

## FERTILITY INCREASE IN THE FOCUS OF DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY IN BULGARIA

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**Abstract:** The paper provides a detailed analysis on the preconditions and the steps of development of the pronatalist demographic policy in Bulgaria, the first elements of which date back since the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and can be uncovered in the first decrees and laws of the Bulgarian government about family and workers' benefits. The history of development of the Bulgarian pronatalist policy is divided into three stages: the first one includes the period 1878-1944; the second one covers the time between 1944 and 1989 and the third one lasts from 1989-1990 until recently when the country undergoes a transition to democracy and market economy. In spite of some interruptions and inconsistencies in the recent demographic policy of the country, this policy has always been directed to an increase of fertility. The childcare has been considered a general priority of the state. The legislative and social-policy measures directed to an increase of fertility include: maternity and family benefits, child allowance, improvement of the social conditions for childrearing, achievement of equity in childcare and stimulation of social responsibility in formation of human capital of the young generations. The overview of the recent demographic crisis in Bulgaria delineates the goals of the future demographic policy and social development of the country.

**Key words:** birth rate, fertility, population policy, family, children.

### **Essence and purpose of the policies concerning demographic reproduction**

The state policy concerning demographic reproduction includes **population policies and demographic policies**. The main purpose of it is to stabilize the reproduction processes and to trigger particular changes that correspond to the national strategic political goals and priorities for demographic development. **Population policy** is a larger term that includes political measures and approaches aiming to shift in a particular direction individuals' fertility intentions and behaviors. It includes larger means aiming to influence socio-economic conditions, income, employment, health status and socialization of young generations. Population policy targets also particular changes and protection of work conditions, promotion of healthy lifestyles, protection of environment and improvement of social conditions and living standards. Population policy

is closely related to larger social processes in the sphere of education, health, residential policies, social protection, social security and social recreation. One of the main specifics of population policy is the regulation of migration process and territorial distribution of population [**Population, 1994**: 329].

The term “**demographic policy**” is more focused and includes mainly political measures and approaches that aim to influence directly and to regulate the demographic processes and structures. The implementation of demographic policy begins with the formulation of particular goals and political means for their achievement that correspond to state-political actions and interventions that governmental institutions should develop and implement in order to achieve optimal demographic reproduction. In many cases, the two terms “population policy” and “demographic policy” are used interchangeably. The reason is that demographic policy is understood as one of the most important components of population policy, directly linked to the main goals and priorities outlined in the latter. According to R. Pressat the narrower definition of demographic policy includes measures implemented by the state in order to influence directly the demographic processes. These measures can stimulate the demographic growth or impede it [**Pressat, 2006**: 243].

In the political practice in Bulgaria, the demographic policy is defined very often as a system of normatively regulated state measures that reflect views and goals of public authority concerning the demographic processes and their relation to other social processes. The demographic policy is also governmental and administrative approach, a means for identification and realization of complex governmental goals for balanced demographic development and long-term adaptation towards demographic challenges aiming to guarantee the economic growth of the country [**Ademov, 2014**: 17].

The formation of demographic policy on a state level as a particular approach in the field of social regulation dates back from the times between the World War One and the World War Two (1918-1939). At that time, the main the stimulation of population growth priority was the man priority. This included also an increase of fertility, prohibition of abortions and other measures aiming to achieve this priority. The increase of fertility played a key role for achievement of high population growth rate at that time.

The deceleration of the population growth emerges as a priority in the global demographic policy at a later period of time, i.e. in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This goal was put forward in the global demographic agenda as a response to the demographic boom observed in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the socio-economic problems it caused.

**Pronatalism** as an approach in demographic policy is related in the general case to preference towards and sustenance of particular fertility levels that ensure population replacement. i.e. fertility rates surpassing mortality rates. In the recent situation birth rates are considered optimal when they ensure a steady and moderate population growth.

In the pronatalist policy as it is implemented in the different times and states, we can distinguish the following key elements. Some of those elements include loans aiming to help people to establish their own independent households (part of the loan can be remitted in case of childbirth); financial support

in case of childbirth; monthly child allowance; tax alleviation in case of having many children; guaranteed income of working mothers. Other elements are related to an introduction of preferences for working parents such as paid maternal and parental leave, flexible work schedules and other benefits in case of breastfeeding, child sickness, change of work position if it is inappropriate for mother, flexibilization of work schedule, work from home etc.; provision of state housing and childcare facilities. Third group of measures include propagation of the social importance of motherhood, development of educational programs for parents and making parenthood psychological attractive and desirable, creation of social environment supporting demographic reproduction and motherhood, increasing tolerance towards extramarital fertility.

Pronatalist policy includes also restriction to the access to abortion and contraception, support of sterile couples in curing infertility and measures aiming to reduce maternal and infant mortality [Heitlinger, 1993: 129].

The implementation of these measures of the pronatalist policy is synchronized with the traditions and the prevailing social preferences in a certain social context. The set of pronatalist measures might increase over time making the policy more complex and embracing larger segments of the society.

The historical facts for Bulgaria confirm that the country has had a long term tradition of pronatalist policy. The state-political atmosphere it has created supports the demographic goals for stable and optimal reproduction of the population even in case of absence of coherent and stable state-political demographic strategy and demographic policy. The reason for this is that the principles of pronatalism are reflected in the legislation and they are supported by the social norms and traditions of the Bulgarian society.

### **Emergence, implementation and scope of pronatalist demographic policy in Bulgaria (1878-1944)**

Bulgaria had high marital and fertility rates in the early period after National Liberation. The indicator was higher than the marital rates observed in Hungary, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. In the period 1881-1910 fertility rates significantly increased from 36.8‰ to 52.1‰. The levels of fertility (42‰ in the period 1901-1910) surpassed the figures for England (26.7‰) and Belgium (25.1‰), Norway (26.7‰), Germany (32.3‰), Italy (32.6‰) etc. [Danailov, 1930: 102]. Fertility of Bulgarian women at that period was higher than fertility of women in almost all neighbor countries and also higher than the rates for other Eastern European countries.

