

REGIONALIZATION OF BULGARIA: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND GEOPOLITICAL IDENTIFICATION

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Abstract

The creation and designation of regions, namely, the establishment of borders and the definition of territorial formations according to some attributea or group of criteria is a fundamental problem of science and practice. Regional changes are slow and rare. So, it should be. Often, people do not reflect them in their personal horizons of human life, but once they have occurred, they remain valid for a very long time and irreversibly affect the lives of whole countries. Consequently, modern geography no longer needs to inform the public about geographic data, phenomena and facts. This is publicly available information in the global network and libraries. Geography thinks and creates for their relationships, interconnections, connectivity, coexistence and synergy. In this regard, I am sure that geography science and profession will not disappear in the future, as many of the worlds of information technology predict, but will simply evolve into another intellectual form.

About Regional Science

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Regional changes are slow and rare. So, it should be. Often, people do not reflect them in their personal horizons of human life, but once they have occurred, they remain valid for a very long time and irreversibly affect the lives of whole countries. Consequently, modern geography no longer needs to inform the public about geographic data, phenomena and facts. This is publicly available information in the global network and libraries. Geography thinks and creates for their relationships, interconnections, connectivity, coexistence and synergy. In this regard, I am sure that geography science and profession will not disappear in the future, as many of the worlds of information technology predict, but will simply evolve into another intellectual form. As British Professor Harvey says - "Geography is too important to be left only to geographers." That is, a more community understanding of the space and the regions that form it, the habitable environment that we defend, develop and call our own home is part of our cultural identity.

There are numerous scientific literatures about the methods for professional definition of regions, whose roots have been since Hetner's horology (1923). Systematic research directions exploring spatial differentiation and analysis of space-time processes, as well as the formation of their territorial (regional projections), evolve later. The scientific direction of economic and regional geography and consequently emerging regional science have a major role to play. Regional science is a more unified concept, as in addition to geographers, it includes economists, urban scientists, landscape scientists, sociologists, philosophers, political scientists and other humanitarian disciplines. The reason is that the "region" - the main subject and object of research that was first placed in science for the first time by the American geographer Richard Hardshorne in the distant 1939, is too complex, multilayered and only one kind of science is not able to satisfy regional analysis and synthesis. Therefore, today there are science schools that give

importance and favor certain criteria, factors and conditions according to the national and regional space they work for and seek to manage.

In this regard, we can not expect the results of the work of any academic geographic school to be the same with another. For example, the French school would put man and human activity at the center of attention. The German school would put the settlement network and the existing transport and production links. The American school would use both previous criteria and incorporate the American way of life and the scale of agglomeration, concentration and specialization of productions that have never occurred in such a volume in Europe, etc. This is an extremely natural process and comparability must not be sought, except one - measuring the results obtained for quality of life, infrastructure, satisfaction, socio-economic indicators, etc. For us, it is enough to have a clearly written methodology that gives us the systematic and verifiable results. In other words, there should not be misinterpreted regions, but there would be mis-structured regionalization methodologies that artificially generate territorial and regional socio-economic imbalances. The European Union has grown extremely territorially and has included 28 countries with different history, culture and territorial-regional tradition. Four of the major academic schools in geography and regional science are part of it - French, German, Dutch and English¹.

They all have a strong regional basis and their own vision. For the purposes of this paper, we will present the summaries of one of the honorable authors in geography, Professor Peter Hagget. In his view, the term "region" is used to designate a territory in which selected criteria, exploring the nature of the phenomenon sought and its spatial manifestations, create a specific effect on the territories outside of it; there are certain amount of homogeneity. Therefore, the key factor in regional research is the choice of meaningful criteria. (Hagget, 2001)² The author proposes the following classification of regions, which has a common scientific continuity:

1. Uniform (homogeneous) regions;
2. Nodal (Polar) regions;
3. Planning or programming regions.

In turn, they are divided into:

1. Regions defined based on one attribute;
2. Regions defined on several grounds;
3. "General" regions - (localities, districts, provinces).

Uniform (homogeneous) regions are homogeneous in terms of the indicator chosen to be the lead in their determination. The nodal regions focus on the centers and their spatial organization. They are extremely useful in analyzing urban areas of the center-periphery type. One of the important differences between the uniform and nodal regions is in terms of their borders. The first ones have precisely defined boundaries in space as they are the result of measurable, most often quantitative and qualitative criteria. The second type of regions have no precise boundaries, but rather their effect (like gravity determined by a spatial-forming effect), which is a function proportional to the increase in distance from the main center-forming city. Because of this, the boundaries of this type of region are more of a shared influence zone than the lines in the space that are reflected on a map³. The regions that Bulgaria rethought today are uniform (homogeneous) regarding the criteria of the Regulation No 1059/2003, they are defined on several grounds and planning / programming regions in the sense of Hagget. There are

¹ Notwithstanding Brexit, the English academic school has had tremendous influence on the continent before Britain's accession to the EU in 1971, which is likely to continue in the future.

² Haggett, P., (2001) *Geography, A Global Synthesis*, Pearson Education Limited.

³ Stoychev K. (2012) *Localization approaches for regional development*, Printing house "St. Kliment Ohridski" - ISBN 978-954-07-3398-2

established urban centers within them, that is, relationships have been realized in the spatial structures of the center-periphery type. All of this makes their spatial defining a complex intellectual task.

NUTS regions – EU Hierarchical Territorial System

From a practical point of view, for EU territorial governance purposes, for a fairer and more efficient allocation of financial resources between Member States and in accordance with their needs and capabilities, the EU has undertaken the establishment of a unified system of Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics⁴, adopted by Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003⁵. In addition, several studies at EU and regional level⁶ have demonstrated deepening regional disparities, despite Union policies through common funds, as well as a number of new regional studies that continue to identify problems related to regional development, economic development, overall competitiveness, domestic challenges and more.

