

## Instead of a polity- Ample Ethnic Pockets Elsewhere



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### Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The growth trend of the Bulgarian population, especially between the 19th and 20th centuries, persisted for a long time, until the 1960s. As early as the 1980s, demographers and sociologists (e.g., M. Minkov) warned of an impending demographic crisis. But the measures taken (child birth allowances, housing for young families with two or more children, strict restriction on abortion on request, and the introduction of the so-called “single’s tax”) did not lead to positive results. After the democratic changes that commenced in 1989-90, new factors of population decline were added to the old ones. Here we shall point out one of them – the growing emigration of people of working and childbearing age. Data analysis has shown that emigration accounts for one 1/3 of the population decrease. Bulgarians working abroad already surpass in number those employed in the economy of Bulgaria by more than 300 thousand.

Is it possible to repeat what we call the “Alcek model” in the 21st century? There are many examples of compact “pockets” of Bulgarian emigrant population in different parts of the world. There the emigrants have jobs, purchase property, give birth to children who later attend local schools. This implies they have little intention of returning to Bulgaria. Our forecast is that, with time, the prospects that these large groups of people, in their best age span, would return are declining. They will never contribute to overcome the impending economic and demographic crisis in the country of origin. By now, the only link of generations of Bulgarian grandchildren to their ancestral home is through Skype. The Bulgarian ethnos will not disappear, but will continue to exist in a modified form, as has happened to other nations since the time of the near-mythical Alcek.

**Key words:** demographic crisis, population lose, hyphenated Bulgarians, Alcek Model

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Demography may be a relatively dull discipline, but it is a source of spicy jokes and of debates in the media and among the public; it is also a key political issue in party platforms and election campaign speeches. It is one of those topics – like the struggle for peace, the fight against war, and the eradication of poverty – that make the agenda of frenzied summits, UN-sponsored forums, and mass rallies, the participants of which include politicians, movie and sports stars, and public opinion leaders, but not those immediately involved in the matter, not those who wage wars, create poverty, or give birth to children. Placing these human activities – from the great-scale ones, like wars, poverty, famines, down to that of reproduction, where only two people at a time are engaged – may seem bizarre. But no human deeds are possible without human beings: wars would be unthinkable without soldiers, poverty will be finally and irrevocably eliminated only when the last poor man or woman passes away. In fact, it's all about demographics.

Let me put it simply: I do not insist that demography is all that it's about, or that it is the most important, number one science, which alone can solve all of humanity's problems. Not at all! Population dynamics – growth, decline, natality/mortality – is, far from being a purely demographic matter; it is a multifaceted, composite outcome of a number of deep, interdependent social interactions, correlations and phenomena. Hence, it needs to be investigated by various social sciences, foremost by sociology, but also by psychology and anthropology.

The point here is to reject the political uses of demography and the implementation of seemingly easy solutions that require huge budgetary funding and redistribution, numerous committees, commissions, executive agencies. These institutions occasionally present proposals that seem reasonable to the mass public, but ultimately prove futile and ineffective. Let us abandon all these costly remedies that give the impression of being expedient and successful as long as they remain within the political platforms, but are far from the realities of life.

