

## **RURAL DEPOPULATION IN BULGARIA SINCE 1946**

### **(Abstract)**

The scope and pace of depopulation of Bulgaria's rural regions have long turned into a major social evil and have undoubtedly been a hampering factor still acting against the nation's development. The rates of depopulation of villages throughout the last seven decades stands among the highest in the world and the trend toward their acceleration leads to a growing number of the affected municipalities and settlements. The size of Bulgaria's rural population since 1946 declines 2.5 times while the the National Register of Populated Places has deleted nearly 1000 villages for a number of reasons: total depopulation, mergers with other villages, aggregation to towns as neighborhoods or promotion of villages into townships. The extreme manifestation of the process is the emergence of "demographic deserts", i.e. regions where the population density has fallen under 10 persons per square kilometer. Bulgarian rural communities are surrendering as they become unable to meet the challenge of the bright lights of the city. Despite serious damages that the rural depopulation has caused to demographic, social and economic development and all agricultural regions as well, there are not many studies by Bulgarian researchers dealing with this problem. The thesis herewith presents a new approach of a complete study on the real pace experienced of rural depopulation along 1946–2011 by time-series accounting for data between the conducted over the indicated period. It is involved new category concerning "authentic" rural population which has not been used in any scientific research efforts hitherto. This term is to mark those village residents who have always been rural for the entire period of the study i.e. when their localities have not been administratively affiliated to cities and have never been promoted to the category of townships. The practical sense of comparisons between it and the registered rural population consists in the fact that the dynamics manifested by the last ones has greatly predetermined future demographic development, natural reproduction, migration flow destinations and rural regions' socio-economic development. A more thorough tracing study on the dynamics of depopulation of villages in Bulgaria over the second half of the last century leads us to the conclusion on the negative impact of a number of political and socio-economic factors, the strongest among which has been that of the spontaneous national industrialization and urbanization and the forced collectivization of peasants' land. Conclusions lead to recommendations regarding present and future policies toward Bulgarian rural areas to support the most viable and prospective rural areas and settlements by national and funds from abroad dedicated to the development of the rural regions in EU.