If we take into account the five century long Ottoman domination, the demographic losses during the wars for the National Liberation, the assimilation policy of the Ottoman state, the unjust international treaties after the Liberation and the emigration in the postliberation period, it becomes clear why the "population" became a crucial factor for the development, autonomy, progress and the security of the country.

The formation of the official pronatalist demographic policy in Bulgaria has its own prehistory that sheds light on the ways it developed, its directions as well as on its motives and aspects of influence. It allows us also to claim that the

official pronatalist demographic policy in Bulgaria is formed by decades long systematic efforts to build up and implement a reasonable and clear concept for demographic development which provides a solid ground and traditions in this area.

The thread of the pronatalist demographic policy aiming to facilitate the process of nation-building can be distinguished even in the first laws of the newly liberated Bulgarian state and in the Turnovo Constitution. The legislation at that time supported the family and the children-orphans from the wars. It also promoted the institutionalization of the public health care system.

The demographic transition began in Bulgaria after the Balkan wars. This process was associated with a decrease of fertility and mortality. Apart from these radical changes in the demographic balance, the rates of maternal and infant mortality continued to be very high. These tendencies provoked several important changes in the national legislation.

In the first decades after the National Liberation, the main aim of the family policy was to ensure the wellbeing of families. It became a priority in the sphere of social protection. The implemented family policy at that time includes direct and indirect measures aiming to guarantee the economic status of parents, the living conditions of the dependent people in family, the alleviation of gender inequality, the strengthening of the solidarity between generations and the transmission of values in family [Aleksandrov, 2013: 46]. It is reasonable to claim that even in a rudimentary form, these aspects of family policy implemented at that time are close or even identical in some areas to the contemporary concepts of social and demographic policy. Ideas and argumentation of modern family policy measures can be found in the theoretical and the methodological studies of the first generation of demographers in Bulgaria: M. Sarafov ("Population in Bulgaria According to the Three Censuses, 1893-1894"), G. Danailov ("Notes on the Demographic Statistics of the Bulgarian Kingdom", 1894), K. Popov ("Economy of Bulgaria", 1916), D. Mishaikov ("Population of Bulgaria", 1920).

One of the main problems that was discussed at that time concerns the abandoned children. The concerns about this phenomenon were reflected in the Law for Recognition of Children Born out of Wedlock, Their Fathering and Adoption (State Gazette, N 9, 12.01.1890). This law regulated the protection of children born out of wedlock, the procedure of their fathering and the procedure of their adoption from another family. In this document we can find the roots of adoption policies in Bulgaria dating back as early as the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays this policy is developed in the European practices of deinstitutionalization of care for abandoned children. Similar social concerns can be uncovered also in the Law for Guardianship of Children [State Gazette, N. 67, 24.03.1890] which introduced the status of guardian of children-orphans. This law stipulates also how the children-orphans can be supported by the state.

Following the European example, the system of registration of vital events was also established soon after the liberation of the Bulgarian state. According to the **Law and the Regulations for Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths** approved in 1892 in Kingdom Bulgaria the municipalities take the responsibility to register births, deaths and marriages.

In 1929 after long preparation, the **Law for Public Health** was also brought into force. According to this law the state granted health protection of pregnant women and their children. Health care of children and young people were also main priority in it.

In 1934, the **Law of Social Support** was implemented in the country. This law reflects the emerging necessity of special policy of social support for children. It introduced family benefits and guaranteed the protection of children born outside marriage. Another law covering this issues is introduced in 1942 in **the Law of Improvement of the Material Status of State, Municipal and Other Clerks** in Kingdom Bulgaria. The law was changed with several state decrees in the period 1942-1943. These decrees regulated the protection of industrial workers and the people with liberal professions. The decrees following the mentioned law promoted also the idea of social justice, equality and protection of families in the increasing Bulgarian population at that time.

The **Law for Bulgarian Families with Many Children** was introduced in March 1943. This law clearly demonstrates the pronatalist orientation of the national policy at that period. It aimed to increase fertility and marriages, thus, revealing the readiness of the state to support families with many children by granting them some privileges in receiving land, paid work, access to education and health care, loans and leaves. The **Law for Bulgarian Families with Many Children** introduced also **tax alleviation and other kinds of support for families with three and more children**. It also regulated **the financial and other kinds of support for poor families with children**. This is also the first law in the national legislation that provided **unpaid medical care in case of pregnancy and childbirth**. The families with many children are granted also some **privileges in provision of agricultural loans and agricultural technique** as well as in the distribution of land. If the income of the family is below certain threshold, the family can receive **monthly financial support for forth and next child**. The state introduced also special **awards for mothers who gave birth to four or more children**. The children born in such families could have also some privileges in regard to the military service. They were given an advantage in enrolment in schools, in the sector of employment in the public services and in the access to state stipends. According to this law, a Fond for Families with Many Children was constituted as part of the Main Health Directorate of the Bulgarian State. The main purpose of this fund was to collect money for families with many children.

Based on the overview of the demographic situation and the policies aiming to increase fertility in the period 1878-1944 in Bulgaria, we can draw the following conclusions:

- The basis of the policies of mother and child protection was established during the 1920s in Bulgaria when on a European and global level the contours of the systematic demographic policy also started to emerge. In Bulgaria this policy was oriented towards a decrease of maternal and infant mortality.
- In the period between World War One and World War Two the idea of pronatalism came to the agenda and drew the public and the political attention. The problem of decreasing fertility became an issue of public concerns as it was expected to have important implications on the labor force and the size

of the army of the country. The issue of fertility decrease became an object of significant concerns at the dawn of the World War Two. The period of 1930s was marked also by the necessity to develop and implement special policy measures aiming to increase the population through an increase of fertility (Balutsova, 2011: 44). These measures can be thought as the beginning of national pronatalist demographic policy. The emphasis was put on the families with many children, the state support of them and their positive role for the country. The first legislative initiatives took the several directions. One of them was associated with the establishment of the social policy of child benefits. Initially, the target group of this policy encompassed specific groups but later on it extended its coverage.