In regard of these analyzes, the classification was renewed in 2016 and it came into force on January 1, 2018. We can conclude that NUTS regions are a compromise designed to make the current socio-economic situation of the EU regions statistically measurable, to identify groups of regions with similar problems, to define common long-term goals and to define policies for their achievement. This compromise is fully justified, but the EC allows national governments and their expertise to determine the number, territorial scope and names of these regions by themselves. Bulgaria is a country that has distanced itself from applying scientifically sound management approaches using limited expertise, which is a prerequisite for assuming management risks in solving regional tasks requiring high scientific background and public consensus.

Today, NUTS 2016 at European level includes 104 NUTS 1 regions, 281 NUTS 2 regions and 1348 NUTS 3 regions. By regulation, the NUTS classification is a hierarchical system for dividing the EU's economic territory into three specific objectives:

1. Collect, develop and harmonize European regional statistics;
2. Development of socio-economic analyzes of the regions:
 - *NUTS 1: Major socio-economic regions*
 - *NUTS 2: Key regions for implementing regional policies*
 - *NUTS 3: Small regions with specific profiles*

3. *Defining the regional policy of the Union:*

- Regions eligible for Cohesion Policy support. At this stage, mainly for NUTS 2 level.

Due to the enormous diversity in the socio-economic profile of the regions, and for practical reasons, the EC considers that it would be most effective to work with a territorial level, which is intermediate. These are NUTS 2 regions that are large enough to meet the conditions of regional significance, homogeneity and identity, while are small enough not to conceal some statistical summaries related to national trends in key indicators. That is why Art. Article 3 (2) of the Regulation sets out the classification criteria to predict the relative homogeneity sought by Hagget. The Regulation defines the administrative units that are to be used on a territorial basis at the different levels:

⁴ NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) -

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background>

⁵ Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS)

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2009/regional-challenges-in-the-perspective-of-2020-regional-disparities-and-future-challenges

"For this purpose," administrative unit "means a geographical unit with administrative authority which has the power to take administrative or political decisions on the area within the legal and institutional framework of the Member State." In addition, there are population thresholds that are required on the regions:

Level	Minimum	Maximum
NUTS 1	3 million	7 million
NUTS 2	800 000	3 million
NUTS 3	150 000	800 000

Article 3 paragraph 5 states "If, for a given NUTS classification level in one Member State, there are no administrative units of an appropriate scale in accordance with the criteria set out in paragraph 2, this NUTS level shall be established by aggregating an appropriate number of existing smaller neighboring administrative units. Such aggregation must take into account such relevant criteria as geographic, socio-economic, cultural or environmental conditions."

As it is evident, the Regulation gives great freedom to the respective member states to do what they think best for their countries and their regional traditions. This makes it possible, in addition to meeting the requirements of the regions as a territorial basis for collecting statistics, but also to apply other criteria that have more significant national targets. The latter condition is very important to us because Bulgaria has a specific post-Liberation experience, and that was the first NUTS regionalization.

It was the population criterion that proved to be a serious challenge because our country failed to implement a successful package of measures that would lead to a change in the reproductive behavior of the population and to control internal and external migration. Therefore, for a very short period, we have had to revise the system of NUTS 2 hierarchical level already twice since its initial introduction in Bulgaria in 2006.

Bulgaria's experience for regionalization

Our problems are at the level of a conceptual apparatus, as the terms used by geographers and regional economists in Bulgaria are evidence of this, because there are two terms - "rayon-район" and "region". This "error" has also multiplied to the "Regional Development Act" level, which defines "rayoni", and regional development takes place. The error has received a regulatory basis at the highest state level. One of the major tasks of the new zoning/regions and changes in the law is the term "rayon" to be completely removed and replaced by "region".

In general, the term "rayon" is used only in the former Soviet Union and Bulgaria. According to many authors in our country, the origin of the word "rayon" comes from the French word "rayon". From the review of specialized geographic dictionaries, it becomes clear that the word is content that has nothing to do with territory. The French word "rayon" literally translates as a ray or radius. In the geographic dictionaries issued by Penguin books, the word "region" is absent, and in The Little Oxford Dictionary (1990), the word is translated as a "textile pulp" derived from cellulose.

In this respect, it is very interesting to interpret the word "rayon" in the "Glossary of Foreign Words in the Bulgarian Language" (1978), which states that "the word is of French origin and has the following meanings":

- 1) Locality with economic or geographic features;
- 2) Part of a settlement or neighborhood;
- 3) Administrative-territorial unit in the USSR;
- 4) Place where a particular action is taken; area of action."

These interpretations in the glossary are borrowed from the Soviet (Russian) dictionaries without making a critical reference to other sources of the content of the term. This is an example of the danger of multiplication in the conversational Bulgarian language and science of foreign words with unclear and even wrong content.

From this brief review of the interpretations of the content of the word "rayon" it is misused to characterize geographically distinct parts of the earth's surface. Proof of this is written by E. Alayev⁷ (1983). In his view, the term "rayon" is rusified and it has no "territorial" content in either France or other French-speaking countries. The term "rayon" was first introduced by the Russian geographer, Hermolov in 1879, in the characterization of agricultural areas in Russia. Today there is a denial of the use of the term "rayon" even in Russia, which is mainly due to the very "precise" geographic content of the term "region". According to E. Alayev (1983) the term "region" has a multifaceted content:

- (1) Synonym of an area, or in the sense of a territory characterized by similar territories and characterized by unity and interrelationships between its elements, which determines its integrity;
- 2) Used to designate comparable taxonomics belonging to different taxonomic systems or to different levels in one system;
- (3) Used to designate any territory which, by its very nature, does not conform to a system of taxonomic units of a particular class already adopted in a specific system of charging.

