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# MOTIVATION FOR MIGRATION, RETURN AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RETURN

## A CASE STUDY OF BULGARIAN STUDENT MOBILITY

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MARIA VELIZAROVA

Return migration is not a new phenomenon in migration history, either for Bulgaria or the rest of the world. On the other hand it is one of the least explored parts of migration science.<sup>1</sup> It should be considered that the first migration step can not be seen as the last mobility experience.<sup>2</sup>

In our research, the first problem to tackle was the lack of information and data on the topic. The second and even larger problem was the extreme lack of data about Bulgaria, not just about returnees but also about how many people had left the country since 1989.

This problem may be overcome by making use of a register of all Bulgarian living abroad for longer than a year. Such a register can be made with the help of the countries which are known as preferred destinations for Bulgarian migrants. A register of returnees is a harder task. The only solution to the problem of obtaining information about this group of Bulgarians might be the implantation of questions on this topic in the micro census in Bulgaria.

### MIGRATION SITUATION IN BULGARIA

Bulgaria is a country that has a high emigration rate. After 1989, there was a large emigration flow out of the country<sup>3</sup>. The net migration flow from 1992 until 2001 is 177,000 people. Most of these were young and of working age, with at least a secondary

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<sup>1</sup> Cp. Russell King, *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, (Routledge 1986) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Petrus Han, *Soziologie der Migration: Erklärungsmodelle, Fakten, politische Konsequenzen, Perspektiven*, (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius 2005), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Before 1989 there was no emigration, because the political system didn't allow it. Before that year Bulgarian citizens needed a special permit to work abroad. Usually this permit was only granted for countries with which the government had good relations.

school qualification<sup>4</sup>. A study on the return plans from ASSA-M suggested that only one-fifth of the emigrants want to stay abroad, the other 80% want to return.<sup>5</sup>

The primary reasons for this emigration were economical.<sup>6</sup> Because of the economic difficulties in that period, many people saw a better opportunities abroad. If that really was the main reason for the emigration, then a back flow of returning migrants was to be expected in the last few years, as the situation in Bulgaria has been improving over this period.

The Bulgarian economy needs its migrants, especially the highly qualified ones, to return to their native land due to the deficit in human capital caused by the economical and negative demographic growth.<sup>7</sup>

### RETURN MIGRATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Return migration is seen as a movement from one country to another and back. Circular migration can also be seen as a part of return migration, where movement from one country to another is repeated over time. Return migration is also seen also as “ancestral return” (when after one ore more generations people return to the country of their ancestors), “brain return”(highly qualified people returning after studying or working abroad), “retirement migration” (people who after spending most of their active life abroad are coming back to spend their retirement years in their home country).<sup>8</sup>

The latest definition on return migration is: *“The movement of a person returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or may not be voluntary. Return migration includes voluntary repatriation.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Bulgarian National Statistic Institute; “Вътрешна и външна миграция на населението в България (резултати от репрезентативно изучаване)”; 2001; <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Vivmigr.htm>

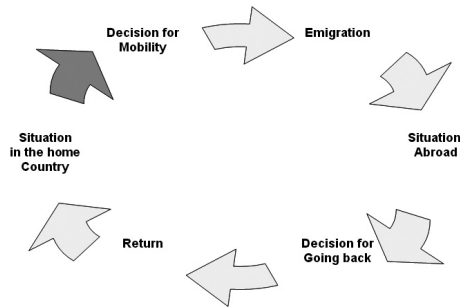
<sup>5</sup> ASSA-M; „Emigration Attitudes of Bulgarian Citizens”; 2007; <http://www.assam.com/en/research41en.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The Bulgarian National Statistic Institute; “Вътрешна и външна миграция на населението в България (резултати от репрезентативно изучаване)”; 2001; <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Vivmigr.htm>

<sup>7</sup> It is to be taken in consideration that this survey was made before the world economic crisis which took place at the end of 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Cp. Russell King, *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, (Routledge 1986) 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> International Migration Law N°1 - Glossary on Migration; IOM; 2004



One of the goals in this study is to define the mobility stages and the motivation for mobility at each stage, and also to analyze if after the return home there is still a potential for more mobility actions.

There are five theoretical approaches in return migration studies: neoclassical economics (NE), the new economics of labor migration (NELM), structuralism, trans-nationalism and social network theory.

