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## ***Return policies and (r)emigration of Bulgarians in the pre- and post-accession period***

### ***Summary***

The article elaborates the concept that Bulgaria's 2007 EU accession didn't itself produce large emigration waves, but rather brought new understanding and value to Bulgarian citizenship, through intensified mobility and return processes, within the context of the economic crisis. The text is structured in two parts: the first one reveals the Bulgarian emigration phenomenon after 1989 and its specifics, and the second one — the core of the article — is devoted to the return dynamics and policy answers with focus on the highly qualified. Thus the analysis answers the research question of whether the state affects the processes of remigration of highly qualified Bulgarian young people through its return policies and instruments.

**Key words:** Bulgaria, emigration, remigration, return migration, EU accession, highly qualified migrant

### ***Introduction***

2007 was a special year for Bulgarian citizens for at least two reasons — first, accession to the EU meant EU citizenship — that is, an “upgrade” allowing them to move and reside freely within the EU, and second, as A. Krasteva writes, *it gives (Bulgaria) a pass to the*

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*club of “the central”, which raises the price and attractiveness of Bulgarian citizenship and to Bulgaria as a destination country, and a transit one on the road to the more “European” Europe, and a stop to a growing number of expats, and a final one [stop]* (Krysteva 2014, p. 636). Europeanization also produces two different forms of migration in the Bulgarian context, with different geographic origins: (1) the expats — all the Europeans moving freely within the EU and (2) migrants from countries like Macedonia and Moldova motivated by the attractiveness of Bulgarian citizenship as a European one (Krysteva 2014, p. 472) who can claim Bulgarian origin and at the same time become citizens of both Bulgaria and the EU. Thus, in the context of migrations and the EU accession, the value of the “new” Bulgarian citizenship is one of the main outcomes and an ultimate gain. Still, this fact does not change the predominant emigration tendencies of the country, so what can be observed as a plus is another characteristic of the period after 2007 (although it can be argued that this is also a result of the economic crisis) — an increasing tendency of mobility and return that will be a focus of further analysis in this article.

The theoretical framework of the article follows Lowell and Findlay policy typology, analysing and presenting the six possibilities of highly qualified migration management as a possibility of preventing brain drain through regain or other, more restrictive, mechanisms. The analysis is presented from the point of view of the country of origin, or the so-called “losing state”, except the recruitment strategy, which reviews the process through the lens of the destination country. The six policies, also known as “the six Rs”, are return, restriction, recruitment, reparation, resourcing expatriates, and retention (Lowell, Findlay 2001). Only the return policy/approach will be a focus of this article.

Paolo Ruspini elaborates four main motives to explain the recent rising interest in return migration on the policy and research agenda, with the second and the fourth particularly applicable in this case: (1) *retired circulation/remigration of former guest workers and possible “remigration” of the second and third generations*; (2) *the sound out-migration of skilled migrants from new Central and Eastern EU members which raises concern about brain drain and the question of possible regain of human capital through remigration*; (3) *the cost and benefit of host and origin countries resulting from assistance or repatriation programmes addressing rejected asylum seekers, irregular migrants or refugees at the end of their protection programmes*; and (4) *the recession into which the world’s advanced industrial economies slipped one by one in 2008 contributed to the prospect of return migration in immigrant-receiving states around the world* (Ruspini 2009). This article tries to shed more light on the intensified debate on return migration of highly qualified persons to their countries of origin, in particular using the case of Bulgaria. Return migration here means a move from industrialized to a post-socialist emigration country — a process that is seen by young professionals as an opportunity for a new start, new development, a new life with all the resources (money, experience and knowledge) gathered abroad.

The research is based on in-depth interviews with Bulgarian returnees from Western Europe, the USA, and some other countries from all over the world. The returnees are young people aged between 20 and 40 who have stayed at least a year abroad with the aim of studying or working. Most of them have already completed their university education

in Bulgaria, or they have finished it abroad. There also are some cases of young people who went abroad with the aim to gain further qualifications (an additional MA, PhD or specialization in their specific professional field).

The text is structured in two parts: the first reveals the Bulgarian emigration phenomenon after 1989 and its specifics, and the second — the core of the article — is devoted to the return dynamics and policy answers with a focus on the highly qualified. Through both parts the analysis answers the research question of whether the state affects the processes of remigration of Bulgarian highly qualified young people through its return policies and instruments.

## ***I. Emigration after 1989***

1989 marks a great shift in Bulgarian contemporary history in political, economic and social terms, including the sphere of migration. From a post-socialist state with closed borders, the country opened for democracy, free market economy, and free movement of people. Immediately after the changes, the migration frame was characterized by the first huge wave of emigration, with the highly qualified leading in numbers, although there are no precise statistics on that matter. It is important to specify that when the terms “Bulgarian emigration”, “Bulgarian diaspora” and “Bulgarians abroad” are mentioned, two groups of people in general have to be taken into consideration — the so-called historical Bulgarian diaspora in some countries like Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, etc., where communities were formed during the process of establishment of the Bulgarian nation, and the so-called new emigration (the emigration of Bulgarians in the years after 1989). The second one will be the focus of the article.

