 2007, marked by adverse climatic factors and changes in the institutional environment.

The information in fig. 1 illustrates the high potential of Bulgarian agriculture, a positive factor for the national economy. This has encoded essential information regarding the process of extensification of agricultural production. The single area payment stimulates the output of covered crops. Direct payments support the expansion of areas with cereals and technical crops. More and more economic units improve their economic situation, specialising in extensive production. The economic conjuncture for growing and realising crop species is favourable. The demand for cereals and oilseeds on the international market ensures rapid realisation. Since 2007, wheat, barley and sunflower have become well-established commodities on the stock-market. It is a positive phenomenon that a large part of the deserted lands, once the Bulgarian model of agrarian reform has been implemented, is again included in economic turnover. The agglomeration of agricultural plots and the shaping of massifs is also a positive economic practice leading to the improvement of the economic system. In essence, this is a process of comasation and consolidation of the agricultural land, albeit made difficult by provisions of the Inheritance Act. The process of fragmentation of land ownership continues as the hereditary rights of landowners of agricultural land are enforced.

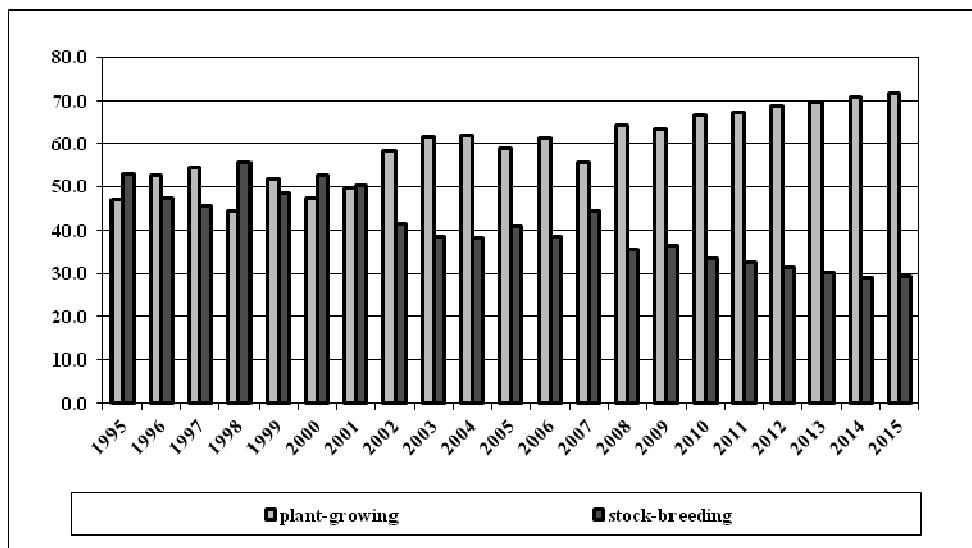
3. Structural changes

Apart from the high potential of Bulgarian agriculture, the information presented in fig. 2 also reflects the effect of the application of the Community agricultural policy. The economic conjuncture in Bulgaria is improving. Thanks to the European funds, economic growth, incl. in agriculture, marks an upward trend (Tanchev, Terziev, 2018, p. 72 et seq.).

At the same time, as a result of the European income support policy, there is a significant change in the established structure of the Bulgarian primary sector (Figure 2). It also illustrates the process of manifestation of structural changes between the two main sub-sectors of agriculture in our country and their transformation into structural imbalances. The observed period 1995-2017 could be divided into three sub-periods: 1995-2001, 2002-2007 and 2008-2017.

Figure 2

Dynamics of total production by sub-sectors, 1995-2017 (%)



Source: Information from the Ministry of Agriculture, www.mzh.government.bg.