#### • Neoclassical economics:

In this perspective the return migration is seen as a failure. The returnees are those who couldn't make it in the new country. Another name for this phenomenon is the return of failure (*"Returnees who intended permanent emigration but chose to return"*)<sup>10</sup>.

*"...in a neoclassical stance, return migration exclusively involves labour migrants who miscalculated the costs of migration and who did not reap the benefits of higher earnings. Return occurs as a consequence of their failed experiences abroad or because their human capital was not rewarded as expected."*<sup>11</sup>

#### • The new economics of labor migration:

*"NELM views return migration as the logical outcome of a "calculated strategy", defined at the level of the migrant's household and resulting from the successful achievement of goals or target"*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Robert B. Potter, Dennis Conway, Joan Phillips; The experience of return migration: Caribbean perspectives; (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.; 2005), 3 cp. Gmelch, "Return Migration", *Annals, 9 Review of Anthropology* (1980), 138.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Cassario; "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited"; *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2004): 162 - 188 ISSN 1564 4901, [www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4) © UNESCO, 146.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* J. P. Cassario; "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited"; *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2004: 162 - 188 ISSN 1564 4901, [www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4) © UNESCO, 164.

For NE the Profit should be maximal, and in NELM there is a specific profit goal in the migration plan, after reaching this goal the migrant is free to come back home. The length of the migration depends on the time the migrant need to reach his/hers goal.<sup>13</sup>

- **The Structural approach:**

In this approach the return depends not only on the individual experience abroad but also on the social and institutional situation in the country of origin. *“In fact, return is also a question of context.”*<sup>14</sup>

King makes a more specific categorization of the return of failure from Gmelch, making a difference between the circumstances under which the primary motivation for permanent migration changed. He saw three different reasons for return in this case. The first is the *“forced return”*, when the migrant loses their job or has family problems at home; the second reason is *“nostalgia”* (which he defines as a return of failure) and the third is *“the better situation at home”* which has appeared during th migrant’s absence.<sup>15</sup>

Gmelch makes an important observation in the case where the expectations in the country of origin do not meet home reality. If the social, economic and political situation does not equal the expectations of the returnee, he/she will find it difficult to reintegrate in the home country, and that may lead to new migration. Such a situation questions the sustainability of the return.<sup>16</sup>

- **The Transnational approach** is very popular nowadays when the migration is seen in a global context where mobility is no longer an impediment.

*“According to transnationalists, returnees prepare their reintegration at home through periodical and regular visits to their home countries”*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cp. Andreas Breinbauer, *Mobilität österreichischer und ungarischer Mathematiker: ein Beitrag zur Brain Drain-Debatte in einem kleinen Segment Hochqualifizierter*, (V & R unipress ; Wien: Vienna Univ. Press 2008), 85.

<sup>14</sup> Cp. J. P. Cassario; “Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited”; *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2004: 162 - 188 ISSN 1564 4901; [www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4) © UNESCO (S. 166)

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Russell King, *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, (Routledge 1986) 11-13 cp. Gmelch “Return Migration”; *Annals; 9 Review of Anthropology* (1980) 135-159.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* Russell King, *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, (Routledge 1986) 11-13 cp. Gmelch “Return Migration”; *Annals; 9 Review of Anthropology* (1980) 135-159.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* J. P. Cassario; “Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited”; *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2004: 162 - 188 ISSN 1564 4901; [www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4) © UNESCO ,171

So the concerns of Gmelch about successful reintegration at home are solved by regular visits home..

- Finally there is the **Network approach**, which seems in some aspects common with the transnational one.

“Social structures increase the availability of resources and information, while securing the effective initiatives of return migrants.”<sup>18</sup>

The difference with the transnational aspect is that in the case of network it is more about the informal connections within a country. For the transnational perspective the institutional and economic connection on an international level are the influential factors for migration mobility. The purpose of this survey was to identify stages of and motivation behind emigration in order to discover what incites Bulgarian students to return home.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Because of the lack of information about Bulgarian returnees and taking into consideration the definition of return migrants given from IOM, the only possible way to collect the data was by using a snowball method. The conditions for participation in this survey were Bulgarians who spend at least one year in a foreign country and at the time of the survey were living in Bulgaria.

The sample contains 70 respondents from an online questionnaire and 8 respondents from in-depth interviews. The use of mixed methods is extremely important in order to acquire more reliable results.<sup>19</sup> The in-depth interviews were helpful, not only in constructing the online questionnaire but also in explaining the results of the survey in greater depth..