### *Waves of emigration*

It is hard to say how many people have left Bulgaria in the period since 1989. There are various studies that research different specific groups in a particular period of time in depth (Mancheva 2008, Maeva 2010, Chongarova 2010). N. Ragaru distinguishes four periods of migratory movements in the years after 1989, defining them as follows: 1) rediscovery of the foreign country in a situation of economic crisis (1989–1993); 2) diversification of the migrants’ experience (1995–2001); 3) after the fall of the Schengen visas (April 2001); and 4) the consequences of the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (EU) (Ragaru 2010). Thus, N. Ragaru determines the developments of the Bulgarian migrations after 1989 in a triple context: *the fall of communism and the imposing of the free market economy; the globalization that influences the national economies among all else, the idea of borders and space and of the imaginary possible and thinkable; and the changes in the geographical contours and priorities of the European Union (the increasing importance of security in public policy)* (Ragaru 2010, p. 247).

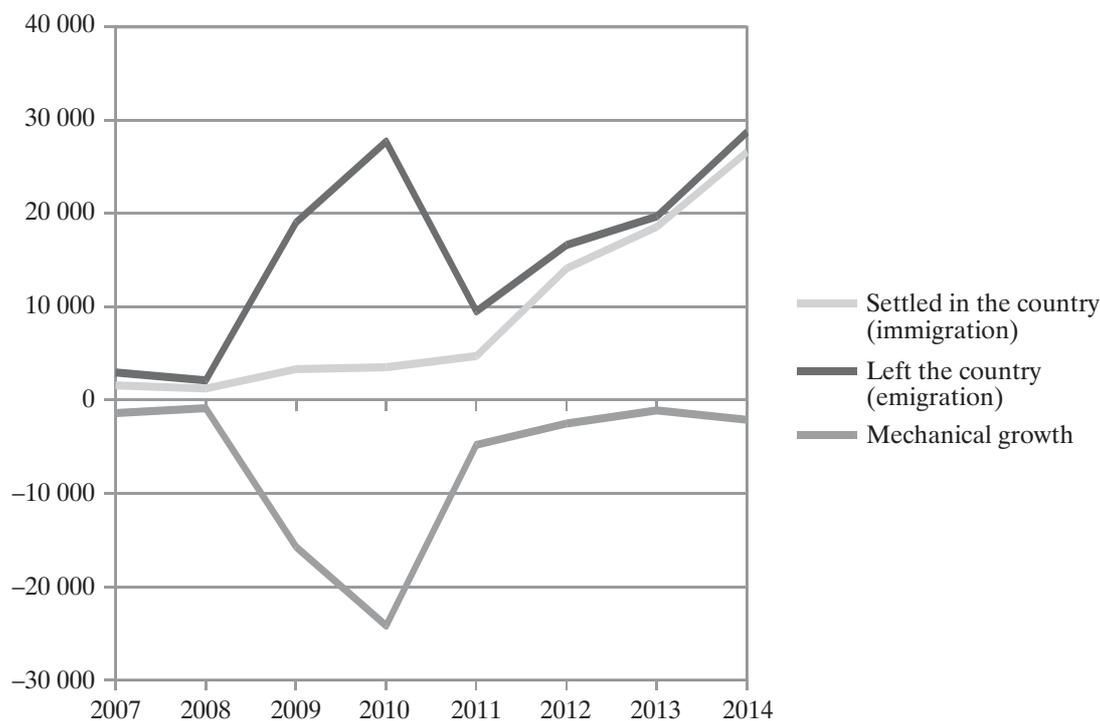
In the first years after 1989, Bulgarian emigrants can be viewed as part of the big waves of migration from East to West. Up until the middle of the 90s, the Central European

states, such as Germany and Austria, were preferred. The interest towards Germany can be explained with the legal framework for giving asylum up to 1993, and because of the bilateral agreements of temporary working contracts between Bulgaria and Germany from 1991–1992 (Ragaru 2010, p. 251).

The deep financial, social, and political crisis of 1996–1997 marks the beginning of the second wave of emigration. Emigration continued in-between the two waves, although not so intensively, with an upward trend of emigration for education. Typical for this wave is that people start moving to the countries in the South (Spain, Italy, Greece) instead of to the ones in the North. This can be explained with the fact that most of the migrants at the time moved to do low-qualified jobs and in these countries is observed *a chronic shortage of manpower in agriculture, construction, home services, catering, hospitality, and tourism* (Ragaru 2010, p. 252). At the same time, in the middle of the 90s, development is observed in the migration trends towards America (the USA and Canada). The migratory processes particularly to the USA were intensified by the “green card” lottery.

The EU’s December 2000 decision to abolish Schengen visas for Bulgarians is the event which marks the beginning of the third stage of Bulgarian contemporary migrations and is a landmark for the next period of emigration. Since April 2001, Bulgarians have had the right to stay up to three months without visas in the countries that have signed the Schengen agreement. This freedom is a partial one, because the citizens of Bulgaria (and Romania) are not allowed full access to the labour market of these countries, which often leads to overstaying. In this period, the most desired destinations are again the countries of the South (including Cyprus, Portugal, Malta). A quantitative survey, carried out by V. Mintchev and V. Boshnakov in November 2005, distinguishes two types of mobility: (1) seasonal movements for several months, which are typical for people who go to work in Southern Europe, and (2) longer stays of around a year and one-two months to the countries in Northern Europe, such as Germany and England (Mintchev, Boshnakov 2006). A study by M. Mancheva of the Bulgarian Turks in Germany makes the conclusion that the abolishment of the visas in April 2001 shortens the average stay of Bulgarian Turks in Germany (Mancheva 2008, p. 25–44).