During the first sub-period there is a relatively balanced state of the total plant production and total livestock production. The second sub-period coincides with the implementation of the SAPARD Programme (Special Accession Program for Agriculture and Rural Development) in Bulgaria. It was designed to support agriculture and rural development in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe before the accession to the European Union. The implementation of SAPARD marked the period in which the dominance of the plant growing sub-sector over livestock production in Bulgaria became substantial. Following EU accession, this trend is increasing (Figure 2). In recent years, total livestock production accounts for only one-quarter of total farm production. This is due to ever-expanding extensive production. The covered crops cultivation process is a preferred business practice

that provides secure financial resources through direct single area payment. The received European funds cover a substantial share of the cost price of the cultivated covered crops. Economies of scale add to the profits. The production of grain and technical crops is increasingly industrialised. Grain and sunflower are recognisable commodities that provide high returns. All these advantages stimulate farmers to grow larger areas of grain-cereal and technical crop plants. As a result, in Bulgaria the production of extensive crops with lower added value expands and has a significant share in agrarian export (Rangelova, 2015). Exports of processed production would have brought more national income. The tendency to export grain as a raw material is still sustainable. The process is fuelled by two favourable prerequisites. The absolutising of the market economy in Bulgaria and the subsidisation under the Community agricultural policy. The social relations in the Bulgarian agrarian sector, considered as a functional system, have a horizontal structure. This is the technical-economic basis of the material-producing sphere. Business entities, "guarded" by the ideology of market economy, make sovereign decisions about the type and mode of economic activity. Managing this process introduces coordination elements, leads to so-called vertical structure in public relations. As Assoc. Prof. Muntian said in 1995 the biggest danger to humanity today is the acute ideologisation of the problems and their solutions. Report submitted to the Centre for the Study of Ideologies. Personal archive of Assoc. Prof. Muntian (Mitev, 2017). This is related to the role of the state. Such processes are observed in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and some other countries that have chosen social democracy as a way of transforming the model of social development.

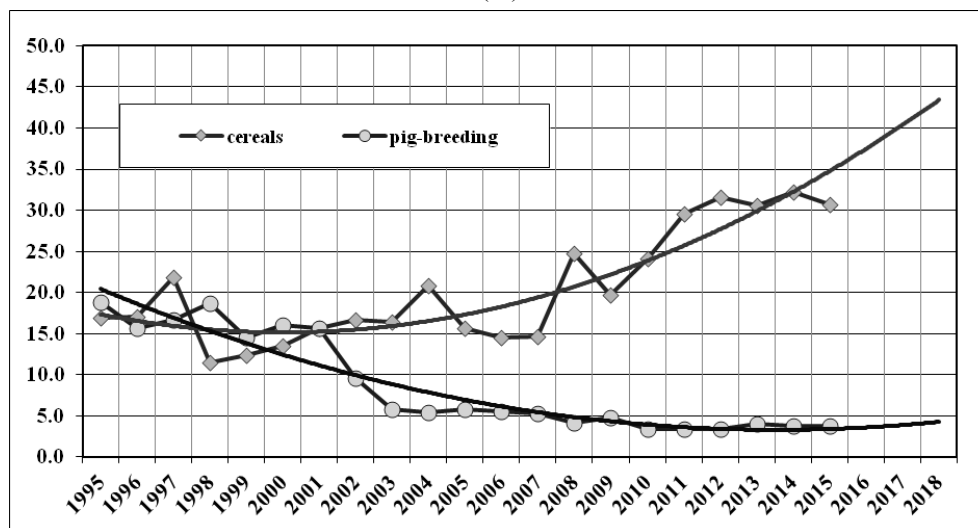
The horizontal structure of the social system in Bulgaria could be illustrated with some elements of the material production sphere in agriculture (Figure 3). The graphical method reveals the economic results of the "Cereals" and "Pig-breeding" sectors. Figure 3 reflects the total production of cereals produced and the total production of pig-breeding. The observed period is the same: 1995-2017. As we have distinguished three relative sub-periods in the development of the two main subsectors of agriculture in our country, in the same way the graphic image of the presented in fig. 3 information could also be subdivided into three sub-periods.

