

# National Report Regional Sustainable Development

## Bulgaria



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**REGIONET – Thematic Network: Strategies for Regional Sustainable Development,  
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The research strategies of the Institute of Sociology are aimed at the study and analysis of social stratification and mobility, institutional transformation and regional development, etc. within the context of globalization and Bulgaria's transition to a market economy and democracy.

The basic research fields of the Institute of Sociology are: social organization and politics; work and employment, poverty and unemployment; ethnosociology and social psychology, ethnic communities and conflicts, social integration and segregation; deviant behaviour, delinquency, corruption, etc.; science and education, technological innovation and personality; religion and everyday life, secularization, intellectualization and rationalization, moral relativism and quasi-religiousness; village and agriculture; methodology of sociological survey and public opinion studies.

Academic autonomy and freedom secures the coexistence and elaboration of competing sociological paradigms.

Department "Global and Regional Development": a) studies the basic concepts (theories, theoretical models) of the global and regional development, b) studies the globalization processes, their beginning, manifestation and consequences in the various societies and mainly in South European and Balkan societies, c) studies long-term transformation in Bulgarian society in the context of the global trends and globalization compared to the changes in the EU countries, East and Southeast Europe and the

Balkans: a) risks that Bulgarian society faces (low technological development, barriers to human development, quick differentiation of the social structure, intra and inter institutional dysfunction, misconception of the legal norms and moral values, ecological crisis etc.), b) potential of Bulgarian society to accept and successfully apply the concepts and the models of sustainable development, human development (including the human and social capital), forming a knowledge-based society, and c) long-term tendencies in the relations between Bulgarian society and the neighbouring societies in the Balkan region, Southeastern Europe, the river valley of the Danube and the Black Sea area in the context of regional changes, Bulgarian integration to EU and the globalization processes.

## Introduction

This National Report on regional sustainable development in [include country] has been written as part of the REGIONET project. REGIONET (Strategies for Regional Sustainable Development: An Integrated Approach beyond Best Practice) is a research project funded under the EU's 5<sup>th</sup> framework programme for research. The main objective of the project was to provide an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to support the implementation of sustainable development in regions across Europe.

The project team of REGIONET consisted of sixteen partners coming from fourteen different European countries (current and new Member States). Early on in the project's running time, the idea came up to use this opportunity and develop a comprehensive study about regional sustainable development in Europe. The high number of project partners (plus associated partners) allowed us to have seventeen storylines and a comprehensive picture of regional sustainable development policy-making across Europe.

In order to ensure comparability, the project team developed a concept for analysis. This concept was used by each national team as a template to carry out the review about regional sustainable development in their country. Out of the project's general objectives, the following main sections are covered within each National Report:

- ***National background on regional development:*** this includes not only the history of regional development in the country but also the political and administrative system and hierarchies as these are of major importance in giving a framework for policy-making. This section also includes a reflection about national initiatives for sustainable development.
- ***Regional sustainable development:*** in here, the National Reports reflect upon national and regional initiatives for regional sustainable development. An important aspect, too, is the role of Structural Funds in fostering sustainable development at the regional level and what the experiences of the regions are with Structural Funds programmes and Community Initiatives.
- ***Multi-Level governance:*** this section elaborates on the involvement of the different political/administrative levels in policy-making – from the EU, to the national and regional level – as well as the multi-level interaction

between the different stakeholders. Additionally, it is analysed how cross-sector policy integration in regional sustainable development is carried out by the different levels.

- **Evaluation methods and tools for regional sustainable development:** the current evaluation methods, tools and indicators are described in this section. It also reflects upon the different types of measurements for regional sustainable development, and if a harmonization of the various methods and tools already takes place in Europe.
- **Analysis of regional sustainable development:** summarizes the practical experiences with regional sustainable development across Europe. This section also evaluates the general trade-offs, top-down and bottom-up relations as well as the future of European regional policy for the period after 2006 when new Structural Funds regulations will be implemented.

Therefore, this National Report of Bulgaria gives a comprehensive overview of regional sustainable development. Together with the other reports, it makes up what is the first comparative study of regional sustainable development in Europe. In 2004, a book publication which will include all National Reports, together with an introduction and conclusion chapter, is planned. Please find further information and ordering details about this forthcoming book on the REGIONET project homepage: [www.iccr-international.org/regionet](http://www.iccr-international.org/regionet).