The period after Bulgaria’s accession in the EU is characterized by lesser emigration than expected. According to Eurostat, in 2007 Bulgaria has a negative migration balance of 33,000 (quoted by: Ragaru 2010, p. 261). The direction of movement is again towards Spain, Italy, and Greece, although these countries hadn’t fully opened their labour markets to citizens from Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The weak emigration wave after 2007 can be explained by several factors. The first one is that Bulgaria marks a peak of emigration in the period between 2000 and 2004 (in the pre-accession period), when the people who wished to accomplish seasonal or other type of migration *already start circulating* (Ragaru 2010, p. 262). The second explanation is connected with the economy and the fact that after 1999 Bulgaria had stable economic growth, a steadily decreasing unemployment rate (Figure 1) up to the end of 2008, accompanied by an *inflow of foreign investments, and then emergence of labour shortages in certain sectors* (Ragaru 2010, p. 262). The third factor is of an economic nature as well, but is connected with the economic and financial crisis that starts in the USA, affects the whole world and has its impact on the migration processes too.

**Graph 1. Unemployment rate (% of population)**

Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria, 2015.

As previously reviewed, the emigration of Bulgarian citizens sustains intensity in the two decades after 1989, which leads to the establishment of considerable Bulgarian communities in some European countries, the USA and Canada. M. Mancheva and E. Troeva conclude that Bulgarian emigration today lives transnationally, as the processes of multiple belonging and self-identification that can be observed are the focus of a considerable part of present migration studies (Mancheva, Troeva 2011, p. 20).

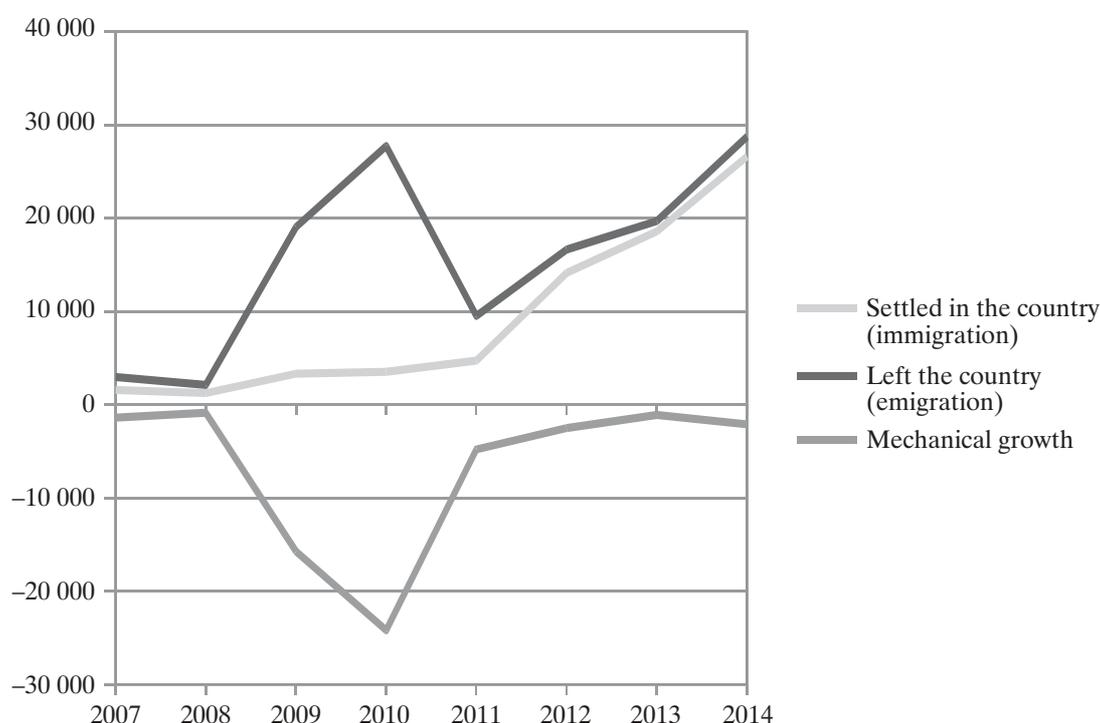
The data of the National Statistical Institute show no great wave of emigration after Bulgaria's accession to the EU. It should be noted that these figures include only those who have declared to the administrative authorities a change of their current address from Bulgaria to abroad and from abroad to Bulgaria. Even though the absolute numbers cannot be accurate, the trend is clear — emigration prevails throughout the entire period. The mechanical growth is negative for the entire period (Graph 2). There is a significant acceleration in the rate of emigration since the start of the economic crisis, which reached its peak in 2010, and then slowed down in 2011, followed by a new intensification. The gradually accelerating process of return is characteristic of the entire period.