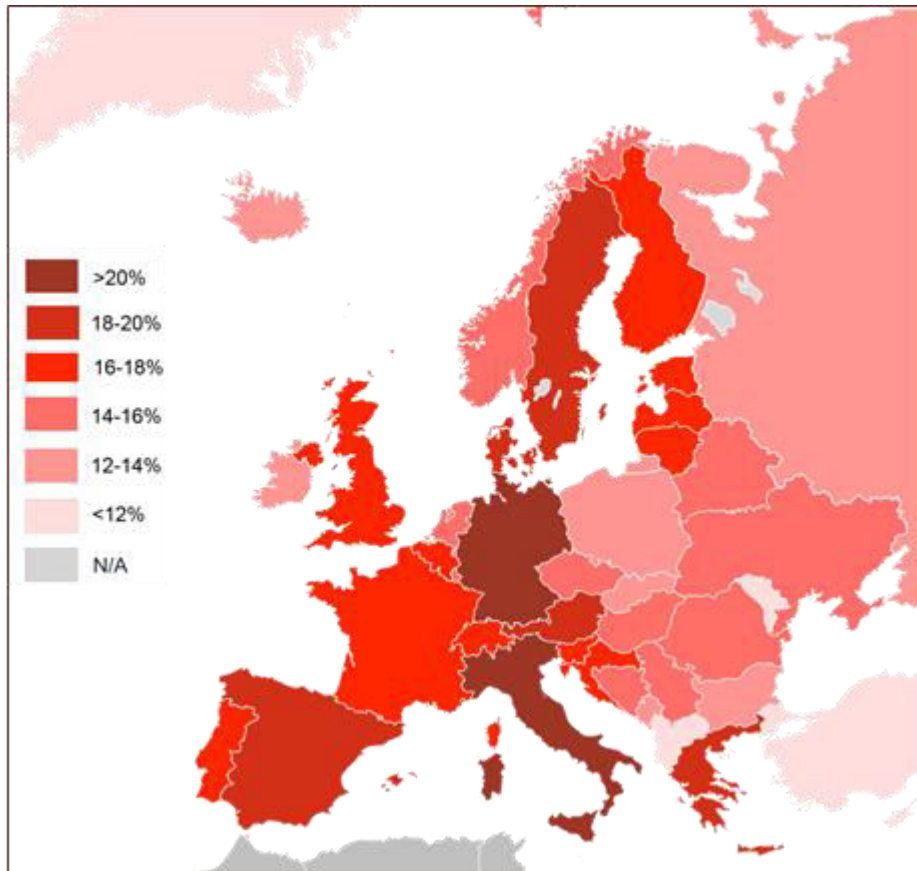
### **Rise and fall**

The growth trend of the Bulgarian population, which began when the country emerged as a state after the end of Ottoman rule (1879), persisted despite the heavy losses sustained in wars

(115,000 killed in battle or victims of disease during World War I alone (see Bulgaria in...)), despite the emigration waves in the 19th and 20th centuries, and continued until the 1960s. Since its peak of 9 million in 1986, Bulgaria's population has been declining. Given the low birth rate, combined with a high death rate and negative net migration, this continuing decline is expected to persist throughout the 21st century. Moreover, Bulgaria (along with Latvia) is one of the two European countries that has a smaller population today than in 1950 (Bulgarian Population 2018...).

This tendency is far from exceptional and not characteristic for Eastern Europe alone or Bulgaria alone. As the well-known Irish biochemist W. Reville wrote, "European civilization is dying... suffering from a pernicious anaemia of the spirit..." (Reville 2016). He warns that all populations in Europe are in decline... The most deadly symptom of this is the lost will to breed: the birth rates in all 28 EU countries are below replacement rates and all the indigenous populations are in decline. The cumulative births per woman in the 28 EU countries are as follows (the first number in the brackets is the 1960 birth rate, the second is the 2014 birth rate; where only one number is noted, it is the 2014 birth rate): Belgium (2.54, 1.74), Bulgaria (2.31, 1.53), Czech Republic (2.09, 1.53), Denmark (2.57, 1.69), Germany (1.47), Estonia (1.98, 1.54)... The average birth rate in the 28 states in 2014 was 1.56 (Reville 2016, see also Carone, Costello 2006). In 2017, nearly one fifth (19 %) of the EU population was aged 65 or above. The share of people aged 80 years or above should more than double by 2080, reaching 13% of the whole population (Population structure... 2018).