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## **2. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BAS	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
CM	Counsel of Ministers
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EPA	Environment Protection Act
ES	Environmental Strategy
ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPARAD	National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Arias Development
NPED	National Plan for Economic Development
NPRD	National Plan for Regional Development
NSEAP	National Strategy for the Environment and Action Plan
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
Phare	Poland, Hungary – Assistance for Reconstructing of their Economics
RAP	Regional Action Program
RDA	Regional Development Act
RSD	Regional Sustainable development
SAPARD	Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme

### **3. Preface**

The present report has been based on official documents of international organizations, state authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria and non-government organizations. Experts' opinion has been offered on some issues.

As long as Bulgarian official documents do not determine the notion “sustainable development”, the report sticks to the term given by the European Commission (An European Strategy for Sustainable Development, 2002: 21-22). According to it sustainable development is:

- A development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own need,
- A positive long-term vision of a society that is more prosperous and more just, and which promises a cleaner, safer, healthier environment, a society which provides the best standard of living for us and the future generations. In order to put this concept into practice the long-term economic increase, social cohesion and environment protection should be closely linked,
- The developing long-term strategy, which should act as a catalyst for politicians and the public to implement the institutional changes and the changes in the business and consumers' behaviour. The success of this strategy depends on the ability of the civil society to specify and concentrate its efforts on the issues, which constitute the greatest danger for the social welfare.

### **4. Country main characteristics**

The Republic of Bulgaria is located in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula. In the East it is bounded by the Black Sea, in the Southeast – by the Republic of Turkey, in the South - by the Republic of Greece, in the West – by the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia and in the North – by the Republic of Romania.

**Map 1: Republic of Bulgaria**



The Republic of Bulgaria has a total area of 110993.6 square kilometers (Statistic Guide 2003: 3). Despite its fairly small area, it has various relief and big climatic differences in its various parts. Stara Planina, a mountain chain that runs from the West boundary to the Black Sea, divides the country into two approximately equal parts - Northern and Southern one. The Danube Plain is situated in the Northern part. In the south of the country, starting from the Southern boundary towards the North, you can find the Rila-

Rhodope massif. An area, which is a combination of mountains and lowlands with the outstanding Thracian lowlands, is located between the massif and Stara Planina. Bulgaria is at the crossroads of three vast biogeographical areas – the Middle European forest area, the Eurasian steppe and the Mediterranean area, which combine in different ways and create conditions for significant climatic and biological diversity. The country has five climatic zones unequal in size: alpine, steppe, sea, Mediterranean and continental. The geographical location and the relief of the country, the numerous mountains and vast forest massifs provide a big variety in the vertical allocation of the life zones – from high mountain ridges to the dunes on the Black Sea coastline (The Green Gold of Bulgaria, 2000: 53).

The country has a high level of biodiversity compared to other European countries, especially the Western European ones.

The population is 7 932 984 people (Bulgaria 2001. Social and Economic Development, 2002:7)\*. The decrease in population, which started at the end of the 1980s, is still continuing. It results from the mixed influence of the down-going birth rate, increasing death rate and considerable emigration. The young population is decreasing whereas the of old people's number goes up. Considering population's aging, Bulgaria rates among the first six countries in the world. The serious migration processes in the last decades combined with strong urbanization processes in the country led to greater aging of the village' population.

Bulgarians have the greatest number of 83.5 % in the ethnic structure of the whole population. The share of the other two major ethnic groups – Turks and Gypsies – amounts to 9.5% and 4.6 % respectively. The population of the rest of the ethnic groups totals at 1.5 %. (Bulgaria 2001. Social and Economic Development, 2002:11). There are some big differences in the urbanization level of the different ethnic formations.

Approximately three quarters (74.0%) of the Bulgarians, slightly more than the half (53.7%) of the Romany and a bit more than a third (37.1%) of the Turks live in towns.