The reason for comparing the dynamics of generating total production in the cereals sector with that created by the pig-breeding sector is the fact that the latter is the main consumer of cereals. This is the most direct way to add value and create high added value products to increase the share of national income generated by the agriculture sector.

The data in Fig. 3 reflect a clearly outlined/marked upward trend of TP created by the cereals sector. The beginning of the growth trend after 2002 coincides with the implementation of the SAPARD Programme in Bulgaria. After the country's accession to the EU and the adoption of the rules of the Community agricultural policy, the dynamics of the process of increasing the production of cereals sped up. Growth compared to 2002 doubled in 2008. With the acceptance of 2009, 2010 marked an increase of the total yield of cereals in excess of 30% by the end of the survey period. Therefore, one-third of the TP in the primary sector is created by the production of cereals. This is a positive trend because the production of cereals is a major source of export potential and plays a significant role in

the positive foreign trade balance in agricultural raw materials. The trend is illustrated in Fig. 1 and was analysed in the context of the income support policy for farmers.

Figure 3
Dynamics of the total production of cereals and pig-breeding during the period 1995-2017 (%)



Source: Calculations based on Eurostat www.eurostat.com.

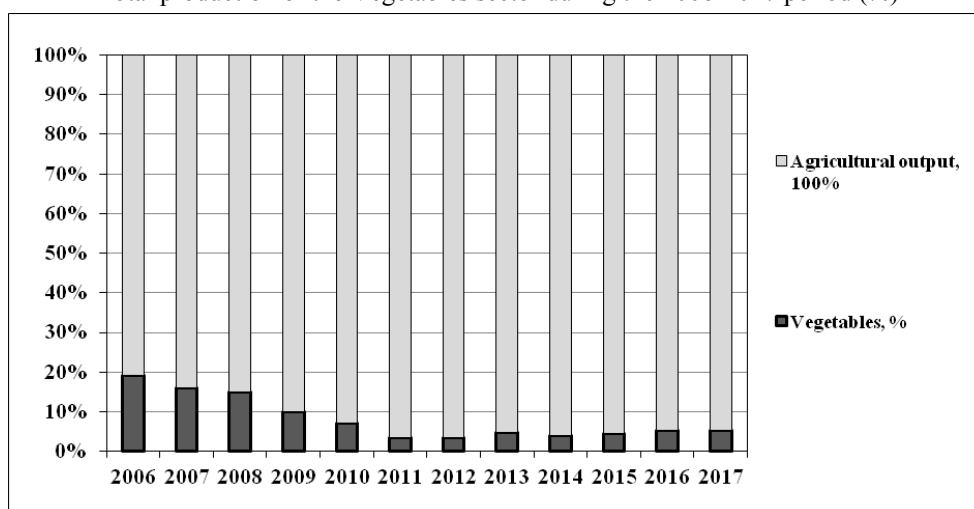
At the same time, the analysis of the graphically presented data (Figure 3) shows a significant decrease in the total production of pig-breeding. In 2001-2002 the decline was 5% per year. For two years the pig-breeding sector in Bulgaria lost two-thirds of its potential. After 2003, it maintained the symbolic 5-6% of total production. In the 2010-2017 period stagnation was permanent. Critical shares of 3-4% of total production are a sign of an unfavourable economic trend. The agri-environmental potential of the country is not used for value-added production. The direct export of cereals and oilseed harvest deprives the country of many additional opportunities - economic benefits, improvement of economic performance, expansion of intensive production, part of which is the livestock sub-sector. The use of grain as a raw material for pig and poultry breeding provides additional employment opportunities for the workforce in the livestock sector. The socio-economic benefits for the rural population have a potentially synergetic effect. Apart from having employment effect and a role in diversifying local economy, the benefits also include a demographic dimension.