**Figure 1.**



Percentage of the population aged above 65 in Europe in 2010. Source: Ageing of Europe (2014). From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

European societies are no longer, and increasingly less, self-sustaining. For example, if current trends continue, every new generation of Spaniards will be 40 per cent smaller in number than the previous one. In Italy, the percentage of the population aged above 65 will increase from 2.7 per cent now to 18.8 per cent in 2050. By 2060, the population of Germany is projected to drop from 81 million to 67 million, and the UN projects that by 2030, the percentage of Germans in the workforce will drop by 7 per cent down to 54 per cent (Reville 2016) – which, indeed, seems to justify German chancellor Angela Merkel’s much criticized immigration policy to compensate for the demographic shortage by aiming to absorb 533,000 immigrants per year<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Prof. Reville calls this “a naive attitude”. “When birth rates fall to about 1.5, even large scale immigration will not hold the population steady over time. Also, European values are not universal and there is no necessary reason to

These changes in population structure have long worried analysts, since they imply further severe deterioration of the entire economy, especially the labor market, of the healthcare and social security system in Europe (see, for example, Bernstein 2003). Moreover, the demographic situation in Bulgaria is far from the worst in Europe, as we see in Fig. 1. It is the general socio-economic picture in Bulgaria that is disturbing.

Low birth rates and higher life expectancy contribute to the transformations in the shape of Europe's *population pyramid*<sup>3</sup>. The most significant change is the transition towards a much older population structure, resulting in a decrease in the proportion of the working age cohort and an increase of the retired population. The total number of the older population is projected to grow sharply within the coming decades, as increasing proportions of the post-war baby-boom generations reach retirement. This will put a high burden on the working age population as they will have to provide for the growing number of the older population (Population structure... 2018). Throughout history, most states have endeavored to maintain high birth rates in order to have additional work force, and, consequently, higher productivity, adequate taxation, more economic activity, as well as strong armed forces for a powerful state (Europe's...).

Both immigration and emigration flows cause fluctuations, particularly in the working age group within the population (Weeks 2012). In case high numbers of young immigrants come to the country, this reduces population ageing. In countries like Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, immigration is expected to decelerate the ageing of the population. In contrast, emigration has quite the opposite effect on population ageing as people of working age leave the country. Increased population ageing caused by emigration is projected to occur, foremost, in Latvia and the other Baltic states (World Population Ageing... 2017: 57-62), but generally in most of Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria.

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expect that other civilisations will adopt these values simply because they come to Europe to partake of the technical and commercial fruits of Western civilisation.” (Reville 2016)

<sup>3</sup> A **population pyramid**, also called an "**age-sex pyramid**", is a graph illustration that shows the distribution of various age groups in a population (typically that of a country or region of the world); it has the shape of a pyramid when the population is growing (see Population Pyramids...). This tool is used to visualize the age section of a particular population (Bezy 2014).

### **Why migration, why Bulgaria?**

Migration is a fundamental part of human existence, so that the movement of people across our entire history is an array of those essential moments when human beings jointly maintain old skills and acquire new ones, together with a better comprehension of the world near and far. From the first migrations of Homo sapiens to all of Africa, Europe, Australia and Asia, to the later migrations from India, Greece and Northern Europe to America, our collective history is marked by migration, which, in our opinion, is a positive human experience (Markova 2012: 11-12).

Migratory movements of huge human masses have occurred throughout human history, and they have been the focus of various studies, mainly within the narrow frameworks of specific scientific disciplines, ranging from history and ethnography to sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the first attempts made to build an integral theory of the migratory phenomenon: the German-British geographer Ernest George Ravenstein defined his “laws” (see Corbett 2003) to explain migration in terms of “push” and “pull” processes, where the combination of adversities experienced in the home country and expected prosperity in the host country encouraged people to migrate. Thus, the “push” factors refer to situations making people unhappy in their current place of residence, while the “pull” factors are features that make a destination seem attractive (Dorigo and Tobler 2005). More than 100 years ago, Ravenstein identified the primary barriers to attraction, such as distances, travel difficulties and gender-associated restraints, while for the modern scholars of migration, such as Heather A. Horst (Horst 2006), Francis Leo Collins (Collins 2009), M. Morokvasic (Morokvasic 2004), A. Portes (Portes 1997, 2000), Louise Ryan (Ryan et al. 2009), S. Turner (Turner 2008), the shrinking of distances brought about by improved roads, means of transportation and information defines the migration context today.