- The social and demographic legislation at the period before 1944 is not studied in detail. The short overview of the main laws allows us to claim that there is a continuity in the state-political reactions towards the demographic changes as well as in the policies aiming to increase fertility in Bulgaria [Balutsova, 2011]. This is why, the national traditions in this area as well as in the realm of family legislation should be recognized and appreciated. The pronatalist policy should not be related only to the state initiatives after 1944. Its roots date back from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Pronatalism as a main component of the demographic policy in the period 1944-1989**

After the World War Two the main aim of the economic policy was to achieve high economic growth through accelerated scientific and technological progress, establishment of material and technical basis for it and an increase of labor productivity. Based on this the development of demographic policy becomes very important. This policy should reflect the importance of human potential as a basic factor for the accelerated social and economic development. Globally, at that time the demographic policies extended their pronatalist nature and enriched their legislative basis by introducing various mechanism of social impact. These policies developed a special character and material resources while the main role for their implementation was taken by the state. The content of the demographic policies was defined by the principles of gender equality, stabilization of family institution, pronatalism and constitution of the demographic factor as a basis of the economic growth and the social development.

The established model of demographic policy in the period after 1944 in Bulgaria includes the **equal participation of women in the social and the economic life** and an increase of the importance of family for the social and political life. This focus of the national demographic policy followed the social movements in other developed countries. The Bulgarian state adopted some models from the western countries among which the model of the family with two working parents. Based on this, the Bulgarian state introduces a new policy for the role of women in the society. The new role of women was based on a combination of the parental responsibilities and duties and the active participation on the labor market. The new image presented the woman as a mother, a professional, an actively engaged person with different social causes. This image should meet the new principles of gender equality. Yet, the combination of these

duties was often fulfilled by women with substantial difficulties stemming from the imposed active participation in the labor market, the low living standard, the unequal distribution of duties in the household and the lack of modern facilities there.

After 1944 the state entered a period of postwar demographic compensation and an increase of fertility was witnessed. Birthrates reached the level of 24-25‰ in the time between 1945 and 1950. In the period 1950-1965 fertility decreased to 15‰. In the next decade featured by a large-scale pronatalist policy birthrates stabilized at a level of 12-13‰. The stabilization was also due to the introduced pronatalist policy. In the first years of the transition period fertility rates were also 12-13‰.

The process of shift in the goals of the national policy brought about important changes in the legislation of the country. As a result of this, newly introduced measures of demographic development and social protection of mothers were granted to women and received large public support.

The Law for the Families with Many Children was still into force at the period 1944-1989. This law was accepted by the XXV National Assembly in 1943. A couple of months after that, on 9.09.1944 it was also revised by the Decree for Change and Extension of the Law for the Families with Many Children (State Gazette, N 113, 18.05.1945). According to this Decree the newly wed couples can receive a low tax loan which can be abolished in case of birth of at least four children. The decree regulates also the taxation policy in case of a birth of a child – the taxes are reduced in case of birth of a subsequent child. The decree granted also an access to unpaid health care of families with many children, reduction of school taxes and some preferences for the national railways. The rural families with many children receive also some benefits in the distribution of land and low-tax credits to buy land and agricultural technique. The fathers with many children were released from obligatory labor duty for the state and from military service. The law introduces also awards for families with many children: a golden medal for birth of seven children; a silver medal for five/six children and a bronze medal for four children.

In the next 10-15 years this law was extended in approximately fifty decrees the main purpose of which is facilitate the process of **fertility increase** [Maksimov, 1957: 292-294]. These decrees updated the policy of reduced taxation of newly wed couples and the benefits of childbirth. They also regulated in more details such benefits as the paid parental leave, family benefits and the unpaid traveling of mothers with many children with the national railways.

In 1951 the Bulgarian state introduces the “**Decree for Increase of Fertility and Birth of Many Children**”. This decree stipulated a **special premium for child birth to women**: from 4,000 levs for first child to 30,000 levs for sixth and next child. (The mean salary in 1950 was 11,396 levs). Industrial and agricultural workers, employees in the administration, pensioners on social benefits were entitled to these progressively increasing financial benefits for childbirth. These social benefits could be received until the child reaches age 14. The lone mothers were also entitled special social benefits: 2,000 levs for first child and 2,400 levs for next child until it reaches 12 years.

In 1956 the state benefits were synchronized with the devaluation of the national currency and even increased. Farmers working in cooperatives were also included in the category entitled to receive them. The age of the children for whom the parents could receive these benefits was also increase from 14 to 16 years. However, the amount of money was linked to the household income. The couples with one child received child benefits if their income was below 1,300 leva; those with two children – below 1,600 leva and the families with three children – below 2,000 leva. All families with four and more children could receive child benefits regardless of the household income (CSA, f. 117 Op. 17 a. ,s. 176, § 2, 7, 13-16 ). In 1957 the monetary payment of child benefits were also slightly increased\*.

The “Decree for Increase of Fertility” introduced also the so-called “bachelor tax”. It was equal to 5% of the monthly income of women between who remained unmarried 21 and 45 years and for the 50 years old unmarried men. The bachelor tax was taken also from the income of those married couples who did not have children in a more than one year period of time after marriage as well as from the monthly income of the childless widowed women and men in the mentioned ages.