Several studies conducted by different authors back up these observations using qualitative and quantitative data.

Research focused on two groups of Bulgarian students who moved to London between 1999 and 2009 and decided to stay and work shows interesting results. (Chongarova 2010). Among the 147 interviewed, about half arrived in London as students enrolled in a British university with 'student' status (the first focus group). The other half includes students

from various Bulgarian universities who come to Britain via the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, language courses, or other statuses (the second focus group). The majority of students from the first group arrived in 2007 — 2009. The majority of students who came with other statuses arrived in 2003, when the process of visa application was liberalized in anticipation of the 2004 enlargement (Chongarova 2010, pp. 1–2). The nearly doubled number of students who arrived in London in 2009, compared to 2007, can be explained by the equalization of tuition fees for residents and students from other EU member countries (Chongarova 2010, p. 9). This is a clear outcome in favour of the Bulgarian students, based on the benefits of the EU membership.

**Graph 2. External migration — Bulgaria (2007–2014)**



Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria, 2015.

Another study, focused on the Bulgarian immigrants in the UK, explains that although there are no official statistics on the number of Bulgarians in the UK, since 1 January 2007 their number has gradually increased, reaching almost 200,000 in 2009 according to unofficial estimates (compared to 20,000 in 2007) (Maeva 2010, p. 178). Concerning the Bulgarian students in the UK, this study gives the following numbers — 389 in 2007, 808 in 2008 and up to 1200 in 2009, reasoning the rise in numbers with the drastic reduction of the tuition fees and *the combination of a good and prestigious education, for which British universities and colleges are famous, and easy access to student loans in the UK* (Maeva 2010, p.179). The same study also discusses the fears about Bulgarians and Romanians, concerning the expectations that “they would flood the labour market”, which became a central theme in most British media in the years immediately before and after 2007

(Maeva 2010, p. 177). These fears are well explained by C. Boswell and A. Geddes by the situation in the UK in the years before the 2004 EU enlargement, when *the Labour government was largely able to convince opposition parties and the media about the economic benefits of selective migration, thus becoming one of only three member states (Ireland and Sweden being the others) to grant immediate labour market access to nationals of the eight central and east European countries that joined the EU in May 2004. The effect of these changes was to lead to the largest inflow of migrants to the UK in its history and a renewed politicisation of labour migration from 2005 onwards* (Boswell, Geddes 2011, p. 89). Thus, the UK governments have shown that they have learned their lesson and used restrictive mechanisms while opening their labour market to the next enlargement countries.

A study<sup>2</sup> by the Economic Research Institute with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences under the scientific guidance of Vesselin Mintchev revealed data from two surveys done in 2007 and 2011 in the spheres of migration potential, emigrants and return migrants, and remittances and knowledge about the Bulgarian diaspora. The research led to several interesting conclusions: 1) a rise in intentions to migrate among Bulgarian citizens in the two studied periods (in favour of 2011); 2) pointing out short-term economic gains, professional realization (less in 2011) and family reasons (less in 2011) as main factors for emigration and 3) a steady tendency of return. Between the surveys in 2007 and 2011, the relative share of the households with returning migrants increased from 10.1% to 13.1% (Mintchev 2011). The tendency of return can be explained with the effect of the economic crisis. The same study mentions Spain, Greece, Germany, England, the USA, Turkey, Italy, France, Cyprus, and Belgium in that particular order as the main destination countries in 2007, while in 2011 the main destination countries are listed in the following order: England, Germany, Spain, Greece, the USA, France, Italy, Cyprus, The Netherlands, Switzerland (Mintchev 2011). These data show a shift in the interest in predominant countries of emigration back to England and Germany, countries with more stable economies compared to Spain and Greece, which were of higher interest to Bulgarians in the previous periods.

All these studies show a steady increase in the number of Bulgarians who intend to move and actually do so within the EU in the period before and after the accession.

### *Share of highly skilled emigrants*

It is very difficult to estimate the percentage of highly skilled migrants within the emigration flows of the last twenty years, but by the year 2000 this share for Bulgaria is 6.6% according to the World Bank (Migration and remittances factbook 2011). A comprehensive study hasn't been done, but even if done now, there are no data for some periods

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<sup>2</sup> *The Bulgarian Diaspora in Western Europe: transborder mobility, national identity and development* [Българската диаспора в Западна Европа: трансгранична мобилност, национална идентичност и развитие]. The survey was done with 2725 people in 2007 and 1204 in 2011 by the Agency for socio-economic analysis — ASA OOD [Агенция за социално-икономически анализи — АСА ООД].

of time, and so wouldn't lead to concrete and accurate results. Yet, it can be said that based on everything done, from the beginning of the transition period till now, there is a constant flow of emigration and mobility of highly skilled people from Bulgaria. This trend, defined by the author as a rather constant one throughout the whole period, is due to several factors, both pull and push — the attracting possibilities of the West, and the repulsive ones because of the situation in Bulgaria. Different programmes play a certain role, supported by EU or worldwide, promoting greater mobility of researchers, teachers and students (for example, "Erasmus" and various academic programmes such as "Marie Curie", 6th and 7th EU Framework Programmes, the "Fulbright" of the USA, etc.).