Figure 4 presents a graphical picture of the economic situation of the Vegetables sector in the 2006-2017 period. The value economic indicator we use in the survey is the total vegetable production, a reliable indicator, reflecting the impact of the Community agricultural policy and the way it is applied. The results show a significant drop in total output. At the beginning of the period, almost a fifth of total agricultural output originated from vegetable production. During the 2011-2012 period it declined down to critical levels

of around 3%. This collapse in vegetable production is characteristic of all intensive productions in Bulgarian agriculture. The process of unsatisfactory economic performance of livestock farming has already been analysed (Figure 3). The same decline in economic performance was also observed in the production of perennial plants. The Perennial fruit and berry plantations sector partially realises its high agri-ecological potential in Bulgaria.

Figure 4

Total production of the Vegetables sector during the 2006-2017 period (%)



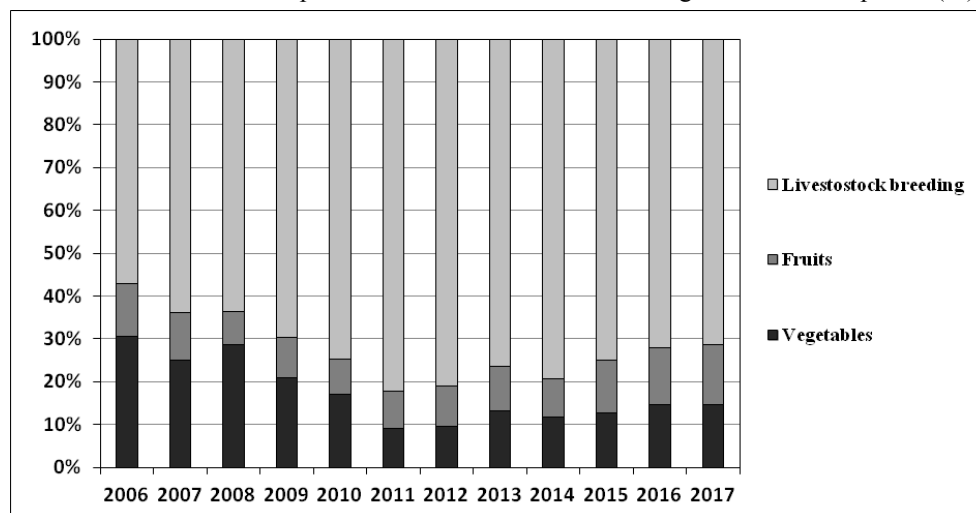
Source: Calculated on the basis of information from MAF and Eurostat.

4. Change in the implementation of the Community agricultural policy in Bulgaria

The unfavourable economic results also grow into a socio-economic problem. This requires Bulgaria to recognise the presence of “Vulnerable” sectors in the economic system of agriculture. This category includes the Livestock sector, the Vegetables sub-sector and the Perennial fruit and berry plant sub-sector. In order to reverse the unfavourable trend, in 2013 Bulgaria started to disburse binded subsidies to these sectors. This policy shift was a success as the sectors are experiencing a revival. There is a process of improving the business environment, which has grown into economic recovery and boom in sectors with support binded to production.

The development of these productions plays a significant role in solving a number of socio-economic problems in the country's agriculture and its rural areas. These have the potential to expand the nomenclature of commodities and to create added value and products with high export potential. Support for those intensive production processes provides new jobs and lowers the effect of emigration.

Figure 5
Relative share of total output from “vulnerable” sectors during the 2006-2017 period (%)



Source: Calculated using information from MAF and Eurostat.