80% of the respondents are between 20 and 30 years old. There are an equal number of men and women. 18% have graduated from secondary school and 82% have graduated from university. Of the latter, 33,3% have been awarded their university degree by a Bulgarian university and 40,6% from a foreign university, while 5 of the respondents graduated both in Bulgaria and abroad. 86% were studying in Bulgaria

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<sup>18</sup> ibid. J. P. Cassario; “Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited”; *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2004: 162 - 188 ISSN 1564 4901; [www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4](http://www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art4) © UNESCO, 174.

<sup>19</sup> Russell King, *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*, (Routledge 1986) 69.

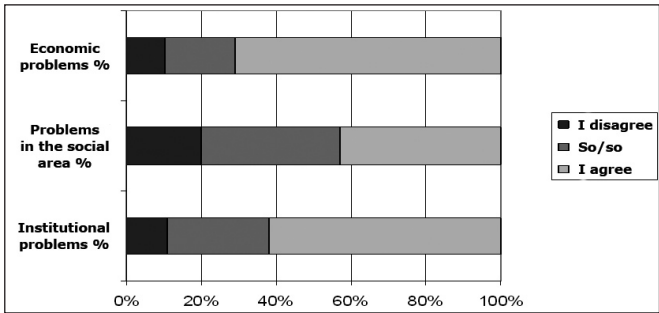
before their departure. So it can be concluded that this study is about young, well-educated people who after staying abroad for some time decided to come back to Bulgaria.

After a factor analysis of the push and pull factors on the micro level for migration and return, 3 categories of motivation were constructed, as the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (2000)<sup>20</sup> suggests. These are economic factors (job improvement, a better income, or a higher standard of living), family or emotional factors (family reunion or marriage, social network), and other factors (reasons related to school or studying, fear of war or persecution, retirement, end of contract, homesickness, expulsion). As these categories are universal, they can also be applied to the Bulgarian case.

### • Situation at Home

For better explanation of the motivation behind migration, the macro situation in Bulgaria before the departure of the respondents was also taken in consideration, which can be seen as a push-factor for emigration (Figure 1). The macro level also argues 3 factors: political situation (institutional problems), economic situation, and social conditions.

Figure 1: Macro Push- Factors



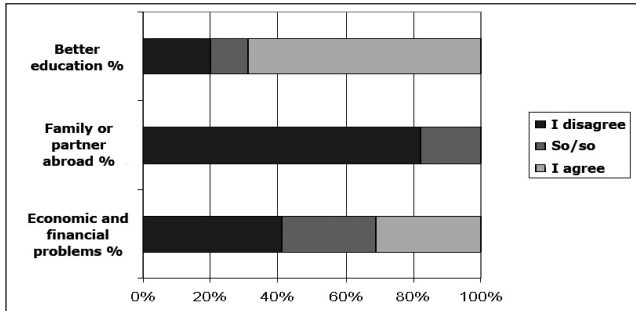
58% of all 70 respondents pointed to the economic factor as a reason for leaving the country; 40% of the respondents identified social conditions as the reason for leaving Bulgaria; and 56% were not satisfied with the institutional system at the time of departure.

<sup>20</sup> Eurostat, J. Schoorf, L. Heering, I. Esweldt, G. Groenewold, R. Van der Erf R, A. Bosch A, H. de Valk, *Push and pull factors of international migration. A comparative report*, (de Bruijn B Luxembourg : Office for Official Publications of the European Communities 2000), 23.

### • Decision for mobility

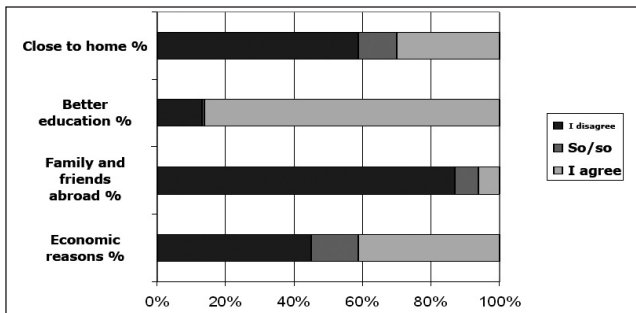
65% left Bulgaria after 2001, after the European Union abolished visa restrictions for Bulgarians.