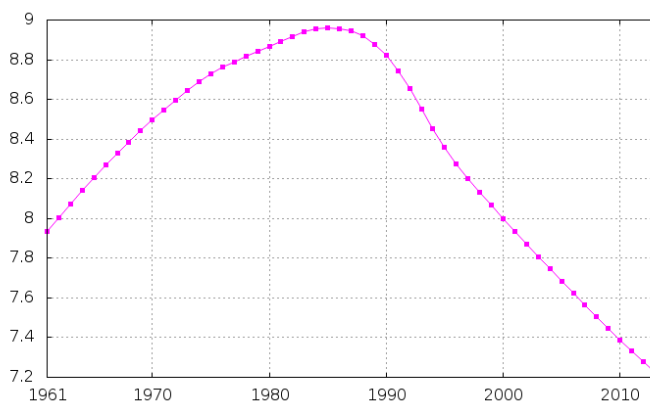
Bulgaria and its global “diaspora”<sup>4</sup> is the specific focus of our study here. The symptoms of inevitable decline of the Bulgarian population emerged while it was still growing: the nine-

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<sup>4</sup> Bulgarian émigré (expatriate) communities are found in 70 countries around the globe. They fundamentally differ by the historic time of settlement – from the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries Banat and Bessarabian Bulgarians, to the most recent emigrations to W. Europe, North America, Australia, S. Africa, and elsewhere, by reasons for departure, etc. Thus, applying the term “diaspora” to Bulgarian communities abroad in anything but a metaphorical sense is incorrect.

million mark was surpassed, and the next goal, ten million, seemed within reach. When reading the official statements issued at that time by the ruling Communist party and the tightly controlled newspapers of that time, one is left with the conviction that nothing could prevent the achievement of these goals. Hence, one might assume (wrongly) that something sudden and calamitous happened towards the end of the 1980s – namely, the fall of the Communist regime and the coming of democracy – which stopped the upward trend. This is simply not true. Demographers and sociologists were warning about the impending disaster as early as the 1970s and 1980s (see, e.g., Minkov 1976), but the measures taken (child birth allowances, housing for young families with two or more children, strict restriction on abortion on request, and the introduction of the so-called “single’s tax” that unmarried and childless couples had to pay) did not lead to positive results.

**Figure 2.**



Simplified version of the diagram, showing the sharp curve of population collapse in Bulgaria.

**Source:** <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bulgaria-population/>

The development of transnational societies as a result of migration is a major focus of theory. Alejandro Portes provides the following definition of transnational societies: societies that are straddling political boundaries and literally “are neither here nor there” but in both places simultaneously (Portes 2000: 254). Transnational communities, in that sense, are composed primarily of migrants and their relatives and friends – these are dense networks of a growing number of people leading double lives. Their members are at least bilingual; they move easily between different cultures; frequently maintain homes in two countries; and pursue economic, political, and cultural interests that require their simultaneous presence in both (Portes 2000:

264). These communities tend to be “cultural and social containers, reproducers and transformers. They facilitate local integration while at the same time maintaining both real and symbolic connections with the original cradle of the community, can articulate themselves around political and other projects both in the home and the host countries, but also very much at the interconnection of the two” (Djelic, Quack 2010: 14). Not every migration network constitutes a community. Mutual orientation and a shared sense of identity and belonging may vary among the members of networks, and in some instances may be absent altogether (Djelic, Quack 2010: 15).