Gradually Bulgaria became popular as a country that provides **stable social protection of motherhood**. With the “Decree for Increase of Fertility” enacted in **16.04.1968** the state **provided one of the longest leaves for pregnancy, childbirth and adoption** (for first child – 120 calendar days; for second child – 150 days; for third child – 180 days and for birth of forth and next child – 120 calendar days, 45 of which must be taken 45 days before birth). The length of the parental leave was not related to previous labor market experience. The amount of money that a woman receives during this period was equal to 100% of previous income. The additional period of parental leave for first, second and third child continues until the child reaches 2 years of age and other 6 month are added for each subsequent child. In the time of parental leave a woman receives financial support equal to the minimal salary for the country. In 1968 the minimal salary was 60 leva. If the parental leave is not used the mother receives 50% of the minimal salary.

Bulgaria was among the countries that provides an option the paid parental leave to be used by the father (with the agreement of the mother) or by some the working grandparents (Labor Code, Decree for the Increase of Fertility, art. 3-b, 1968). The legislation provided also the option the child to stay at home until it reaches 3 years if the mother (father) or one of the grandparents decides to take an additional year of unpaid parental leave. According to the legislation from that period maternal and parental leaves were counted as labor market experience of women.

According to the Decree for the Increase of Fertility childbirth was related also to several kinds of compensations and other benefits such as the leave for sick child below age 16. The Decree stipulated also one-time payment of 100 leva

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\*The amount of money, mentioned previously, refers to the period before the valorization of national currency in 1961.

for birth of first child; 250 for birth of second child; 500 for birth of third child and 100 for fourth and next child. The state support included also monthly financial benefits for childrearing. These size of these benefits was regulated by the Labor Code and the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (State Gazette, N 36, 1988). In the period 1960-1967 the monthly benefits for second, third and fourth child were 13 levs, for fifth child – 10 levs and for sixth and next child - 5 levs. According to the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (1968) until 1984 z. the amount of monthly benefits paid for first child was 5 levs; for second and third child – 15 levs and for next child – 5 levs. In 1970 the monthly nominal salary was 124 levs; in 1975 it was 146 levs and in 1980 - 181 levs. In 1970 the state spent 219.8 million levs for child benefits; in 1975 - 253.0 million levs and in 1980 - 503.6 million levs. The state benefits for childrearing were 56.3 million levs in 1975 and 98.9 million levs in 1980 (NSI., 1981: 182, 188-189). In 1984 the state payments for first child were 15 levs, for second child – 30 levs, for third child – 55 levs and for fourth and next child – 15 levs\*

The families could use a large network of **nurseries and kindergartens** fully subsidized by the state. In the period 1945-1980 the number of kindergartens increased from 243 to 6 185. All-day kindergartens were 3,414, half-day kindergartens – 2,227 and seasonal ones – 544. In the same period the number of children who were enrolled in them increased from 11,334 to 420,804. In the all-day kindergartens the children were – 302,078; in the half-day kindergartens – 101,773 and in the seasonal kindergartens – 16,553 (Woman..., 1989: 120-121). In 1980 the nurseries were 1,151 in which places are provided for 1,994 kids per 10 thousand children under age 3. In total the enrolled children were 77,369 [NSI, 1981: 214].

Additional legislative documents regulated also some privileges and benefits of **families with many children**. These privileges and benefits included an access to state dwellings; guaranteed access to kindergarten and reduced fees for them; schools and universities stipends for children coming from such families; reduced tickets for the national railways and one-time aid for children coming from poor families.

In order to increase fertility and marital rates the Bulgarian state provided also additional benefits for **newly-wed couples**. One of the most important benefits includes the opportunity to receive a loan equal to 15 thousands levs with a 2% interest rate and 30 years long period of pay-off. In case of birth of second child 4 years after previous, the loan is reduced with 3,000 levs and in case of birth of a third child – with another 4,000 levs. The lone mothers under age of 35 as well as the divorced and the widowed parents with small children could also use such loans.

The newly wed couples could also receive a one-time **loan** of 5,000 levs with a **10 years long** time of pay-off. In case of birth of a second child 4 years after previous birth, 50% of the loan left to be paid was paid off. If the couple has a third child – the loan was completely paid off. Certain privileges were also

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\* For correct comparison of the data it is necessary to take into account the solvency corresponding to the price level and the inflation.

granted to lone, widowed and divorced mothers. For example they could receive a loan of 2,500 leva (Regulation of Credit Activity of DSK – State Gazette, N. 79/1978; N. 3/1985, N. 92/ 1986).

One of the main directions of the state demographic policy in the period 1944-1989 was the healthcare for **pregnant women, mothers and their small children**. It was regulated by **the Law of Health Protection of Mothers and Children (1946)**, **the Constitution of People's Republic of Bulgaria (1947)**, **the Labor Code (1951)**, **the Law of Public Healthcare (1975)** and other legislative documents related to medical care of **pregnant women, mothers and children**.

In 1951 the state introduced the **unpaid medical care**. The medicines for pregnant women, those who have children below age of 1 and also the children up to 6 years old who have certain diseases could receive free medicines. The system of **gynecological and pediatric care** was quickly established. In the period 1945-1952 the state built up 863 maternity wards, 1,361 pediatric and gynecological consultative centers and 200 nurseries with 10,000 places for small children. In 1985 the pediatric and gynecological consultative centers increased to 2,425; beds in the gynecological centers were 11,129 and the pediatric centers – 8,862 [**Woman..., 1989**: 109].

The introduction of modern methods for diagnostic and medical treatment, the **premarital and marital consultation centers and the improvement of the prophylactics** brought about positive changes in maternal and child health indicators of the country. In 1985 99.5% live births happened in specialized obstetrics hospitals. Infant mortality decreased from 144‰ in 1944-45 to 14.6‰ in 1985. Maternal mortality decreases from 4‰ to 0.2‰ for the same period. The main causes of infant mortality related to infectious diseases disappeared [**Woman..., 1989**].

Thus, we can draw the conclusion that motherhood and parenthood constituted the main social roles at that period, while the qualitative and the quantitative reproduction of the generations was considered as a basis of socio-economic growth and cultural development of the country.