In the period after 1990, about 600–800 thousand Bulgarians have sought fulfilment abroad, predominantly young people, which directly affects the generational structure of the population. This trend is reinforced by the growing numbers of people who intend to have a foreign education whose desire is shared by their parents. *The sharp rise of Bulgarian students abroad puts us among the countries with the largest export of intellect, shows UNESCO data. According to the ranking from 2004, Bulgaria is third in Eastern Europe after Albania and Macedonia in "brain drain"* (Report Bulgarians..., 2007, pp. 9–10).

A major challenge and problem is the fact that the education system is not linked to the trends of the labour market and there is a strong backlog in the field of high technology, where investor interest is wasted because of a poorly trained workforce (Report Bulgarians..., 2007, p. 10). This in turn leads to two trends — on one hand, the outflow of young people from Bulgaria to obtain the necessary qualifications, and on the other, a need to attract highly specialized in these areas, mostly third country nationals, to meet the needs of the labour market.

Thus, the logic of the migration patterns moves from political to economic reasons. Most of the Bulgarians who left the country in recent years have done so mainly for economic and educational reasons. In the period before the global economic crisis (which was felt in Bulgaria at the end of 2008), the country had experienced steps of economic progress and stabilization for several years, also linked with the accession of Bulgaria to the EU that lead to stabilization of the economic environment in Bulgaria. In these few years before 2008, there was a desire by both the government and by economic emigrants to return, which is a natural reaction in such situations of economic progress and political stabilization.

The return of the new emigration to the country is seen as one of the answers to the demographic crisis. Attracting people with Bulgarian origin from the historical diaspora for *permanent settlement in the country* is seen in a similar way. These desirable state mechanisms for solving the demographic crisis are clearly and explicitly reviewed in the analysis of national strategies and other key documents that follow. At this stage it is important to note that when it comes to the demographic crisis and crisis of the workforce, the state relies on the connection between them and the possible resources of the diaspora through return or a more intense engagement.

A country like Bulgaria, with a population of about seven million people, can safely be called a country with an average migration potential. CEED's research from 2014

categorizes it as a country with moderate migration potential together with countries such as Poland, Estonia and Slovakia, (Duszczuk, Matuszczyk 2014), which, in terms of state institutions and their policies, further reinforces the importance of adequate management of the emigration processes and the relationship with the diaspora. In various analyses and reports the number of Bulgarians around the world ranges from one to over three million (Report Bulgarians..., 2007).

## ***II. Return policies with focus on the highly qualified***

### *Policy instruments*

According to the draft of the national strategy for Bulgarians abroad<sup>3</sup>, there is a process of return migration of Bulgarian nationals to Bulgaria going on (including students and graduate students). In the 1992–2001 period, 19,000 Bulgarians returned to the country. Since then, about 20,000 Bulgarian citizens yearly change their residency from a foreign country to Bulgaria and in 2006 this number tripled. These data from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute show a tendency to return. This article sheds light on the processes that are addressed at a governmental level and what programmes and initiatives are planned to facilitate them (Ivanova 2015).

Three strategic documents already mark migration policy in Bulgaria — the national strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on migration and integration (2008–2015), the national strategy in the field of migration, asylum and integration (2011–2020) and the national strategy in the field of migration, asylum and integration (2015–2020). In all three strategies, the term “return” is used with the connotation of a *permanent return*. In the first strategy the following measure is set: *creation of a programme for permanent return of persons with Bulgarian citizenship living on the territory of other countries* (National strategy 2008, p. 19). An emphasis is put on the highly qualified (HQ) Bulgarian emigration, aiming to foster optimal opportunities for the return of Bulgarian citizens to Bulgaria. The main activities for implementing the programme are: studying the problems that young highly qualified Bulgarian emigrants face, listed as psychological, social, cultural, economic and other; attracting Bulgarian youth and business organisations abroad into direct cooperation with business organisations in Bulgaria; studying the experience of other institutions in attracting the young emigration back, etc. (National strategy 2008, pp. 19–20). Some of the planned activities are reported implemented, but not all results are available for researchers. The 2008 annual report lists implemented activities like organising a meeting with Bulgarian students in Madrid titled “Qualification and Realisation” (October 2008), a round table titled “How to Bring the Emigrants Back Home?” that took place in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and was organised by „Human Resources” magazine (National strategy 2011, p. 14).

Just three years after the first strategy on migration in Bulgaria was published, a new one was adopted, with its focus shifted from integration to security measures.

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<sup>3</sup> The draft of the strategy is available at the website of the Bulgarian Presidency.

The argumentation was that Bulgaria is an external EU border and redefining the strategy is a vital step towards entering the Schengen agreement. This 2011 national strategy also sets the ambitious aim of attracting back Bulgarian citizens who left Bulgaria in the last two decades, not allowing their migration to become “permanent”: *The migration policy in respect to Bulgarian nationals and people of Bulgarian origin living outside Bulgaria is viewed as a potential resource for overcoming the negative demographic trends in the country. The economic growth in a post-crisis period, combined with the completed reforms in important public sectors and with proactive government measures, is expected to lead to: a tendency for the Bulgarian emigrants, who left the country in the past 20 years, to return home; the permanent establishment of individuals of Bulgarian origin living outside Bulgaria on Bulgarian territory* (National strategy 2011, p. 3).