In the "Geographical Encyclopedia" (1962), the Latin word "regio" refers to the district or region and its use in the characterization of large areas. This understanding is much closer to the logic of the EU in creating the NUTS hierarchical system.

According to the remarkable American geographer R.J. Johnston (1987) defines as a "region" any part of the earth's surface with its specific and characteristic features of nature or human development. They, on the other hand, give in this territory identity, differentiation and distinction from other similar parts of the earth's surface.

According to S. B. Cohen (1973), the geographic region is a space organization based on quantitative and qualitative criteria and expressing the unity of its various elements.

According to Boyadzhiev (2005) there are two possible explanations for the region's definition. One is related to the Latin word "regere", i.e. the territory on the border line. In Rome, "region" meant an area that was to be governed in principle without being associated with a particular state institution. The region has not been associated with political power and organization. Its competence is expressed by limited territorial power resources. The other understanding of the origin is from the Latin "Rex," meaning ruler possession. (Boyadzhiev, 2005)

Against this background, it is striking that in Russian and many Bulgarian publications the definitions of "rayon" completely coincide with the definitions of "region". For example, Э. Алаев (1983) points out that "a rayon" is a territory that is distinguished from other similar territories, having its internal unity, integrity and interconnection between its elements.

From what we have said, we can draw the following conclusion: the word "rayon" is not only a Russian version of the French word "rayon", but its content is entirely borrowed from the content of the word "region" of Anglo-Saxon origin. This gives us reason to believe that the term "rayon" should be completely removed and replaced by a "region", at least in connection with the alignment of our terminology with the EU countries.

In the following pages are analyzed some basic models for regionalization of Bulgaria in connection with attempts to justify "new" NUTS 2 regions. How many proposals that were considered by the MRDPW are "new" is a controversial issue. Bulgaria has no great options for significant changes in the scope as the socio-economic processes of transformation are going too

⁷ Алаев, Э. Б., Социально-экономическая география. Понятийно-терминологический словарь, Москва, 1983

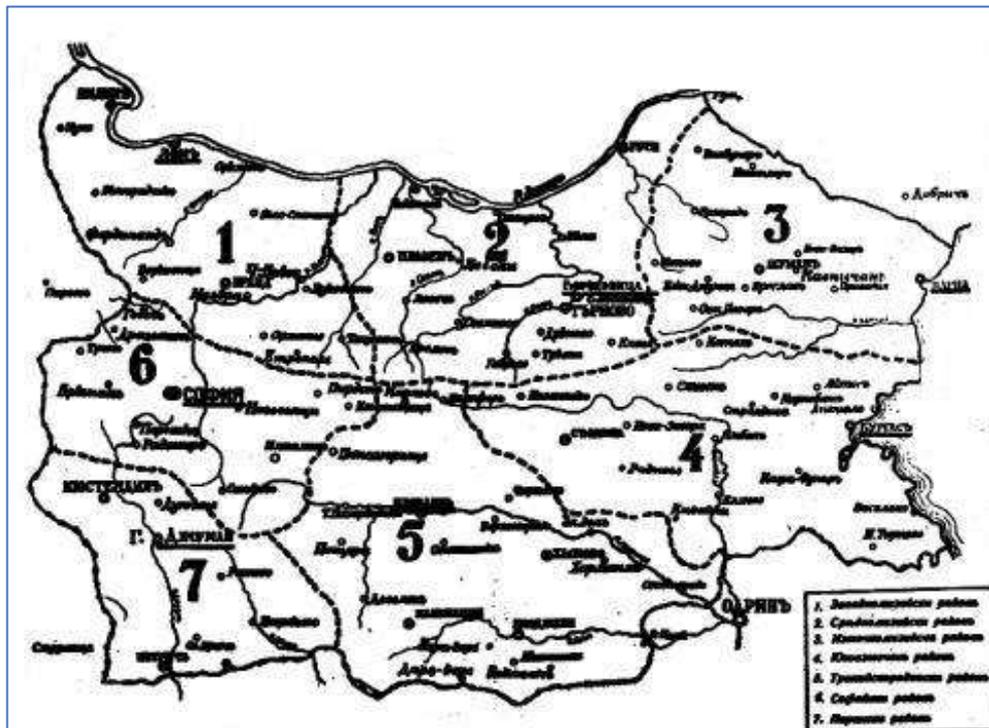
slowly. The only accelerated process is the depopulation of the regions, but this is a separate topic. Our country should only answer three important questions about the NUTS 2 regions:

1. Where Sofia should be – alone or part of bigger region?
2. How many are the new NUTS 2 regions?
3. What should be the names of the new NUTS 2 regions?

Long before the current NUTS regionalization of Bulgaria was carried out, a number of prominent scientists have worked on this topic and through many criteria and approaches have developed significant number of regionalization schemes. We can consider the present and the future regionalization scheme of Bulgaria as their derivative. For the purpose of academic honesty, we will mention several basic models. The first specialized zoning is by geographer Ivan Batakliiev in 1934 ("Landscape division of Bulgaria"). Although it is landscape, it is the first to introduce specific names of the regional division of Bulgaria. It is based on geotectonic, morphological, climatic, plant-geographic and anthropo-geographic "foundations" of 5 landscapes or landscape areas, as he calls them, which are the main species of natural zoning: Macedonian-Rhodopian, Middle-Bulgarian, Staroplaninski (Balkan), Danube plateau and Black Sea shore. Paragraph 5 of Article 3 of the Regulation allows the participation of this type of criteria in the regionalization process.