Financial support for the “vulnerable” livestock and fruit and vegetable sectors continues to have a proven and expanding positive effect on agriculture and the food industry. The results for the first 8 months of 2018 showed a rise in meat and dairy production between 10 and 20%.² The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Rumen Porozhanov announced at the opening of six food fairs in Sofia – Messomania, Bulpek, World of Milk, Wine Salon, Interfood and Drink and SIHRE that the export of Bulgarian food and agricultural products is more than 13% higher on an annual basis. The huge interest in the exhibitions, both by Bulgarian and foreign producers, shows/reflects the potential of agriculture, as well as that of the “vulnerable sectors”. Minister Porozhanov appealed to the public to shift the focus again towards Bulgarian products and traditional tastes. In this regard, on 14 November 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, together with representatives of the agricultural industry, launched the campaign *"I support the Bulgarian producers, support them too"*.³ It envisages products for which Bulgaria has monopoly conditions and the capacity to satisfy the demand in many niche markets in Bulgaria, Europe and worldwide. The intensive contacts with entities from the United Arab Emirates⁴ as well as the will for cooperation between the Agricultural Academy and

² Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Rumen Porozhanov at the opening of 6 food fairs in Sofia – Messomania; Bulpek; Milk World; Salon of Wine; Interfood and Drink and SIHRE. 07.11.2018 Interexpocenter. <http://www.mzh.government.bg/bg/press-center/novini/rumen-porozhanov-za-prvite-8-meseca-na-2018-g-otch/> accessible on 09.11.2018.

³ <http://www.mzh.government.bg/bg/press-center/novini/rumen-porozhanov-zapochvame-kampaniya-v-podkrepa-n/> accessible on 14.11.2018.

⁴ <https://www.agriacad.bg/index.php/новини/17.11.2018> г. The Minister of Food Security of the United Arab Emirates.

scientific centres from the Gulf state are an evidence of this. Long-term contacts of Bulgarian and Chinese scientists are maintained in carrying out common selection, technological and production projects⁵, which transfer the Bulgarian scientific product to the Chinese agricultural production structures.

The research interest in the processes in the primary sector highlights a number of problem areas, some of which could be located in the coordinate system of political and economic factors. The knowledge of the political and economic factors allows for a precise definition of some weak links in Bulgarian agriculture: *"the biggest problem of the Bulgarian plant-growing is to provide conditions for the restoration of the traditional productions corresponding to the geographic climatic conditions (Tasev, 2012, p. 87)"*. The provision of these conditions is aided by the increasing demand among the consumers for real food, a process facilitating opportunities for increased traditional national and regional productions with high-quality characteristics. Another factor contributing to the rediscovery of the potential of the so-called vulnerable sectors in Bulgarian agriculture are the European social policies and the sentiment of the European public in support of small and medium-sized farmers with an important role in preserving rural areas.

5. Potential as a resource

The way of implementation and the results of the use of the European funds are subject to analytical studies by a number of social scientists. This is the scientific potential that the society is about to recognise and use to improve the economic system in agriculture and to solve and overcome a number of problems with socio-economic character. We fully support the opinion of social scientists that "the deep decline of agriculture, communities and rural areas can hardly be overcome without special support" (Minev, 2012, p. 98). Our view is that the problems of Bulgarian agriculture are not only problems of the sector. Their origin in the land reform and the ongoing "fine tuning" of the land relations in Bulgaria presuppose a particular resistance of the negative processes in the plant growing and livestock breeding. The liberal model and the absolutisation of market forces marginalise the role of the state and devalue the importance of strategic and sectoral documents for the development of the sector. In our view, the socio-economic role and importance of agriculture is not influenced by the imposed dogma of the market. The significance of the sector is constant and is not subject to conjunctural influences. The role of agriculture stems from the eminently inherent function of the activity of economic actors – to create enough food that is essential for the existence of man as a species. In his *opus magnum*, in the first volume of the Capital, Karl Marx writes that *before they are engaged in science and art, people need to be fed*. Agriculture is attributed with providing indispensable nutritional resources for maintaining and developing human life. We believe that the growing social sensitivity of Europe and the "greening" of economic activity allow for the study of the potential of agriculture to go beyond the technical and technological frameworks of study and evaluation. The society as a whole, incl. more and more farmers are aware of the