At the beginning of the 1990s of the last century Bulgarian society started the transformation from one-party government to multi-party system of state government and from a centralized planned economy to a market one. These processes were accompanied by great changes in the character of property – from mainly state property to mainly private one (through the means of privatization and restitution). This was a period of decay for the heavy industry established during the socialistic regime and a sharp reduction in technical equipment and organization of agriculture. At the same time, some new services started to develop and foreign investments became possible. During these years of changes Bulgarian economy reduced. Gross Domestic Product has not reached the 1989 level yet. This has an impact on the low income for the majority of the population and a high unemployment rate – 16 % in 2002 (Statistic Guide, 2003:68).

The lowered life standard and the aging population have led to a great number of people with health problems – from 33.6 % in 1996 to 42.2 % in 2001. There is a tendency of low life expectancy for people in good health for all age groups of both men and women (Bulgaria 2001. Social and Economic Development, 2002:70, 73).

The education structure of the active population at the age of 25 – 64 is improving – the number of people with primary school degree or a lower one has been reduced, and the number of people with secondary school and higher education degree is increasing (Bulgaria 2001, Social and Economic Development, 2002:70, 80).

It is the high level of education that compensates to some degree the income and life expectancy problems and puts the Republic of Bulgaria at the second place among the

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\* All data here are based on the last census of the population taken in 2001.

medium-developed countries according to the human development index (Human Development Report, 2003:238). This index can be used as a good general indicator of the sustainable development for the state and the potential of a country.

The changes in the country have had a mixed influence on the environment. On the one hand, the reduced functioning or the total closure of some chemical and metallurgy plants led to lower air, water and soil pollution. The reduced use of fertilizers and other chemicals in agriculture has also contributed to this process. On the other hand, however, the financial and organizational abilities of the State to implement adequate environment protection policy and regional development also went down. This is well visible in big towns, where pollution and waste problems are getting increasingly serious. The State is not capable to protect the areas of great biodiversity especially the forests in mountain and hilly regions. Their out-of-control mass commercial utilization constitutes a grave danger.

The basic characteristics of Bulgarian nature and society are the necessary background, in which we should consider the issues of the regional sustainable development.

## **5. National background on regional development**

### **a) Political and administrative system and hierarchies**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1991), Bulgaria is a republic with parliamentary government. The central political power has three centers of concentration: President, National Assembly and Government.

The President is mainly a representative figure with limited powers especially in respect of the ability to influence the social and economic development of the State.

The National Assembly is a key institution, which has wide powers including the authority to make and amend laws, accept the state budget and the Government's report on its implementation, regulate the kind and amounts of taxation, elect and dismiss the Prime Minister.

The Council of Ministers (CM) has the greatest powers. It has the right and obligation to: govern and implement the state foreign and domestic policy, secure the social order and national security, manage the state administration and armed forces in a general way, manage the state budget's implementation; organize the administration of the state property, conclude, ratify and denounce international agreements in the cases envisaged in the law.

The Prime Minister is a central figure in the CM. He/she coordinates the Government's general policy and bears the responsibility for it.

The Republic of Bulgaria is a unified state with local government that does not authorize autonomous territorial formations. According to the Constitution, the State is bound to provide conditions for balanced development of the different regions and support territorial authorities and activities through financial, credit and investment policy.

According to the Constitution, the Republic of Bulgaria is divided into municipalities (obshtini) and districts (oblasti). Within them other administrative territorial units and authorities of self-government can be legally established.

A Municipality is a basic administrative territorial unit, within which the local self-government is implemented. Citizens take part in the Municipality's government through the bodies of local self-government they have elected, as well as through direct referendum and General Meeting of citizens.

The Constitution gives the self-governing territorial units the ability to associate with each other in order to solve common problems.

The Municipal Council is the body of the local self-government. Citizens in the respective municipality elect it for the legally established period of four successive years.

The Mayor represents the executive power in the Municipality. Citizens or the Municipal Council elect him/her for the legally established period of four years. The Mayor's activity is regulated by the law, by the acts of the Municipal Council and the citizens' decisions. The organization and the procedures of local self-government authorities and local administration's activities are legally established.