The New Zealander Francis L. Collins, a geographer, sociologist and prominent scholar in migration studies, recently published a monograph called *Global Asian City: Migration, Desire and the Politics of Encounter in 21st Century Seoul* (Collins 2018) where he provides a unique theoretical framework for studying the growth of cities and migration, focused on the notion of desire as a major driver of international migration to Asian cities. Drawing on more than 120 interviews of emigrant and migrant workers and from Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam to Seoul, teachers there of English from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, UK and USA, as well as international students at two elite Korean universities, he features a comparative account of different migrant populations and the ways in which both national migration systems and urban processes create differences between the various groups; he reveals how migration has transformed the city and nation, especially in the last two decades. He describes the limitations of the migrant studies based on their focus mostly on Western immigrant cities as a site for theory making (Collins 2012). Confining their attention to these urban milieus, scholars often “take the drivers of migration as obvious (economic advancement, lifestyle, settlement and citizenship) because migration itself is better established as part of the peopling of settlers communities and cities” (Collins 2018: 7). This theory has some limitations: “Sociologists of migration that focus on transnationalism and global networks, often ignore the issue of the motivation of the individual migrant by taking the primacy of the collective material well-being of households for granted” (Ahmad 2008). “However, the experience, direction and connotations of migration is never, in fact, taken for granted, and it is necessary to explore how the migrant’s imagination, desires and aspirations, including these related to the infrastructures that support their movements, also enter into the daily foundation of urban life. Moreover,



migration cannot be read as a flat experience of similar forms of mobility; instead, there is a need to focus closely on the different statuses accorded to migrants, the temporary forms of migrant entry that predominate in many parts of the world and how its regulation shapes the urban lives of migrants” (Ahmad 2008).

In an earlier work (Collins 2009), the author comments that access to communication technology makes “home” closer to “here”, which increases both the opportunities offered by the “home” and the restrictions. In short, the author argues that, although migrants have the opportunity to participate regularly in the lives of their friends and relatives who have remained at home, the latter can also take part in the life of migrants and the neighborhood “there”, which in some cases may also includes attempts to “punish” those who have left home. For this reason, Collins concludes that “national identities and their associated social formations, continue to strongly influence the transnational life.”

An important issue of both migrant and ethnic studies, assuming that family ties and those with home country can be preserved, is whether migration is capable of creating a new identity when transnational engagements allow migrants to live (simultaneously or in parallel) at home and in the host country. Turner (Turner 2008) argues that while transnational commitments go across territories, and pervade spatial fixation, they could provide, maintain and anchor stable identities. Butcher (Butcher 2009), on the other hand, cannot find evidence for such identity and argues that it is impossible to feel the world as you feel your home; nor can attachment to the “global citizen” notion overcome the need for a national identity. According to her, there is still an impetus to belong to a place that is familiar and provides comfort, including elements of the national vision. This is supported by the maintenance of specific links, which confirm that this identity and related practices and values are shared and therefore valuable. Mandaville (Mandaville 2009) discusses Muslim communities and argues that the multidimensional experience of Muslims in Europe who seek to create a common cause across borders often carries with it the gear of their unique national (or even local) experiences which hinders unification across a shared sense of European Muslimhood. At the same time, other authors consider that migrant communities become culturally transnational in cases where migrants absorb both their experiences from their home cultures and foster cultures to create a “culture of migration” other than that of the nation of origin and the adopted cultures (Massey et al. 1994).

Considering that national boundaries have not disappeared despite the impact of globalization, Markova considers it problematic to assert the existence of a genuine transnational identity only by leaning on theories like that of Massey (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 1994), which suppose that the migration process creates a new identity based on the countries of origin and adoption, a process going beyond the limitations of the two fixed (or “hyphenated” – see Hamann, England 2011) identities.

| <b>Main reasons for depopulation in Bulgaria</b> |  |
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| •  | small ratio between births and deaths  |
| •  | ageing of the population   |
| •  | postponing the birth of the first child, increasing number of childless and one-child families (cohabitation without marriage, change of partners) |
| •  | surge of emigration of young people in fertile age (aged 18-40)  |