The first economic zoning of Bulgaria appeared in the same year by the geographer Anastas Beshkov⁸ (1934), which remained the highest quality division until 1944. Acad. Beshkov divided Bulgaria into 7 economic areas (economic complexes) based on criteria such as economic specialization of the territory in terms of agricultural development, production traditions of the population (development of crafts), ethno-cultural and cultural characteristics, peculiarities of the population territory and its natural characteristics. It defines seven regions: West-Moesian, Middle-Moesian, East-Moesian, Southeast, Thracian-Rhodope, Pirin (Strumsky) and Sofia (Figure 1). As can be seen, a mixed approach is used in naming them - historical-geographic province, directions of the world, morphology, settlement name.

⁸ Бешков, А., Стопанско-географско поделение на България. София, 1934, с. 11.

Figure 1: Economic regions of Bulgaria by A. Beshkov (1934)

After the changes of 1944, Acad. Beshkov attempted to defend his thesis and in 1946 in his article "From militant to peaceful economy. Economic Planning and Economic Zoning" indicates the need to know the different regions by the way of their complex research⁹.

Two years later, Prof. Ignat Penkov conducted a first regional survey attempt, raising the question of the "economic geographic area" as a "territorial-production complex" with maximum developed domestic production links and specialization on a nationwide scale. This formulation will continue to be maintained by a number of scholars during the socialist years until the end of 1989.

As a result, I. Penkov and T. Hristov present their view of division of the country (December 1952 - January 1953) at a session on economic zoning of Bulgaria conducted by the Geographical Institute of BAS with the departments of geography in Sofia University and the Institute of Economics at BAS. They define only 3 major areas (Figure 2): West, Southeast and Northeast, as well as nine sub-regions.

This economic zoning of the country's territory is based on the following criteria and conditions:

1. the industrial bases – thermal power-energetics, metallurgical, machine building, etc. ;
2. sectoral areas and the formation of industrial cores, nodes and areas, including agricultural areas;
3. the territorial distribution of labor;
4. forms of complexity;
5. the most important rail highways. and road junctions;
6. areas of ports;
7. the functions of the cities and the changes in the urban network;

⁹ Пенков, И., Т. Христов, Икономическа география на България. София, 1975, с. 344.

8. party and government documents;

9. the international division of labor, scientific and technological progress and the integration of the countries in the CEA. (Penkov and Hristov, 1975)

Figure 2: Economic regions and sub-regions by I. Penkov and T. Hristov.



1 - boundary of a region; 2 - boundary of a sub-region

Again, during this period Academician A. Beshkov, Prof. T. Yordanov, Prof. Hr. Marinov, I. Zahariev, P. Popov argue that no economic division of the country has been made and that the existing scheme of administrative-territorial units (districts and counties) does not coincide and could not coincide with the economic regions. According to them, economic zoning represents an "objective scientific process of revealing and proving the existence of objective economic areas on the territory of the country" which are formed as a result of the development of the settlement network on the national territory, the distribution of the productive forces and the industrial, and economic ties. The limiting influence of the natural environment, especially the relief - the barrier of Stara Planina, some cultural and household peculiarities of the population, the daily and weekly labor trips, etc. are taken into account. (The Geographic Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1954). To date, Bulgaria has not overcome the differences in urban and infrastructure development between Northern and Southern Bulgaria.

Contrary to this thesis, Ignat Penkov (1954) maintains the notion that "administrative-territorial units (counties) are economic regions", ie. argues that there is a coverage between the scheme from the administrative and territorial units and the economic regions.

Another scheme (Figure 3), proposed by Prof. T. Yordanov (1954), includes five economic areas - two in the north (northwest and northeast) and three in southern Bulgaria (Southwest, Marisho-Rhodopi and Southeastern).

Figure 3: Economic regions of Bulgaria under the scheme of T. Yordanov.

The currently active NUTS 2 regionalization almost completely coincides with that of Yordanov, with the small difference that the Stara Zagora region is not in the Southeast as it was never previously considered a Southeastern region, as well as the fact that today in Northern Bulgaria the regions are 3, but the new proposal for NUTS 2 will again bring us back to 2 in northern Bulgaria.

Particularly intensive work on the regions was carried out in the period 1956-1960. Results are published in "Geography of Bulgaria", item 2, 1961, where 6 regions are described, namely: Northwest, North Central, Northeast, Southwest, South Central and Southeast. This is the beginning when the Bulgarian national space falls under the "iron curtain" of the directions of the world. Even today the Bulgarian regions are represented precisely by these names in the EU, created in 1961. The names based on a river or sea basins, morphostructure approach or historical-geographic provinces forever disappear.

At that point, the authors of the monograph underline that "economic zoning is a prerequisite for the complex development of the national economy." More results from the expeditionary surveys were published in "Economic Zoning of the People's Republic of Bulgaria", 1963. More than ten options for schemes of the country's economic regions were presented. The regions that are offered have a different territorial scope, natural, demographic, economic and infrastructure potential.¹⁰

Other scholars present their schemes - Christ. Marinov - 3 regions (1953), T. Yordanov - 5 districts (1954), Radka Naydenova and F. Nikolov - 8 districts (1974), V. Dakov - 1 district, D.S. Timoskin and others, using one or other criteria and metrics.¹¹

It is clear that there was no specific logical link and systemicity between the perceived factors, criteria and indicators that influenced the formation of the territorial basis of zoning.