The first signs of the fertility decrease in the 1960s gave strong **pronatalist direction of the demographic policy oriented towards birth of a third child** in family. The family with three children became a focus of state support through the outlined policies of social and financial benefits. Some of them included lengthy maternity and parental leaves, one-time financial support of mothers, child benefits and other types of social benefits as well as loans for housing with low interest rates.

**Young people's families** became a cross-section of the pronatalist demographic policy. The changes in the legislation aimed to support the families of young people and to alleviate their social and material problems. For example, the Decree for Increase of Fertility and some other legislative documents provided an access to state housing, loans, credits and other financial support linked to the number of children in family.

The **socialist state played** the main role for the described changes in the social policy legislation and its increasing pronatalist orientation. The state defined the goals, the legislative changes and the financial mechanisms through which these goals can be achieved.

At the level of municipalities the state political goals were adapted to the specificities of each region. The financial resources were redistributed and additional resources for housing, kindergartens, establishment of the health and social care infrastructure, support for families with many children and poor families were also additionally provided in different administrative regions of the country.

**The state economic organizations, cooperatives and administrative organizations played also an important role for the development of the pronatalist demographic policy.** They should guarantee the protection of mother's labor rights as well as the adoption of the labor legislation and the provision of social and financial benefits related to parenthood. The development plans of labor collectives included additional support for housing, an access to kindergartens, recreation and sport facilities of the working people and their families. On the level of state economic organizations, cooperatives and administrative organizations several measures for social support were also implemented such as housing loans, canteens, unpaid public transport, stipends for children, support in education etc.

The effectiveness of these measures is still disputable. Yet, **we can claim that in the period 1944-1989 the demographic policy had a short-term positive effect.** The fertility decrease was mitigated. In the first decade after the enactment of the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (1968) fertility rates were kept at a constant level. In 1978 marital rates were 8.1%, while fertility rates were 15.5%. Fertility rates were above the population replacement level until the middle of 1980s. The process of depopulation was still unknown. The natural growth was positive - 6.3% [NSI, 1981: 214]. Marriage was preferred family form and the two child family model was widespread. In other words, the human capital of the Bulgarian population increased at that period. Children and parenthood were at the center of the value system of the society.

At the same time, in the theoretical concepts for demographic development and in the legislation of the country from that period these are principles and regulations that we cannot define as **fully corresponding to the democratic principles and the concept of protection of human rights in regard to private life. The right to take independent decisions about the time of marriage and childbirth and the number of children in the family was not guaranteed in the legislation.** Even in the times of socialism in Bulgaria some of the policies and their measures violating these rights were an object of critics and discussions.

One of the critics concerns the scope of some of the demographic policy measures. The **social protection of mothers is very important for working women** and especially for mothers who continued their education in colleges and universities. Yet, this measure ignored those women who preferred to be housewives and those who were to unemployment and had to stay at home. This is one of the weaknesses of the policies described above.

**The increase of the number of third births** was not realistic goal in the demographic policy at that period. The reason for this is that this objective not correspond to the fertility preferences of young people and as a result it remained unsupported by them. The main preferences of families at that time were focused on the two child family model.

The imposed model of working woman calls into question the right of women to choose independently their roles in the society. This policy of the Bulgarian state was largely criticized. **The bachelor tax** for people who did not marry and did not have children was also an object of criticism and disapproval.

The absence of developed **policy of family planning and sexual education** had also negative consequence. The women were forced to control fertility mainly through abortions. This brought about a striking tendency the number of abortions to exceed live births. This also had a negative impact on the health status of women.

Another problematic moment in the demographic policy of the Bulgarian socialist state is the prohibition of abortions on request. **The ban on abortions for families with one of two children** was considered a means to increase fertility at that period. It became an official state policy with the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (1968). The **social control on family and private life** exercised by the state created a sense of social pressure over individual's private life [Mihova, 2013: 110-113]

Pronatalism in the period of demographic instability (1989-2014)

The negative demographic trends the first signs of which were witnessed in 1960s accelerated and deepened in the period of transition to market economy in Bulgaria (1989-2014). In this period the country experienced a profound demographic crisis. The recent demographic crisis cannot be explained only with the socio-economic changes in the transition period. However, the economic and social difficulties experienced at that time significantly accelerated it. In the period of chaotic social and economic reforms several factors played a major role for the negative demographic development of the country. One of this factors is the withdrawal of the state from the process of control of the demographic reproduction and the decreased state support for families. Thus, the diminishing role of the state in this sphere sometimes justified with the principles of democracy, together with the crisis led socio-economic restructuring accelerated the negative demographic trends.

The socio-economic transformations during the transition period featured by **mass impoverishment, increasing unemployment, reduced social security and protection** are reflected in the aggravated demographic situation of the country. A continuing process of depopulation began after 1989. Fertility reached one of the lowest levels in the national history. Mortality increased and a huge emigration wave took place brought about a persisting population decrease. In this period fertility decreased to a level far below the population replacement level. This is one of the main features of the recent demographic crisis in Bulgaria. In the beginning of the new millennium the country has had one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe. The Total fertility rate was approximately 1.2 children per woman in 2001. Similar was the situation in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. According to the data from 2011 the Total fertility rate became 1.4 children per woman at that year. The ethnic differences in fertility has increased at that period. According to the data from the latest National Census (2011) the mean number of children for women with Bulgarian ethnic origin was 1.3; for Turkish women it was 1.7 and for Roma women – 2 children.