Important priorities in the “proactive” strategy are:

- *Attracting highly qualified Bulgarian nationals — emigrants, as well as foreigners of Bulgarian origin, to permanently establish and settle in the country* (National strategy 2011, p. 33);
- *Attracting Bulgarian emigrants back to Bulgaria with a view to their permanent return* (National strategy 2011, p. 45).

The highly qualified are a factor and an aim, because they are dynamic, entrepreneurial and innovative. The institutional vision of “permanent settlement” does not fit their profile, which is associated with freedom and mobility. Thus, the priorities are not only wishful, but do not adequately reflect the target group they address. In the 2011 Action Plan, 34 measures are developed and listed in total; two of them are directly related to this article. Measure 25 looks for the number of people who emigrated and the reasons for emigration. Measure 33 says *Strengthening the cooperation with Bulgarian emigrants and their organisations abroad through establishing regular contacts between them and the Labour and Social Affairs Offices (at MLSP) within the Bulgarian embassies abroad, the Employment Agency (EA) and the interested firms and corporations on a long-term basis. This measure aims at their gradual return to Bulgaria and compensation of the deficit of qualified labour specialists in the country.*

The tendency continues in the next years. One of the priorities that remain in the migration policy of Bulgaria is the activation of the policy towards highly qualified emigration, aiming for the return and professional fulfilment of the returnees to the country. One of the measures to achieve it is the development and adoption of a national strategy for Bulgarians abroad aimed at building complete, complex, long-term, and integrated policies regarding the Bulgarians and Bulgarian communities abroad, with a deadline in June 2013 and the SABA institution responsible (Action Plan 2013, pp. 16–17).

After a period of discontinuing the committed implementation of the second strategy and the years 2013 and 2014, which focused on the refugee crisis and the Syrian wave of asylum seekers that challenged the current governments of the country<sup>4</sup>, in June

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<sup>4</sup> The article of this volume of Daskalova & Pavlova is focused on that issue.

2015 a new strategy was approved with Decision 437 of the Council of Ministers, called “National Strategy in the sphere of Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015–2020”. At the core of the strategy lies the idea that the migration phenomena is a source of workforce, but also a potential threat for the national security. In the introduction it is already emphasized that the management of the migration processes’ policies are harmonized with the ones in the EU. The migration policy towards Bulgarians abroad is seen as a possible resource in overcoming the negative tendencies of the demographic crisis, thus following the aims and objectives of the previous strategies. Out of 12 priorities in the strategy, two are directly linked to the focus of the article:

- *Attracting highly qualified Bulgarian citizens — emigrants and foreigners with Bulgarian origin with the aim of permanent settlement in the country;*
- *Supporting the Bulgarian citizens to use their rights as EU citizens for free movement in the EU and EEA, as well other EU/EEA citizens for free movement in Bulgaria (National strategy 2015–2020... 2015, p. 41).*

Thus the three strategies show a continuous desire to attract the highly qualified Bulgarians who live abroad seen as a possible answer to boost both the Bulgarian economy and demographics. Hence, the three documents show nuances characterising the periods they are meant to address. Concerning return migration of Bulgarian citizens, all of them show preference to the highly qualified (explicitly mentioned in all strategies) as a mechanism to react and balance the process of brain drain from the country during the 90s, implicitly considering them as a source of income and social capital. The first strategy follows a strong ethnic characteristic, emphasizing the return of foreigners of Bulgarian origin, or the so-called Bulgarian historic diaspora. The second one is more general in its expected results — encouraging the return of Bulgarian nationals working abroad to the Bulgarian labour market, and so is the third one — attracting Bulgarian emigrants back to Bulgaria with a view to their definite return. It can be concluded that the logic of the main strategic documents try to address mainly national and ethnic ideals rather than identified labour market needs.

Based on the main milestones (Annex 2) that set the ground in terms of establishing return policy with focus on the diaspora and attracting back the highly qualified, several sub-periods can be distinguished:

- The first ten years are characterized by no dynamic actions, at that time the state mainly observed the phenomena of emigration and more specifically, the brain drain;
- 2000 is a peak of several key events;
- in the period between 2000 and 2013 intensification of the events is seen, as well as some attempts for cooperation with the diaspora and attracting the highly qualified experts who have emigrated after 1989. This tendency is visible up to 2012 — a peak year for the institutional debate on attracting the diaspora and especially the highly qualified. In the years after, there is no continuation of the undertaken endeavours that can be explained with the political crisis and changes of governments (Ivanova 2015).