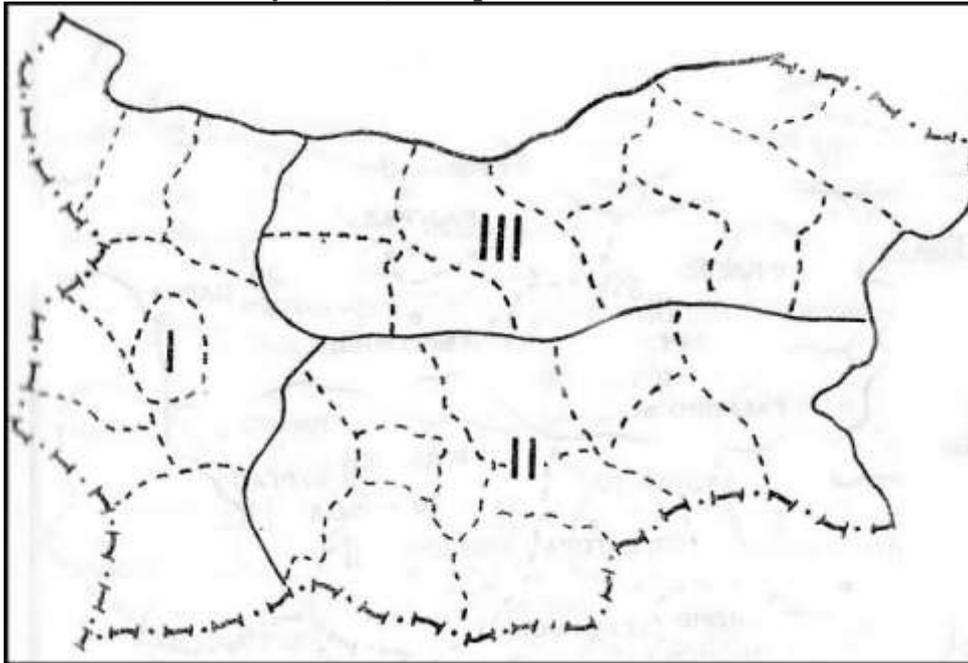
In 1956, with the publication of the 273th Regulation, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and other government departments were commissioned to carry out the necessary

¹⁰ География на България: Физическа и социално-икономическа география. София, БАН, 2002, с. 671.

¹¹ Икономическо райониране на НРБ, 1963 г.

researches by the end of 1960 and to come up with a scientific project for pre-zoning, and by the end of 1965, with a final project for the overall zoning of the country. In 1962 the cited authors' team (Prof. Iv. Zahariev, Prof. D. Bradistilov, Prof. Radka Naidenova, Prof. P. Popov and V. Vassilev) developed divisions under Regulation 273. The development of productive forces on the territory of Bulgaria, there are two distinct (West and Southeast) and one third (Northeast) under construction of economic and territorial complex areas. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Economic regions of Bulgaria under the Iv. Zahariev, D. Bradistilov, Radka Naydenova, P. Popov and V. Vassilev.



1. West (together North-Western and South-West Bulgaria) with the center of the industrial agglomeration Sofia-Pernik;
2. Southeast (together Southeastern and Southern Central Bulgaria) with Plovdiv center, uniting all industrial agglomerations;
3. Northeast, which unites all industrial cores and agglomerations in northeastern and central northern Bulgaria. There is no center in it.

On this principle an attempt was made economic zoning of Bulgaria, which is done with the "General scheme for the territorial location of the production sectors" (preliminary version). In it, on the basis of the formed industrial-territorial complexes and the territorial concentration and specialization of the main branches and the transport, there are eight territorial-production complexes, which form eight economic regions (figure 5):

- South-West, West - Upper Thracian, East-Upper Thracian, South-East Primorski, North-West, North Central, North-East Danube and North-East Primorski.

Basically these eight regions coincide with the sub-regions described above in the scheme of I. Penkov and T. Hristov (1952-1953).

Figure 5: General Economic Areas (1972).



Later Prof. Doncho Donchev (1983) brought out 7 economical regions (Figure 6) - Sofia-Pernishki (the largest by economic potential and by degree of economic development), Western Upper Thracian (Plovdiv-Pazardzhik, second largest and economic including the cities of Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Karlovo, Smolyan, Panagyurishte, Asenovgrad, Velingrad, Peshtera), Eastern Gornotrakiyski (Eastern Maritsa, includes the lands of Stara Zagora and Haskovo and parts of Kardzhali, Yambol and Sliven).

Figure 6: Economic regions of Bulgaria by D. Donchev (1983)