Figure 2: Micro Push- Factors



The Push- Factors (Figure 2) provide the personal reasons of the respondents for leaving Bulgaria. The economic push-factors are also in the lead at the micro level, with 31% by all respondents. Studying abroad was a motivation factor for leaving the country for 69% of the respondents, while for 11% that was one part of the motivation for going abroad. The economic pull-factors are also the most common, with 40% followed by the security factor with 14%, while just 4% of my sample was attracted to a country for family reasons.

Figure 3: Micro Pull- Factors



The Pull-Factors (Figure 3) provide reasons for choosing a specific destination country. The economic pull factors were mostly important for the returnees from Austria (72%), the USA (71%) and Germany (37.5%). 83% of returnees from Germany were entirely motivated to study abroad. Of the returnees from Austria, 36% were entirely and 27% mainly motivated to study abroad. For the USA returnees this proportion was 57% to 20%. Therefore it can be expected that another motivation, like

a good job or a good salary, has a bigger impact on the decision to choose Austria or the USA than the education motivation.

#### • Emigration planning

As regards the question of whether the respondents had planned their return, just 11% said they hadn't wanted to come back and 8% were planning to go abroad again. Therefore it can be concluded that almost 80% of the participants had been planning their return, whereas 38% of them didn't know when exactly they were going to go back. This corresponds with the results of the ASSA-M survey.<sup>21</sup>

The 5 most represented countries in the sample are Germany, Austria, USA, Italy and England. This was to be expected, because these destinations are the most attractive ones for high-skilled migrants. Spain and Greece for example, are the most desired countries for low- skilled migrants from Bulgaria.<sup>22</sup>

#### • Situation abroad

60% of the returnees stayed abroad between one and five years, which is considered as a critical stage in one's emigration life: after 4 or 5 years abroad comes the time for taking the decision of whether one will settle or not. 36% were in another country between one and three years and the other 24% were abroad between four and five years. As many studies suggested, the length of the stay abroad is connected with the decision for coming back. The longer one is abroad, the more probable it is that one will stay there.<sup>23</sup>

64% visited Bulgaria during their stay abroad two or more times a year and 31% once a year. These numbers prove that the migrants are still strongly connected to their social networks in Bulgaria. The country in which the returnees were living did not have any significant influence on the frequency of their visits to Bulgaria. This fact shows that geographical remoteness does not have an important impact on the network in the home country.

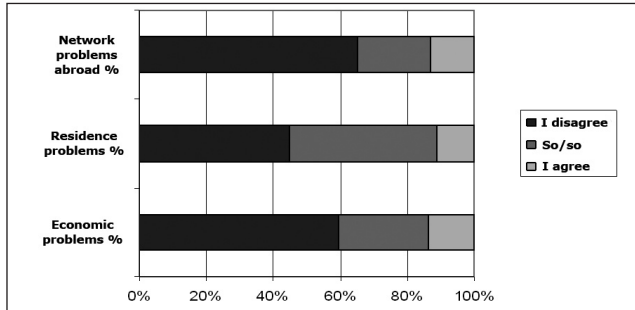
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<sup>21</sup> ASSA-M, Emigration Attitudes of Bulgarian Citizens, 2007, <http://www.assam.com/en/research41en.htm>

<sup>22</sup> The Bulgarian National Statistic Institute: "Вътрешна и външна миграция на населението в България (резултати от репрезентативно изучаване)"; (Sofia, 2001); <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Vivmigr.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Petrus Han, *Soziologie der Migration: Erklärungsmodelle, Fakten, politische Konsequenzen, Perspektiven*, (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius 2005), 124.



*Figure 4: Micro Push- returns Factors*

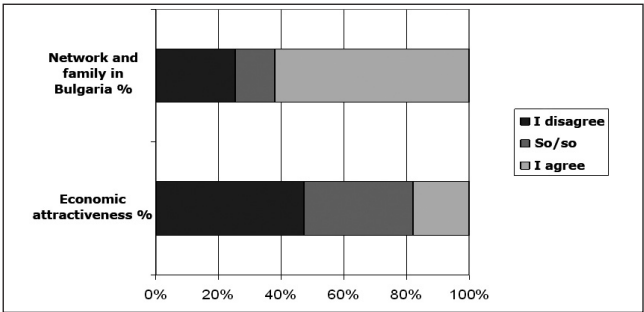
Looking at the Push-return factors (Figure 4), or in other words reasons for leaving the foreign country of residence, returnees once again found themselves confronted with economic difficulties. 14% had had economic problems and for 26.8% this was a part of the motivation to return.