After the democratic changes that commenced in 1989-90, new factors of population decline were added to the old ones. Here we shall point out one of them – the *growing emigration of people of working and childbearing age*. A completely new and very powerful factor of depopulation has been (e)migration. While in the period 1950-89, there was hardly any cross-border population movement due to the strong restrictions and strict control on travel abroad, the situation after 1989 has been characterized by significant migratory movements. In the year 1989, about 350 thousand Bulgarian Turks left the country (over 100 thousand of them returned later on), forced to take this step because of the shameful campaign that aimed to assimilate them by erasing their identity. In the next stage, when restrictions on travelling abroad were lifted, economic conditions (affecting the entire population) became a factor of emigration. These emigration movements had a direct impact on the demographic situation in the country. On the one hand, with regard to the Bulgarian Turks, it was typical for whole families to leave the country, which diminished the reproductive potential of the population, especially as people of this ethnic group have firmly established reproductive attitudes to have many children in a family. On the other hand, the basis of the new wave of economic emigration was formed almost entirely by people of working age (up to 95%), and mostly by males (78%). Another distinctive

feature of the emigrant flow is that it covered mainly people with vocational and professional training or with higher education. This inevitably affects the population's educational structure negatively. The demographic impact of increased migration consists in the following: decreased birth rates, increased mortality, respectively, increased rate of ageing of the population, deterioration of the demographic structures, including reduced prospects for personnel recruitment. According to the national statistics, the migration balance of the country for the period 1992-2001 was negative and amounted to -178 thousand people, including around 197 thousand expatriates and 18.7 thousand immigrants (Internal and External...). Otherwise presented, these data indicate that the external migration contributes to the reduction of the country's population by as much as 32%. For the period 2001-2011, this percentage slightly dropped to 31.1%; in other words the balance of external migration totaled -175,244 people (Naydenov 2012:36). Bulgarians working abroad already surpass in number those employed in the economy of Bulgaria by more than 300 thousand.

### **Projections for the near future**

- *UN estimate: by 2050, the population of Bulgaria will fall by 27.9%, i.e., 1,96 million people less than now.*
- *The World Bank predicts an even greater reduction of the population by 2050: by 34%.*
- *Bulgarian national statistics (NSI) gives a similar picture: a 30% reduction, which would mean an estimated population of 4.9 million people by 2050.*

This situation causes deep concern and many speculations. Both experts and decision-makers propose various *measures to deal* with it, namely:

- To create conditions for a moderate increase of the birth rate from the current 8.9‰ to 11‰ (i.e., 15-20,000 newborns per year).
- To reduce mortality to 11‰ (i.e., the present figure of 110,000 deaths per year will have to be reduced by around 35,000 in order for mortality to fall to 75,000 deaths per year)
- Reduction of the negative natural growth to the value of 0, i.e., the birth and mortality rates should be equal.

▪ An active migration policy aimed at attracting new residents who are ready to integrate into Bulgarian society. This includes the return to Bulgaria of 180,000 *Bulgarian emigrants*; attracting 10,000 *ethnic Bulgarians living abroad*; “creating conditions for attracting part of the potential emigrants from countries seeking to join the EU”, who total 185,000 people; “building capacity for adequate reception and integration of *immigrants from third countries*, mainly from the Middle East and Africa” amounting to 7,000 people. The sum total is 382,000 people, or nearly 5.5% of the declining indigenous population of Bulgaria.

The first three measures are related to the natural population growth, and require a complex set of actions in various social domains: first of all, healthcare, nutrition, general improvement of the quality of living conditions and of the natural environment. Funding is not enough when it involves personal choices and life circumstances, which vary significantly. A great number of dependent, and especially independent, variables circumscribe each individual’s decision to stay home or leave, to remain abroad for a brief period of time for a specific purpose (study, earnings), or longer/forever, etc.

Without completely dismissing government sponsored material incentives for the solution of the demographic crisis (such as maternity and child benefits, expanding chain of public kindergartens, etc.), it is clear, that all these can only modestly contribute to solving the problem when many other, including psychological, factors are involved. These incentives certainly have to be on the governmental and political agenda, but it is necessary to thwart turning this item, which is sensitive to the public, into yet another deep ditch where the taxpayers’ money will sink; or, as often happens, into a matter of empty political guesswork. We need to be aware that even the Communist state, with its enormous capacity to control society through repression, restrictions, and incentives, under conditions of total deficit, was not able to deal with this, and many other, issues. Implementing some gizmo under completely different conditions would be utterly irrelevant.