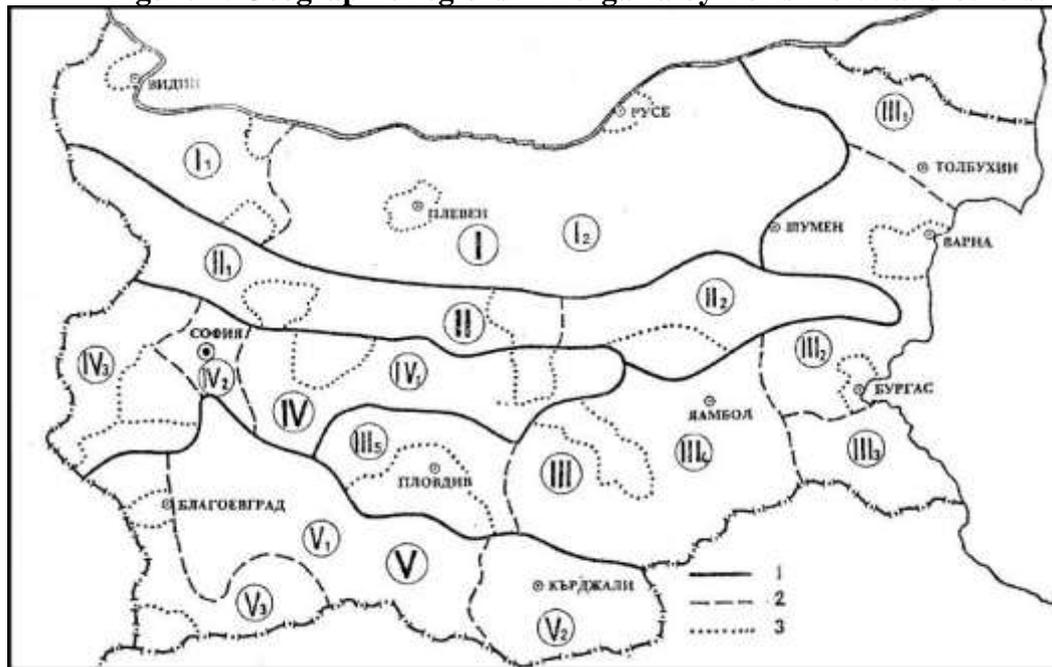
Donchev defines intra-regional relations as an important regional factor, but first places the role of "business centers". He clearly states that if the territorial scope of one or another region has to be expanded in a given direction, no change of the economic center is possible, precisely because there is a larger number of productive forces on its territory, resistant as a region-forming factor. That is, the first conditions for viewing our national space through the prism of a mosaic of centers and peripherals models occur. Concept, which is now fully realized in the country in its primarily negative plan, and which was the reason for the creation of the National Spatial Development Concept 2013-2025, which sets the options for future development.

A special place in that period is the article of "Experiences of natural-economic (geographic) zoning of Bulgaria with application of multi-dimensional statistical analysis" (1984) by Prof. Boris Kolev and others. This is the first scientific-complex geographic zoning in Bulgaria, taking into account the basic properties of both the natural and the anthropogenic subsystem. On the basis of a variety of natural and socio-economic components, typological territorial classification is performed using multidimensional statistical analysis and complex areas with similar characteristics are outlined.

The credibility of this zoning gives us the principles that were used as the basis for determining the extent of the regions - the principle of homogeneity of the territory (expression of the relatively uniform expression of the initial indicators on the territory - the homogeneous regions of Hagget), the principle of contrast (the relative difference between the magnitudes of the typical indicators for individual homogeneous groups of territorial units) and the principle of complexity (simultaneous completion and analysis of all or most of the indicators, characterizing the territory). All these principles for comparability and verifiability of source data.

29 indicators (12 natural and 17 socio-economic), related to 291 settlement systems, were used to carry out this zoning. After a statistical transformation, a matrix of so-called Euclidean (taxonomic) "distances" is obtained. These are actually "distances" between the points in a multi-dimensional space.

After the establishment of minimum taxonomic "distances" linking the individual points, groups of closely spaced points, called taxonic, are formed. On the basis of their grouping, a scheme of complex geographic regions in Bulgaria is comprised of 5 regions and 15 sub-regions. Outside the examined areas and sub-regions, urban systems with exceptionally large dimensions of their indicators remain unlike their neighboring territories, which is why they are not associated with them and are not included within the respective sub-regions.

Figure 7: Geographic regions in Bulgaria by Boris Kolev and others.

1 - boundary of a region; 2 - boundary of a sub-region; 3 - Locality

In the course of the division work from the territory of the whole country, twenty relatively small units of the territory have been allocated, which are called "socio-economic localities". They are single (Vidin) or groups - from several urban systems (Plovdiv, Asenovgrad). As seen in the figure, these are settlement systems, on whose territory were concentrated very large production capacities of national importance (Kolev et al., 1984). Today, some similar dependencies of large concentrations can still be taken into account. A typical example in this respect are Lukoil-Neftochim for Burgas, the Marishki Thermo-Power Energetic Complex for Stara Zagora, Cluster "Srednogorie" for the extraction of rare metals for the municipalities of the Sofia region, Kozloduy NPP for Vratsa region and others.

Today's socio-economic conditions are completely different and at the basis of the modern regionalization of Bulgaria there must be completely different motives leading to regional identification of a new type that places the human activity, his habitat (the populated place) and the regional territory (its name) as the main source of cultural identity. As can be seen from the above analysis, far more complex regions have been developed in the country than the criteria set by the EU regulation.

In the period after 1989, the regionalization of Bulgaria is placed in the sphere of the executive public power, thus not giving priority to the systematic study of the regional structure of the socio-economic and cultural development of Bulgaria (Dimov, 2006). In other words, the scientific approach to this problem has almost ceased, with a leading role being given to the administrative-command approach, which is subordinated to other objective criteria in decision-making.

The modern zoning of the country is located in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria since 1991 and in some of its subsequent laws, including the Regional Development Act and its subsequent amendments. This law specifies the role of the state for regional development and the issue of the planning regions is defined, which term is then eliminated because the NUTS 2 regions in Bulgaria have no administration and budget and have nothing to plan respectively. In

this connection, they are really statistical. By decision of the Council of Ministers the territorial scope of 6 such areas used for the purposes of the National Plan for Regional Development - 2000-2006 of the pre-EU membership period was determined. Thus it formally meets the requirements and conditions related to the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (EU) in the field of regional policy. These regions were very much in line with the requirements of Eurostat and, under its nomenclature, are units of the so-called NUTS level 2. According to Chapter 21 "Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments" of the EU Accession Negotiation Process, as of 01.01.2006 the country has had the opportunity to change both the number and the territorial coverage of the level 2 regions, but this chance has been missed. In that way the model since 1961 is borrowed, based on the geographical directions and our country joins the EU as follows:

Northwest (Vidin, Montana and Vratsa centers), North Central (Pleven, Lovech, Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo and Rousse centers), Northeastern (centers Silistra, Targovishte, Razgrad, Dobrich, Shumen and Varna), Southeastern (centers Bourgas, Sliven and Yambol), South Central (centers Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Smolyan, Stara Zagora, Haskovo and Kardzhali) and Southwest (centers Sofia, Pernik, Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil and Sofia district).¹²

Figure 8. NUTS 2 regions in Bulgaria as of 2007.