⁵ <http://www.mzh.government.bg/bg/press-center/novini/rumen-porozhanov-imame-mnogo-vzmozhnosti-za-strudn/> accessible on 17.11.2018.

possibility of seeking synergies between natural resources and economic activity. The accomplishing of the positive effects of these opportunities has a multi-layered dimension and multivalent assessment. It is a systemic process in which investments have the nature of a natural resource, capital and human activity. The system's output consists of vital material goods. The natural form of the newly created product assumes a value dimension. Depending on the nature of the production, a substantial added value can be attached to each product upon its sale. Thus, the system of material production in agriculture multiplies the potential of primary production means. The transformation of primary natural potential into economic creates new/added value in the course of various biological, technological, economic, etc. processes involved in the production of different agricultural products. The way in which the economic activity is organised presupposes the possibility to also create social potential, perceived as potential of third generation. The social potential includes not only the ability of the primary economic agents to rationalise their production activities, but also the expertise of CAP Authority, implementing the Community agricultural policy as well as their ability to prepare farmers for the ever more ambiguous and dynamic changes in Bulgarian and pan-European standards. We can see "processes of decline, due to the concentration of land and capital ... in agriculture. ... a small number of particularly large tenants have been able to derive rent from their privileged access to these funds and to the political decision-making process" (Minev, 2012, p. 94).

A decade after Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, a number of researchers believe that *"over-consolidated agriculture and monopolised land use are the result of the administration of the governments that have ruled the country since the land reform, and above all since the EU membership"*. According to the authors, *"it is important for our country to have both a political and a public consensus to get things going in a new direction."* The difficulty is to realise the need to *"make a huge turn and give preference to creating and supporting family farms that will save both agriculture and rural areas"*. (Tasev and Dimitrov, 2016).

Individual decisions, actions, behavioral motivations and production practices of agricultural producers add new qualitative content to their economic activity. The decisions concerning the organisation of a production process and the way it is carried out, from the choice of the crops to be cultivated and the types of livestock to the realisation of the production are essential for the economic system in agriculture. Farmers, as business agents in the primary sector, attach economic importance to the process of transforming matter. Adding value to the newly created production, using natural, biological and economic factors, the economic agents are also influenced by institutional factors. The dynamically changing regulatory and market conditions, influenced by the Community's agricultural policy, are increasingly taken into account when economic decisions are made. The impact of these conditions is "captured" by empirical data, from the amount of information observed by the statistical authorities in Bulgaria. The results take into account both the impact of European policy and some national specifics related to socio-cultural features and characteristics of the agri-environmental potential in the country.

The processes in Bulgarian agriculture are in direct connection with a number of contemporary globalisation trends. Openness of the economy, the absolute implementation of the free market, unification and standardisation of the European policy, aging of the

population, etc are subject to special analyses. The subject of generation renewal is increasingly debated on European and national political forums. On 21 May 2018, the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU circulates a document⁶ that highlights the importance of the topic of generational renewal. Emphasis is placed on the need to increase the efficiency and development of current tools to support young farmers. In the context of the CAP after 2020, the need to take into account the national and regional specifics of the individual Member States is outlined.

6. General conclusion

The presented results of the implementation of the Community agricultural policy in Bulgaria presume/impose/require the conceptualisation of the complex processes in the Bulgarian agriculture. Horizontal and vertical links in the sector respond to changes in the institutional environment. Changes are made more dynamic by policy changes. The outcome of the economic activity in the sector reflects the complexity of all European and national changes. Effects are too often socio-economic. Given the overall CAP 2020+ platform, with a view to improving the performance/effect of the support instruments implemented in Bulgarian agriculture, national policy is gaining significance. Knowing the traditional advantages and specifics will help to improve the results of the absorbed funds, which, together with the requirement to simplify the implementation of the Community's agricultural policy, is also imposed on the national states.

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