There is an interesting significant correlation between economic problems abroad and the length of the stay in a foreign country. 90% of the respondents who had had such problems stayed abroad between one and five years, while 60% of the participants had been living in another country between two and three years. It is important to mention that none of the respondents' with a degree from a university abroad was complaining about his economic situation in the foreign country.

The absence of a social network was a problem for 12.7% and partly a problem for 22.5% of the respondents. Neither was the absence of a social network abroad a problem for the returnees with foreign university degrees. Residence rights posed a serious problem for 11.3%, and for another 43.7% that was a part of the motivation to return. The people with serious residence problems stayed abroad between 4 and 10 years. Only 14% of the respondents with foreign degrees had no residence problem, for the respondents from the education groups this present was 77%.

• **Decision for coming back home**

*Figure 5: Micro Pull-Return Factors*



The results related to the pull-return factors such as family and network were particularly interesting. 62% of all participants identified these factors as the main reason for their return. Another 18.3 % mentioned the current economic situation in Bulgaria and carrier-related perspectives as the main reason to come back.

• **Situation at home after return**

70% of all respondents have at the time of writing spent to date no longer than two years permanently in Bulgaria.

Currently almost 50% of the respondents are economically very well integrated in Bulgaria, 26% are partly integrated and 24% (68.8% of whom are female) are not so well integrated. This proportion is also valid for the participants who came back for of family reasons. The data confirmed the positive relation between economic reintegration and the length of the stay in Bulgaria. The longer the returnees have been in their home country, the better their economic reintegration has become.

80% of the respondents were well or very well informed about the country in which they were planning to live. Regarding the question about their migration plans after their return, 15% do not want to live in Bulgaria and 40% of them would live abroad if they had the opportunity to do so. 11% were not sure. Also all of the respondents from the in-depth interviews said they didn't want to stay in Bulgaria and they are going to use the good economical situation in the country to earn experience, to make a career and to reach a good position in a few years. To do so abroad, they stated, would have taken much longer. They were making plans to attain their goals and good positions within a few years and to go abroad as a higher qualified worker. All those results

questioned the sustainability of the return. This opens up a new area of research: detecting the factors that are responsible for the sustainability of return in Bulgaria.

## CONCLUSIONS

As expected, in my study all of the theoretical aspects from Cassario's article can be seen. The participants of this survey are well informed which is a sign for a strategy (NELM). They return with the idea of making a career, which is possible because of the situations abroad and at home (structural). A lot of the respondents want to go abroad again, which means they are still connected with life abroad, and while being abroad they still stay in touch with Bulgaria (transnational). Last but by no means least, the main reason that most people pointed out for their return was the family and network at home, automatically securing their return (network). It should be taken into consideration that most of the respondents were well educated. The reason that most of them left the country at about 20 years of age was their goal to study abroad, which put them in the upper middle class. That automatically secures a better start in Bulgaria. Of course after a few years abroad in countries which are further developed than their own, they are likely to miss a certain living standard that they have become accustomed to abroad. The fast prosperity in one's career is the first step people are taking to secure their standard of living. The social network is also very supportive in this way. But there are also things in life which do not depend directly on a person but on the state this person is living in. The state should provide security in the social areas and should give people a feeling belonging, if the state wants the people to be there for it.

Sustainability of return is very important for Bulgaria at this moment, as an enormous demographic problem is developing. The economy is growing fast, investments are high, the capital is a fact but the human resources are missing. In 1989 Bulgaria's population was about 8 Million. Today it has reduced to less than 7 Million and the future is not looking much more optimistic. That is the reason why the government, especially in the last year, is really concerned with the question of how to get its population back. They are trying to inform Bulgarians abroad about the opportunities they have back home. I think there is a more important problem to solve, which is not the return itself but its sustainability once it has taken place. Bulgaria should strive to become an attractive place where people want to build their long-term future, not only stay for a few years.

It should be taken in consideration that this survey was made before the economic crisis which occurred at the end of 2008. Now, at a time of growing unemployment in the USA and the European countries, the migrants will be the first people to lose their jobs, especially the low-qualified ones. At the beginning of 2009 the news was widespread that many emigrants from countries (Spain mostly) hosting poorly skilled Bulgarian emigrants were returning to Bulgaria because they had lost their jobs abroad. The Bulgarian government slowed down their activities in attracting Bulgarian emigrants back home after the economic crisis was felt not to be affecting Bulgaria to the extent that it was other parts of the world.