Source: NCTP, 2007

¹² Закон за регионалното развитие. ДВ бр. 26 от 1999 г.

Only seven years later due to the negative demographic trends, it turned out that two of these regions no longer met the conditions of Art. 3 of the Regulation. (Southwest and Northwest). This imposed an administrative-command change in the territorial basis of the regional planning and the Stara Zagora region "migrates" to Southeastern Bulgaria and the regions of Lovech and Pleven "migrated" to the Northwest. This questioned the statistical reliability of the data collected by region, as the change in the territorial base led to difficulties and distortions in the reliability of regional comparisons.

Figure 9. NUTS 2 regions in Bulgaria as of 2010.



Source: NCTP, 2007

In accordance with the severe dynamics of demographic processes as early as 2010, Karastoyanov and Stoychev (2010)¹³ propose a new vision for new regionalization of the country, based on an approach that defines regions that are in line with the Regulation, but according to the authors, they are more sustainable in time, possessing the corresponding natural and historical-geographical identification.

¹³ Karastoyanov, S., K. Stoychev, Cultural Civic and Natural Approach in the Regionalization of Bulgaria, B: Bulgarian Diplomatic Review, vol. 5-6, 2010.

mental categories and their corresponding territorial projection give the boundaries of thinking - spatial thinking builds the categories and the conception of the regions that are the "mosaic" of the national space. In fact, our national space - geotoriya (territory, aero, aquatory, and earthly bowels) is the most constant capital available to a nation. Therefore, the attitude and understanding of this space and its internal division - the regions and the process of regionalization itself - are fundamental knowledge and attitude. On the other hand, this constant leads to a relationship as to a givenness, caused by the thought that we will always have it, it belongs to us and will always serve us. This thought is fraudulent because the care for the national space is like taking care of the home.

Bulgaria is about to create a "new regions" at NUTS 2 level, which it intends to use in the next 30-40 years, taking into account the regional (spatial) development of our country. This is the third change for the past 19 years, which is very short period in geography, in fact terribly short. The formal political-administrative reason for these frequent changes is the above-mentioned Regulation on Population Number, as well as some other conditions that have little relevance to the process of regionalization but have been administratively subordinated to them. From this point of view, this is an irreplaceable necessity and we must respond to it. Therefore, the more important question is how do we respond, what is the prospect for the new regions, how long and whether they will accurately reflect the national reality?

To begin with, the names and the territorial scope of these regions are the most important because they give the regional identification of the national space, answering the question "Where Bulgaria is"? and the more important question of which are Bulgarian regions today? If we look back on history, the territory of our current national space covers several historical geographic provinces that are marked on ancient and medieval maps and whose identification is categorical - Moesia, Dobrudja, Thrace and Macedonia.

Since the Liberation for various supranational reasons, Bulgaria has never allowed itself to use them in its official region's names. In fact, in some regions before 1961 there have been names such as Macedonia, Dobrudja, Rodopi, Thrace, Pirin and others. Since after, completely disappear over a period of over 50 years, but without full regional system based on cultural identity. That is why for a whole century of time the naming approach based on the directions of the world has been applied. Thus, we disguise what historical-geographic provinces Bulgaria occupied today. Bulgaria's "problem" is that these provinces are geographically partly located in our neighboring countries, which is the reason for all the "geopolitics" that arises in our minds. Thus, a Czech man that may live in Bohemia, a name that can be traced back 20 centuries is using the name Bohemia, but man who is a resident of Sofia, whose city history is older than that of Rome, lives in Southwest Bulgaria, who's name of a region was determined in 1961.

However, in the different periods of the development of our country appear Northwest, North-Central, Northeast, South-East, South-Central and South-West. As described above, there were variants with 8, 6, 5 regions, but all based on this naming approach - the geographic directions of the world. An approach that strived to turn the country into a homogeneous area in which everyone is the same, equal, and just like themselves. We are always excited by the question: since Serdika, that is, Sofia, is the center of Southwest Bulgaria, which geographic object is located southwest after its name means a center?

There has been a process in which other factors and forces have taken the lead part and have defined both the names and the territorial coverage of the regions. In other words, Bulgaria has stubbornly masked where it is, looking for its national identity in artefacts from archeology and sources from history back in the centuries, but unrelated to today's territory and regions. Thus, if a Thracian treasure is found, it is Thracian for archeology and history, but the region is

not Thrace, that is, for the Bulgarian geography, it is from South-Eastern or South-Central Bulgaria.

Today our country will readily accept a variant with 4 regions - Danube, Black Sea, Thrace and the Rhodopes, Southwest. Named basin-based designations, historical geographic province and morphology and directions of the world. It is astonishing that one of the new regions accepts the name Trakia and Rodopi of Karastoyanov and Stoychev, but not the others, where is Moesia, Dobrudja, Macedonia? Therefore, the first level of error is the very names of future regions.