Several policy instruments can be distinguished at institutional level, oriented towards attracting the highly qualified emigrants abroad (Annex 3). The most stable formats are

the forums and the fairs done both in Bulgaria and abroad. The key institutions are the State Agency for the Bulgarians Abroad (SABA), the Presidency, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with its Labour and Social Affairs Offices in several European capitals. At the same time, the challenges that returnees of my study face, range from reverse culture shock, collision with reality in finding work, to interpersonal relationships and most importantly the extremely difficult procedures of legalisation of their diplomas. For the returnees, a really working and meaningful instrument is the forum called “A career in Bulgaria. Why not?” that has taken place for eight years now and is initiated by returnees for returnees, who in 2008 created their own NGO (Tuk-Tam/Here-There) to try to help others with what they have learnt in their struggle to find their way back and re-adapt. Thus, the association creates a social environment for the people who have returned to Bulgaria. The main idea behind the “Career in Bulgaria. Why not?” forum is to gather employers who are interested in hiring people who’ve graduated abroad and for people with experience from abroad to meet each other. In September 2015, the eighth edition of the forum will take place. The official website of the event states that more than 7,000 young Bulgarians who work or have studied abroad have taken part in the forums in its previous seven editions since its start in 2008. More than 1,000 people participate annually. The latest forum, which took place in 2014, had 1,127 pre-registered participants coming from 47 countries worldwide and 100 more did it on the venue<sup>5</sup>, more than 60 companies were presenting business and other working opportunities. Surveys of the participants show that 25% claim they would return to Bulgaria, 42% have already returned, 33% are not sure, and less than 1% reply that they wouldn’t come back. The clear need identified here is that while abroad, young people receive very scarce information that is also filtered on many levels, and it is very important to meet employers’ organisations to make an informed decision. There are many people who still have not returned but go to the annual forum to see what is happening in Bulgaria, to acquaint themselves with others like them who have returned, to see how they feel in general, to communicate, and to get to know like-minded people. Other civic initiatives of this kind are the foundation “Identity for Bulgaria”, United Ideas for Bulgaria, etc.

### *Returnees’ point of view*

Based on my research, the majority of the highly skilled young Bulgarians have returned to Bulgaria driven by three main groups of motives:

- (1) Work related motives — to start their own companies or join the Bulgarian administration — in general to start practising what they have seen, experienced and learned abroad and thus contribute to the development of the Bulgarian society and state. In reality they mostly find their realization in international companies, create their own businesses or start working in local NGOs;

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<sup>5</sup> Data from the official website of Tuk-Tam: <http://www.tuk-tam.bg/da-bydem-tuk-kbg/#more-3490> [access: 26.08.2015).

- (2) Family related motives — feeling nostalgic about their families or other family issues (reunification with their partners, old/ill parents or relatives, etc.) that triggered their return;
- (3) Consequences of the economic crisis — losing or being unable to find jobs, which results in a kind of “involuntary return” (Ivanova 2012, p. 13).

The motives for repeated/circular migration or desire to stay in Bulgaria are as complex as are the ones of the initial migration itself. For the highly qualified with whom I have talked, a tendency for a second/repeated migration can be observed only if is connected with personal or professional growth: *I would go again, only if I had the opportunity to develop from the place I have reached, from there up* (A., woman, 2010). The free movement in Europe is not mentioned explicitly in the study.

A determining factor for the choice to remain in Bulgaria is to create a family that prevails at least when the relationships are at the outset. For some, returning is intended to be a temporary thing, but becomes constant: *I came with a return ticket, a bit like a vacation to see what the situation is, and stayed a bit. I had very unpleasant experiences in the beginning, because of professional relationship, incorrect, how things work in the old way, depending on connections, less on professionalism* (L., man, 2010).

Those who have found fulfillment and a professional niche sound more convinced: *This is creative, meaningful work that I do, and I like that we communicate with the Commission at international level, when necessary. Going to Brussels, when there are meetings of the Committee of Solidarity and Management of the Migration Flows* (I. woman, 2010).

The balance of pros and cons remains delicate, especially when finances are concerned: *I dream of finally getting some satisfaction, not only professionally, but also financially* (I., woman, 2010).

Highly qualified young Bulgarians are mobile, adaptable, capable, and creative. Yet they are going through a period of uncertainty and re-adaptation after extended periods abroad. The reasons are various, but among the most important ones, a phenomenon that occurs invisibly in all stories, is the interruption of the social threads of understanding what is generally accepted, the unwritten rules for functioning in society as well as in the professional field, or simply the answer of the question: how does it work here? That’s why networking appears to be a major necessity that they seek to reconstruct for themselves.

Thus, in free, open and mobile Europe, the next step for highly qualified young Bulgarians can be a well-planned and pre-defined professional development, a more challenging career path or a spontaneous search for adventure, exploration and learning. Both (and many more) ways are possible in the EU. The attempts of a return policy are not the driving factor for return of that particular layer of the Bulgarian society. They just show how inadequate these measures are, aimed at “permanent return”, “permanent settlement”, etc. Still, there is a return tendency. To the question “why return?” one of the founders of Tuk-Tam replies: *My theory is that there are untapped markets and niches, and these young people are interested in developing them. They saw something abroad and said, hey, it would be really cool to do it here. People who return and want to work here often encounter difficulties. Many return with anticipation for something else — higher payment, for*

example, and then encounter opportunities which are much lower paid. But for example, my friends from the Free Sofia Tour say: «in the West this exists, and here it doesn't, it's so nice to develop something new» (V. Interview, 2012). Thus through return, Bulgaria becomes a possibility for development, innovation and creativity.