Bulgaria became the country in Eastern Europe with the highest decrease of the number of women in reproductive age (15-34). For the period 1990-2014 the number of women in reproductive age decreases with 22%. Yet, the pace of the decrease was not the same for the different ethnic groups. The group of Bulgarian women in reproductive age decreases with 477 thousands; the Turkish women – with 60 thousands and the other smaller ethnic groups - 19 thousands. The overall reduction was equal to 550 thousands women in reproductive age. An increase in the size of the female population was witnessed only in the Roma ethnic group (6 thousands) [NSI, 2012: 47-54]. Fertility decreases from 12.1‰ in 1990 to 9.2‰ in 2013. In 1997 the lowest fertility rate in the national history was registered – 7.7‰. Extramarital fertility increases to 58% from all live births reflecting the increase of the one-parent families and the spread-out of cohabitations among the young people. These trends signal a persisting population decrease in the future; negative changes in the age structure of the population and a decrease of the demographic and economic potential of the country.

The overview of the negative socio-economic and demographic changes during the transition period in the country underlines the necessity to reevaluate the past legacy related to the demographic policy and the need to adapt some of its principles in the new conditions of transition to democracy and market economy. Some of these principles can be extended with new approaches and social policy measures aiming to slow down the negative demographic trends. In particular, the necessity to develop an effective demographic policy in the new conditions requires the implementation of a clear-cut and overarching national demographic strategy. It is important also to develop new theory and methodology of the demographic policy that should meet the new realities in its priorities, mechanisms and impact [Minkov, 1996: 106-109].

**The National Demographic Strategy of Republic of Bulgaria (2006–2020)** was adopted with a Decree of the Council of Ministers, No 625 from 22.08.2006. This Strategy was updated in 2012 and its period of implementation was extended to 2030. In this document the **demographic development of the country is defined as national priority of primary importance**. The main goals defined in the National Demographic Strategy are the deceleration of the process of population decrease, stabilization of the size of the population in a long run and improvement of the human capital (people's health status, education and others skills) of the country. These goals should be obtained in the period (2006-2030).

The pronatalist policy focused on an improvement of the conditions for childbearing and childrearing is defined as the first direction of the **general priority for deceleration of the negative demographic trends and the population decrease**. In relation to this, concrete measures, programs and state-political activities as well as financial support and material and administrative resources are outlined in the document. The indicators through which particular services are made available, the results of their functioning and their impact on a national, regional and regional level are also described. The financial incentives aiming to support childbearing and parenthood are also mentioned together with measures directed towards family-work balance, social investments in education, healthcare and social development of children. The main purpose

of these measures and indicators is to strengthen family as a basic component of the society and to encourage parents to have more children and to raise them in good family and social conditions. The necessity to improve the reproductive health of the population, the prevention and the medical treatment of diseases of reproductive system, the support of family planning in order to reduce abortions and births of children officially unrecognized by their fathers are also stress as priorities in the National Demographic Strategy. Together with these important directions of the recent demographic policy, another important aspect of the National demographic strategy concerns the increase of the demographic knowledge and the sexual and reproductive culture of the population; improvement of the health states; reduction of infant and maternal mortality through health prevention, prophylactics, immunization and improved access to primary and specialized healthcare. Other important elements aiming to ensure effectiveness and efficacy of the demographic measures concerns the need of regular monitoring of the implementation of the National Demographic Strategy as well as the need of the development of administrative capacity for implementation of the legislation and evaluation of the impact of particular legislative measures concerning the demographic development.

During the transition period in Bulgaria **the legislation concerning the demographic development of the country and the system of social benefits** has been undergone to significant changes. Until 2001 the length of maternity and parental leave has not been changed. In 2001 in the Labor Code, art. 163 the maternity leave became 135 days regardless of the birth order. At the time of maternity leave the woman is entitled to receive 90% of the income she had in the last 6 month before pregnancy. The women can use also parental leave for birth of first, second and third child until age of 2 and another 6 months in case of birth of a next child. During the two year period of parental leave a woman is entitle to receive financial support equal to the minimal salary of the country.

The **Law of the Family Benefits for Children** (01.04.2002) abolished the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (1968). This new law introduced several changes in the recent demographic policy of the country. **The one-time support of childbirth** became 200 levs for first, second and third child and 100 levs for fourth and next child. From a universal approach that guarantees that a woman should receive family benefits for each child, the social policy of the country took another direction, i.e. an approach of differentiation of the state benefits which is based on the family income. The amount of money paid for a child as a social benefit became 18 levs. Yet, only the families with a monthly income below 200 levs (2004, 2005) are entitled to receive it. The new law kept the principle stipulated in the Decree for the Increase of Fertility (1968) of a two years long paid parental leave equal to the minimal salary for the country for birth of first and second child and another 6 months for birth of a next child. The amount of money the women can receive as a paid parental leave was constantly actualized and became 340 levs in 2014. If a woman decides to return to work before the end of the paid parental leave, she can receive a monthly compensation equal to 50% of the minimal salary for the country. In case that a mother does not have social security, she can receive a monthly sup-

port of 100 levs. The right of the father or some of the grandparents (if they are employed) to use parental leave is also described in the law. The new law keeps also the previous right of a woman to use unpaid parental leave until the child reaches 3 years. However, this period is not recognized as a labor market participation. The changes of the Labor Code (June, 2004) provide also the opportunity of a woman to use 6 months of unpaid parental leave in the period until the child becomes 8 years old and if the child is not enrolled in a public kindergarten.

The changes in the Code of Social Insurance [**State Gazette**, No 68, 22.08.2006] extended the maternity leave from 135 to 315 days for each child from which 45 are used before childbirth. The changes in the Law for Family Benefits (2006) and the Guidelines of its implementation provided also the opportunities for the families to use family benefits as social investments aiming to achieve better socialization of children and an improvement of the human capital of the their children. The families can also receive another alternative forms of support such as a state subsidy for the taxes in kindergartens, provision of free meals for children in school canteens, unpaid textbooks, school kits, clothes etc. This **new type of family support** is related to the necessity to guarantee an effective spending of the state financial and social support oriented towards better personal development of the children [**Family...**, 2007: 20].