The third and fourth measures envisage replacing the leaving population with newcomers – in first place, with descendants of Bulgarians who centuries ago resettled in areas outside the Ottoman Empire (which ruled over the Bulgarian lands between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century), such as Bulgarians from the region of Banat, situated between Serbia, Hungary and Transylvania, Bessarabia in modern Ukraine and Moldova, etc.; or those who remained beyond

the borders established in 1919 and were thereby detached for generations from the bulk of the Bulgarian population. Apart from many other independent variables, these people come from different paths of life, have been brought up under very different conditions and socio-political environment from the Bulgarian ones (for example, in Greece and Yugoslavia, countries that during certain periods were quite hostile and belligerent towards Bulgaria). Whether the present-day descendants crave to re-settle in Bulgaria is quite doubtful. Such a desire depends primarily on their individual judgment whether they can expect to have a considerably better quality and way of life in Bulgaria compared with those in their present country of residence, which often is far from certain. This is a typical rational choice situation, where emotional “stuff” – family legends about the “old motherland”, carried and exaggerated across generations – might play no more than a triggering role, if any. Returning to the “push” and “pull” factors, described above (Dorigo and Tobler 2005), we find the “push” factors are the stronger ones – such as better pay for the same work abroad and a seemingly more comfortable, stress-free life (due, among others, to certain duties in everyday life that newcomers, legally or not, “skip” doing, in contrast with the locals, or neglect to do while pursuing a better life styled after a quasi-“American dream”).

Moreover, politicians of a patriotic-nationalistic bent and some bogus experts tend to portray “Bulgarians abroad” (called also “external Bulgarians”) as a group so compact as to match the “Bulgarian” Bulgarians. This is simply not true: there are considerable differences even between regions in Bulgaria, for instance, in terms of accent (soft or hard pronunciation, specific words, etc.), temperament, local folk costumes, folk songs, etc. As we have stated elsewhere, after two or three generations have lived separately from their nation-state, and under specific conditions (forced socialization, repression, or benefits from belonging to the dominant ethnicity), the people of this ethnicity may have been pressed to adopt a different ethnic identity to that of their ancestors (Nikolov 1996; Nikolov, Rudometof 1999).

As for the fourth measure, it goes far beyond the sphere of our discussion. Still, let us say a few words about it. This certainly seems to be the most controversial one, as it assumes, among many other independent variables, that people from different paths of life, coming from alien and remote cultures, with centuries-old customs that differ from the local ones here, would desire to re-settle in Bulgaria. However, to maintain, that it is completely impossible to integrate them into “our” – ostensibly “superior” – society is an Orban-style argument equally exploited by our

home-grown nationalists (“saviors of the nation’s ethnic purity” who strive for a pure ethnicity, which is like wanting both to keep one’s virginity and be a mother), and their British/German/French counterparts, who use the same phraseology, this time against the “*hordes of Eastern European savages*”, including the Bulgarians. And the similarity in the ways of thinking here and there makes this part of our discussion important.

*Studies on Bulgarian emigration*, especially of the most recent waves (not counting historical narratives and ethnographic research) are too few, not to say inexistent. I would point out one title – *The Bulgarian Emigration: Theories, Policies, Empirical Research* (Minchev et. al. 2012). It includes a representative survey conducted in Bulgaria<sup>5</sup> that categorizes potential emigrants as settlers (expatriates) or as long- and short-term migrants. The study pays special attention to the potential educational emigration (despite the relatively limited number of respondents wishing to continue their education abroad), outlines attitudes and motivations for migration, favorite destinations, highlights the socio-economic profile of potential emigrants, their professional and labour status, etc., identifies the so-called "returning" emigrants (who are few), etc. The information from this empirical study is arranged in a number of areas, including the demographic and socio-economic profiles of the potential and returning emigrants (Kalchev 2012) and the employment of Bulgarian emigrants and Bulgarians studying abroad (Zareva 2012). The second survey, conducted in Spain, where the largest Bulgarian emigrant community lives, reveals the demographic profile, economic and social status, etc., of Bulgarians there (Kalchev, Zareva 2012; Kalchev 2012a). The focus is likewise on the economic and social effects of emigration, analyzed by Evgeniya Markova (Markova 2012).