### **Conclusion**

Analysing the pre- and post-accession periods in Bulgarian emigration processes and whether the state through its return policies and its instruments affect the processes of remigration of the highly qualified young Bulgarian people, three main points can be summarized.

First, in terms of emigration, the accession to the EU does not result in the expected increase in the number of emigrants. The phenomenon can be explained with the fact that the emigration waves had already taken place by the time of EU accession, the effects of the economic crisis, as well as with the restrictive labour market measures, imposed by some of the member states.

Second, the pre-accession period is characterised by a higher number of emigrants and no general migration policy addressing the phenomena, but with the first milestones in creating return policy mechanisms (the “Bulgarian Easter” campaign, law for the Bulgarians abroad, etc.). The post-accession period is characterised by a lack of high emigration rates, but intensified production of migration strategies and policies, all having a strong focus on return. The visible asymmetry of these two periods is characterised by a constant tendency towards showing that the return policies and instruments do not greatly affect the complex choice of return among the young highly qualified Bulgarians. It is rather a complex mix of professional and social factors that influence both return and further mobility and circulation of returnees.

Third, the EU accession and the open borders change the nature of migration trajectories for Bulgarian citizens in general. Both emigration and return are no longer perceived as permanent steps. It also fosters the institutionalization of migration, leading to the production of three strategic documents in eight years, after nearly two decades of neglecting the matter. Although a focus in all documents, the return of highly qualified Bulgarians remains on paper. Possible effective policies can emerge from the bottom-up initiatives of the returnees themselves.

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***Annex I***  
***External migration — Bulgaria, (2007–2014)***

**Table 1. External migration — Bulgaria, (2007–2014)**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Settled in the country (immigration)</b>	1561	1236	3310	3518	4722	14103	18570	26615
<b>Left the country (emigration)</b>	2958	2112	19039	27708	9517	16615	19678	28727
<b>Mechanical growth</b>	-1397	-876	-15729	-24190	-4795	-2512	-1108	-2112

Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria, 2015.

## *Annex 2*

### *Return policy milestones in Bulgaria*

**Table 2. Return policy milestones in Bulgaria**

1993	An Agency for the Bulgarians Abroad is established, which became the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA) in 2000
2000	The “Bulgarian Easter” campaign <sup>a</sup> ), started during the government of Ivan Kostov Law for Bulgarians abroad is adopted
2001–2004	The government of NDSV and DPS attracting highly qualified Bulgarians living abroad to high ministerial positions; a period associated with “the return of the King” and “the return of the yuppies”
2008	Report “Bulgarians around the world and the state policy” National strategy of Republic of Bulgaria on migration and integration (2008–2015)
July 2009 — February 2011	Minister without Portfolio for Bulgarians abroad
2011	National strategy in the sphere of migration, asylum and integration (2011–2020)
November 2011	Draft law for the Bulgarians and Bulgarian communities abroad, State Agency for the Bulgarians Abroad (SABA)
18 June 2012	Council at the President (Council for culture, spiritual development and national identity), setting the frame of national strategy for Bulgarians abroad
7–8 November 2012	“Policies towards Bulgarians abroad” conference in Brussels
21 December 2013	First working meeting of the “National council for Bulgarians living abroad”
June 2015	National strategy in the sphere of migration, asylum and integration (2015–2020)

a) “The government of the former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov was the first to attempt to attract the interest and expertise of young Bulgarian emigrants to Bulgaria, organizing an event titled “Bulgarian Easter”. Ironically, just a year later, some of those invited to the event, such as financial brokers from London, became the main reason Kostov’s party suffered major losses in the elections of June 2001. As E. Markova writes: This election presented a very interesting situation: the winner was a party formed at the last minute and led by the former king (who became prime minister following the elections). Among the party’s candidates were Bulgarian emigrant professionals — including prominent participants in recent Bulgarian government initiative to attract highly skilled migrants to Bulgaria — who put on hold their careers in the West to participate in the Bulgarian politics. They formed the first government comprised mainly of returned professionals” (Markova 2010, p. 223).

Source: V. Ivanova 2015.

*Attracting the highly qualified in Bulgaria — policy instruments***Table 3. Attracting the highly qualified in Bulgaria — policy instruments**

Activity	Example	Responsible institution/ NGOs
Forums	Bulgarian Easter Professional realisation in the Fatherland (2002) Career in Bulgaria. Why not? (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015)	Council of Ministers State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA) NGOs (Tuk-Tam, Back2BG, Identity for Bulgaria)
Programmes	Bulgarian dream	State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad; Ministry of Economy
Trainings	For 12 years at SABA State Administration as a whole since 2012	SABA Council of Ministers
Labour and Information Fairs	Germany, Spain, United Kingdom	Labour and Social Affairs Offices, MLSP SABA
Studies	Study of attitudes Study of needs	SABA
Dialogue	Council at the Presidency Conference in Brussels	Presidency

Source: V. Ivanova 2015.

***Cytowanie***

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