**The financial benefits for pregnancy and childbirth** covered 90% from the monthly income of the woman before childbirth. According to art. 48a of the Code for Social Insurance (enacted in 02.01.2009) the women who have social insurance for general diseases and maternity have also the right to receive a compensation during pregnancy and childbirth instead of income if they were on a paid work in the last 12 months [**State Gazette, N 109, 2008**].

According to art. 163, paragraph 1 of the Labor Code (State Gazette, N. 109, 2008) from 2.01.2009 the working women can use maternity leave equal to 410 days for each child, 45 of which have to be used before childbirth. Before that the length of the leave was 315 days. The new paragraph 8 of art. 163 stipulates that the father can also use this leave after the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the child (with the agreement of the woman) until the end of the period of 410 days. For the first time this right is granted also to the adoptive father.

The mother has also to right to use **additional leave for first, second and third child** until the child turns age of 2. This leave is equal to 6 months for each additional child. With the agreement of the mother (adopter) this leave can be used also by the father (adopter) or one of the working grandparents (Labor Code, art. 164). In this case the monthly financial support is equal to the minimal salary. Yet, the state did not keep this regulation in the last years. In 2012 the minimal salary increased to 310 levs. However, the paid parental leave was kept at 240 levs. Since June 2013 these minimal salary and the amount of money for paid parental leave were equalized again. In 1.01.2015 the minimal salary was increase to 360 levs. Yet, the paid parental leave did not follow this increase and remained 310 levs.

According to art. 167a, paragraph 1 from the Labor Code after the end of the paid parental leave for a child below 2 years, if a woman returns to work and the child is not enrolled in a public kindergarten, she can use 6 months long

**unpaid parental leave.** This right is granted until the child turns 8 years. This right can be used both from the mother and the father.

According to the Law for the State Budget (2009) and the Law for Family Benefits, paragraph 7, art. 1 the monthly child benefits are increased to 35 levs. In 2009 the mean monthly salary became 554,78 levs. The one-time financial support for birth of twins was increased to 1,200 levs for each child (State Gazette, N 31, 28.04.2009). Since 02.01.2009 the father can use a 15 days long leave after the date of hospital release of the mother and the child after child-birth (Labor Code, paragraph 163, art. 7). The law introduces also monthly financial benefits for women who study full time equal to the monthly salary of the country. These women can receive also one-time financial support until the child turns 1 year. The new Family code (1.10.2009) regulates several problems related to the functioning of the family, the relationships and the duties of the family members, the adoption procedures and the rights of the children born in cohabitation.

As a response to the lack of places in kindergartens and closing down some of them due to the restitution policies or selling the property by municipalities, the law introduces also a new kind of support related to **children's enrollment in state kindergartens.** The families whose child cannot be enrolled in a public kindergarten have the right to receive 100 levs monthly financial help for each child at age between 3 and 6 years. The money for are ensured by the state budget.

Family taxation as a part of country's demographic policy was introduced in the first years of the new millennium. In 2004 the regalement of the Law of Taxation of Individuals (par. 29a) introduced a policy of reduction of the annual taxes of families with small children.

One of the main aspects of the recent demographic policy in Bulgaria concerns the introduction of the principle of **responsible parenthood.** The latter includes the adequate spending of the state family benefits for childrearing and a support of parents to provide good care for their children. The changes in the Regalement of the Law for Family Benefits (2006) relate these benefits with the school enrollment of the children. Additional changes in the Law for the Protection of the Child for the first time introduced sanctions for the lack of care and attendance of children below age of 12 (State Gazette, N 14, 20.02.2009).

The Program of Protection of the Child introduced the development of **Centers for Social Support** for parents that aims to improve their parenting skills and to train them to avoid risky situations.

A process of active **deinstitutionalization of social services for abandoned children** has also begun in the recent period. New forms of care were introduced such as foster care, family-type homes for children without parents, centers for daily care for children and crisis centers for women and children-victims of violence and trafficking. The new policy encourages parenthood in family environment and aims to prevent child abandoning.

Some of the positive changes in the field of social policy legislation that were undertaken after 2007 in Bulgaria can be found in the "**National Program Supporting Motherhood**". The program was continued until 2009. The main aims of the program were to provide a smooth transition and return of

the mothers to labor market after materiality or parental leave (child adoption); to improve the family-work balance of working mothers; to open new jobs for unemployed women such as provision of paid childcare for children up to 2 years. The National Employment Agency began a project “**Family Centers for Children**” the purpose of which is to support the professional development of parents and to stimulate the provision of care for children from 1 to 3 years and from 3-5 years old in family environment.

In order to reduce infant and maternal mortality the state provided also a large number of **genetic tests for pregnant women and newborn children**.

In relation to the improvement of the reproductive health of women and reduction of infertility the state also set up the Programs for “**Child Healthcare**” and “**Maternal Healthcare**”. These programs include prophylactic examinations and immunization of children, special care for children in high medical risks and children with chronic diseases, regular examinations of pregnant women and women with newborn children for timely detection of medical complications.

Based on approved medical standards is also the Program for “**Assisted Reproduction**”. It provides an access to the new reproductive technologies (IVF) and in-vitro procedures of sterile couples. The Program is state-financed. It provides also financial support for medicines for treatment of infertility. With the Decree № 25 of Council of Ministers from 09.02.2009 “Fund for assisted Reproduction” was also established as a juridical entity that operates with finances provided by the Ministry of Health. The **Program “In-Vitro Stimulation of Fertility among Couples with Reproductive Programs”** provides additional although limited financial support for 270 thousand infertile couples.

The state stimulates also and tries to increase the **professional competencies** of employed people who want to use maternity and parental leaves. Another priority relates also to the creation of **new jobs with flexible working hours, reduced work time, work from home and distant work**.

## **Conclusion**

If we compare the recent population policy in Bulgaria with the real demographic situation and socio-economic instability in the period 1989-2014, we can draw the following **conclusions** about its effectiveness.