Figure 11: One of main proposals to new NUTS 2 regions



Source: MRDPW, 2018

Secondly, the city of Sofia is not seen as an autonomous region, which is due to a short-lived political desire to remain a cohesive city and to continue to use in the next programming period European funds for public infrastructure. This is a disastrous solution for Bulgaria and deserves a separate paper. The Ministry intent to use this region for at least 50 years, therefore, it must be really well thought out and it is not proper to pursue financial objectives with a single programming period of 7 years to define regionalization. Remaining center of Southwest Bulgaria (although in the changes to RRDs being prepared, it is proposed not to define the centers of the regions), the question arises as to how to achieve polycentric development of the National Spatial Development Concept without specific centers? This is also a mystery and a separate topic - "How about contemporary Regions Without Centers"?

Bulgaria consists of the capital Sofia and its periphery, and every other administrative district is in the same miniaturization model - center and its periphery (province). The designation of centers is essential in order to conduct in-depth analyzes of them and their periphery in order to identify policies that will impact them effectively. In other words, we would like to have regional development programming in which no other city competes with Sofia, but

there is a regional cluster of cities of similar rank, problems and solutions. If Sofia remains the center of Southwestern Bulgaria, its role is reduced to a geopolitical and geostrategic level.

The natural city center of the so-called Southwest, which we do not consider to be favorable, is Blagoevgrad, not Sofia. In the current structure of the hierarchy of settlements, Sofia has the first national rank and should not be equated with other towns and cities in Bulgaria. That is, Sofia may have a special status. This will enable it to lead completely different policies from the periphery (provinces) - spatial, regional, economic, geostrategic. Bulgaria needs a city that is not cohesive to start developing smarter policies and projects. Last but not least, this future new zoning does not satisfy the geopolitical and regional interests of Bulgaria and its capital.

External political challenges and the "new" regions

One of the existing countries in the Balkans, based on its name of a historical-geographic province, is about to get the addition "Northern or North". Through this action, it is recognized that this historical geographic province is not only found in one of the modern Balkan countries, but still in Greece and Bulgaria, and at the same time uses a non-defining geographic identification - "Northern". Perhaps one day for the geography will be found South, West and East. The latter seems to me the most important for us - the Bulgarians. This type of administrative-command naming and regionalization is like a useless indication of a GPS navigator, who in a completely unknown place tells you "take the northwest direction"!

As our European partners are poorly acquainted with the regional geography of Bulgaria and the Balkans, they are inclined to pursue the important political goal of FYR Macedonia becoming an EU member and avoiding further complications - for a very short time are open to declare the issue for the name solved problem. Probably this solution will remain, but it is not in Bulgaria's interest. There are many examples in geography that we have accepted without thinking, for example: Bulgaria has taken the Russian geographic school to call Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - Baltic republics. These republics are the pre-Baltic only if the observer is east of them. If, however, it is viewed from the position of Denmark, which is also a Baltic country, this pre-Baltic is losing meaning.

In such a complex situation and in our own history the Berlin Congress of 1878 opened the name "Eastern Rumelia", which was the first territorial name we removed as a nation after the 1885 war. That is, congressional diplomats call Rumelia, indicating its eastern part. Probably somebody in mind had a Western one. Nowadays, in the map is about to come "Northern Macedonia". In geostrategic struggles, when geography is to be masked in favor of another geopolitical identity, uncertain geographical identifications are often placed as they "blur" the picture. There are similar examples in Western Europe, do we wonder if the citizens of Northern Ireland feel less Irish than those living in Ireland itself?

If our country "miss" the emergence of "Northern Macedonia", then we forever allow the fragmentation of the idea of a united Macedonia of our ancestors. Today, the historical-geographic province of Macedonia is located in three countries - FYR Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. This is a political-geographic division, but it does not question the fact that the historical-geographic province of Macedonia is a whole region. Allowing the impersonal "North or Northern" will forever divide the map and disturb the culturally-historical and geographic integrity. History will remember, but it requires intellectual effort, memory, attitude. Our Western partners do not have the time and desire to get a glimpse into these small Balkan themes, but they are a serious risk for us. Adding our intellectual difficulty to finding a new

Bulgarian name for Southwest Bulgaria and leaving Sofia as "Southwestern" city, we get two geographic incorrect names will be obtained - North Macedonia and Southwestern Bulgaria.

The question arises, what message will we send to all outside of Bulgaria, who are also interested in these issues, and especially the European peoples, because also these regions should serve as a territorial basis for measuring the degree of development of Bulgaria? How do I explain that west of Southwestern Bulgaria is Northern Macedonia? How will these two regions bordering on the EU and will implement territorial policies, since wall is still there even at names level?

The paradigm that Bulgaria is everywhere there are Bulgarians can only be protected if they can answer the question: "Where is Bulgaria" and more so, what is the region from which they come from? Regional identification is not genetic inheritance, it is cultural and is important just as much as the national, and today the European continental.

Here is the possibility that the Bulgarian identity will become a cultural and civilization category, which is the only condition for it to be transferred in time, not to the genes. They, the genes, will mix, as has happened so far, and will happen in the future. We will be part of a great Europe and these processes have begun. However, it has always survived the Bulgarian identity that needs its regional projection, not a certain ethnic profile. In the globalizing world, the two paradigms were opposed, and in fact, they were complementary. We could realize an intellectual plan in which to use them in favor of Bulgaria. In this way, we will remain a loyal European partner contributing to the "big idea", but we will also create conditions for everyone born in Bulgaria and all who will come to live on its territory to recognize the regional, that is, the Bulgarian identity for its own.

Bulgaria has a long way to go to its national identification in the large PanEurope family. A path that does not go through the concealment of its regional peculiarities, identities and names but, on the contrary, through their conception and use in cultural and socio-economic terms.

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