Some little studied aspects of migrations, however, are the *incentives for preserving ties with the native country*. Some of the main ones are *the presence of parents and/or close relatives in the home country, ownership of real estate (a home, land), homesickness, and preference for the cuisine of the home country*. Very often, the need to support a family is a primary motives that drive one or both parents to leave their native land and seek higher earnings abroad. Traditionally, men were the ones most often leaving for *gurbet*<sup>6</sup>, especially those of good

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<sup>5</sup> Comprising 1,204 standardized interviews and based on a two-stage cluster sampling procedure, with random sampling at the second stage.

<sup>6</sup> From Arabic through Turkish: Working abroad for profit or a livelihood.

health and with good vocational skills. But this pattern from the 1900s-1930s is no longer the prevalent one. Now, women also frequently go to work abroad, especially single ones, but not only. When a whole family, including the parents and their children, reunites abroad, this is a compelling indicator that they are inclined to remain abroad. A permanent job, possession of property there, schooling children in a local school, a new circle of friends may further reinforce this choice. In contrast, the elderly parents remaining in the home country (inviting them to the foreign country for more than a short visit is usually not a feasible option, as pensions in Bulgaria are very modest, and could not ensure a normal life for elderly people in Western countries; the problem of health insurance is also a factor) provide a vital connection with the emigrants in terms of sending money home or sending the children during the vacation to the grandparents. Another connection is property (homes/apartments, arable land, fields, vineyards etc.) that needs maintenance, payment of property taxes, leasing, etc. Other researchable indicators, this time in the emotional aspect, and hence vague, are homesickness and the desire for specific dishes and tastes; this may also influence the decision to stay or return to the country of origin<sup>7</sup>. It is possible to study empirically these composite indicators, to measure them and examine them quantitatively and qualitatively with recognized sociological tools. One of the possible hypothetical prospects is that detached Bulgarian communities will appear in various places all over the world – we are already observing the formation of compact neighborhoods, which we call “ethnic population pockets”, formed by families coming from the same settlement or region in Bulgaria. Whether this will lead to the disappearance of Bulgarian statehood is a question that goes far beyond the topic of this article. Personally, I do not look upon this eventuality as a tragedy<sup>8</sup>

We call this the “**Alcek model**” (Nikolov, 2017). There are many examples showing that in different parts of the world, there are compact “pockets” of Bulgarian emigrant population.

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<sup>7</sup> An ever-increasing number of researchers and observers of migration in Bulgaria are convinced that to expect a substantial rate of return migration among the many Bulgarians who left the country since the 1990s is unrealistic. Iglia Goranova (Goranova 2018) mentions that returning migrants are graduates in computer science and economics, but not engineers and medics. Despite the efforts of the state, only about 30 people per year are returning.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Stavrev (Stavrev 2018) writes, “Somewhere at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it became quite clear to me that the history of my country is approaching a quick sunset and, possibly, our deletion from the map of the world... This national euthanasia was not caused externally, although external influences had occurred”.

There they have jobs, purchase property, give birth to children who later attend local schools. This implies they have little intention of returning to Bulgaria. Our forecast is that, with time, the prospects that these large groups of people, in their best age span, would return are declining. They will never contribute to overcoming the impending economic and demographic crisis in their country of origin. By now, the only link of generations of grandchildren to their ancestral home is through Skype. The Bulgarian ethnos will not disappear, but will continue to exist in a modified form, as has happened to other nations since the time of the near-mythical Alcek.

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