The period of transition to market economy is featured by a **profound demographic crisis that would have negative consequences in a long run**. The demographic crisis and the population decrease are influenced by several factors – impoverishment of the population, reduced employment opportunities, decreased social protection and security, change in the individuals’ life priorities and growing prevalence of the values of survival and also adoption of new values and lifestyles. These changes allow the demographic policies to be considered as a complex result from different factors. The complex approach is necessary to be applied also in the solutions of the problems triggered by the demographic crisis.

**The positive aspects** in the recent development of the social policy in Bulgaria are related to recognition of the demographic factor for country's socio-economic development, the increasing importance of human capital and the long run negative consequences of the demographic changes that could hamper the socio-economic development of the country in a long run. In this aspect, it is necessary to underline the importance of the **developed short- and long-run strategic priorities of the country** in regard to the future demographic development which are based on the Eurostat's demographic projections and the analyses provided by the National statistical institute. The demographic policy was also **institutionalized** in the recent period in Bulgaria. The recognition of its importance brought about the establishment of new institutions engaged with the demographic development of the country.

In that period several sanctions and normative constraints about the individuals' family and private life disappear. The ban on abortions was abolished. The social norms concerning marriage and family, parenthood and children born outside marriage also changed. The social regulators of fertility behavior also changed in a more liberal direction as well as the norms concerning individuals' sexual culture and family planning.

**The civil society gradually became more concerned about the demographic crisis** and about the search of adequate solutions of this problem. There are also some elements of **continuity with the demographic policy of the socialist period**. As a result of this, some of the socio-political measures related to protection of motherhood and the recognition of its social importance are also preserved in the recent legislative changes.

In the same time, it is important to underline also that the demographic policy in the recent period in Bulgaria is **not consecutive and effective enough in its implementation**. There are **strong contradictions in the public attitudes** about it. These contradictions are based on differences in the concepts for social development and the role of the state for the solution of the demographic crisis. These difference influence the policies concerning about the recent demographic situation. In the new conditions of market economy several measures described in the social policy legislation from the previous period became inadequate. The financial benefits related to maternity and childrearing are reduced by inflation and the general reduction of income. The system of protection of working mothers on the labor market, the protection of jobs and guaranteed healthcare eroded in the recent period. Mass impoverishment, high unemployment and prevailing social uncertainty trigger a process of postponement of family formation and fertility decrease. The postponement of childbearing is often followed by impossibility or denial of the couples to have more children at a later age. The recent pronatalist policy is often discontinuous, unsystematic and inconsistent in its implementation. This undermines its effectiveness.

**The regime of economic constraints in the recent period brought about also a reduction of the financial support of the demographic policy which hampered the process of stabilization of country's demographic situation.** According to the National Constitution Bulgaria is a social state but the model of shared

responsibility for **the biological and social reproduction of the populations between families and society** is still not fully established in the recent period.

**Several aspects of fertility policy in the country remain an object of discussions and public disagreement.** They concern for example the question if only working women should be supported to have more children; how to actualize the family benefits and make them adequate to the inflation processes; which counties to take as an example and to follow their policies and models of demographic development; how to connect better the support of individuals depending on their age to the real consumption model in the country; if the approach of differentiation of the social benefits based on the family income should be continued in the future etc.

**The recent period is featured also by growing public concerns about the ethnic differences in fertility rates in the country.** Strong nationalist opinions about this issue are also publicly expressed and become an object of increasing support. These opinions negatively influence the ethnic model of the country and the relationships between different ethnic groups. The protection of national identity became an object of public concerns. However, the protection of national identity requires more constructive and positive thinking as well as better understanding of the new realities of population development. Globalization, labor market economy, the liberated and increased mobility of people and capitals significantly change the ethnic structures in a regional plan as well as in a particular country. The main ethnic groups in countries like Bulgaria decrease in numbers and as a share in the total population. The multinational profile of populations grows. This process triggers also an increasing cultural diversity and mixture of traditions, habits models of the reproductive behavior. In this aspect, the difficulties in the implementation of effective fertility policies stem not only from the specificities of the recent socio-economic conditions but also from the **different demographic profiles of the ethnic groups**. This is why, the universalist approach in the demographic policy lacks effectiveness and does not work in the same way in different social conditions. The analysis of the demographic processes in the recent period in Bulgaria reveals that this approach in the demographic policy does not work in the same way among the main ethnic groups. This means that the state political approach to the demographic problems of the country, and particularly fertility policies, should take into account the ethnic dimension and the specificities of the different ethnic groups. In a global perspective such a political approach has its reasons but on a national level ethnic diversity in the country should not be ignored since it means ignoring of the real problems which in a social, economic and political perspective might provoke ethnic tensions.

**The main responsibility of the national government in regard to the population development relates to the improvement of qualitative demographic indicators**, i.e. the human capital of the population without underestimating of the stabilization of the population size. This means also a rational optimization of fertility and stabilization of the demographic trends by deceleration of the process of population decrease. The existing studies show that the optimization of the levels of fertility and the increase of human capital can be achieved

through policies and socio-political measures of integration of the main ethnic groups in the country. This includes equal opportunities for education, child-care, reduction of unemployment, illiteracy, professional disqualification and poverty among the main ethnic groups [Dimitrova, 2011; Zhekova, 2002; Tomova, Nikolova, 2011].

The country is doomed to follow a pronatalist demographic policy in the future. The challenges of population decrease, the worsened age structure of the Bulgarian population, the lack of people in economically active ages require the presence of more young people that could increase in the future the national fertility levels to the European average levels of childbearing and to increase the human capital of the country.

Regardless of the crisis situation, the economic difficulties following and the lack of material and financial resources, the Bulgarian state should continue to invest in people and to develop and enrich its policies aiming to support family and parenthood. This would be a sign of a social concern and responsibility that synchronizes the national demographic policy and traditions in this area with the global trends and policies.

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