The Municipality has an independent budget and a right to its own property, which is supposed to be used for the benefit of the territorial society. The State is bound to support the normal municipal functioning through the Budget and other means it deems appropriate. The permanent financial sources of the Municipality are legally specified.

A District is an administrative territorial unit, where the local policy and state government in the region is implemented. It is also the place to secure the coordination between the national and the local interests. The District is governed by a district governor appointed by the CM, who is supported by the local administration. His/her obligations include conducting the state policy, securing the national interests, law and social order and exercising administrative control.

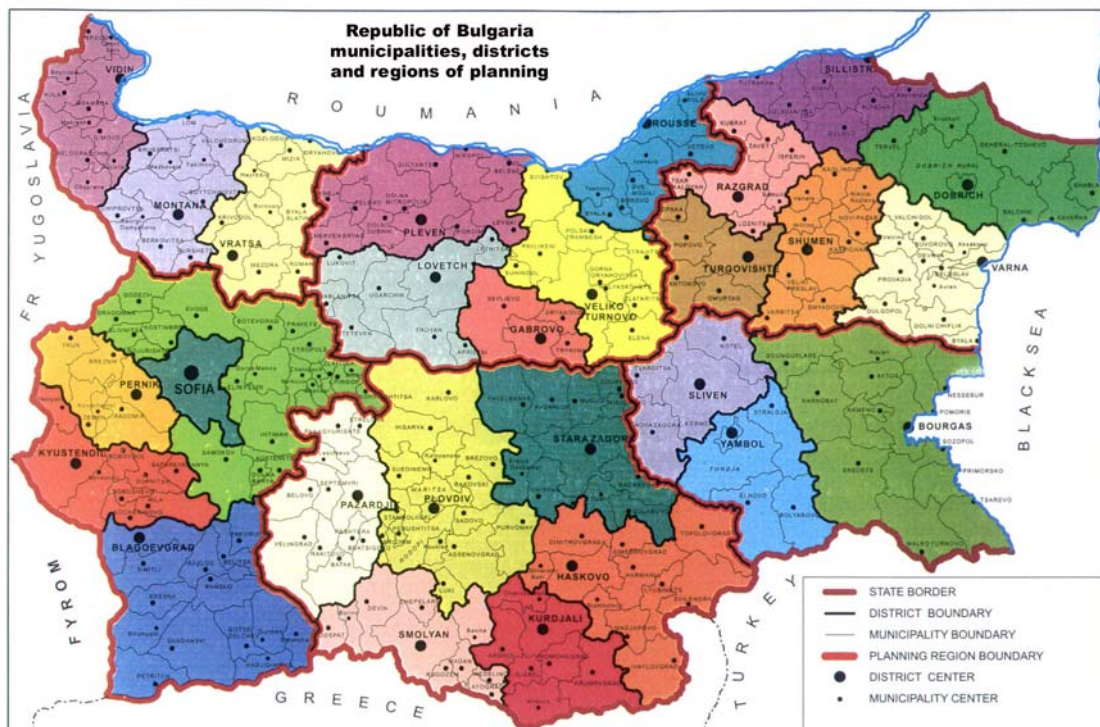
The established by the Constitution structure of the central and local authorities causes controversy between them (in both authorization and resources) that is in favour of the central authorities. The second level of the administrative territorial division (district) is another way to carry out the Government's policy and is not related to the will of the citizens on the territory of the district.

In accordance with the aspiration of the State to join the European Union, the central authorities adjust the administrative territorial structure to the requirements of the Union. A Regulation adopted by the Government in 2002 settled six planning regions. These regions include the territory of the districts in them and the municipalities in these districts respectively. The formation of these regions is based on the implementation of programmes – strategies co-financed by the European Union's programmes in the field of the regional development and the economic and social approach (Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, 2003:21). Thus the administrative territorial division of the State is as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1.

<b>Planning regions</b>	<b>Territory</b>	<b>Districts</b>	<b>Municipalities</b>	<b>Settlements</b>	<b>Population</b>
	sq. km.	number	number	number	number
North Western	10288.2	3	32	395	531.2
North Central	18344.0	5	41	1049	1194.3
North Eastern	19899.4	6	49	939	1304.3
South Eastern	14647.6	5	22	486	793.9
South Central	27516.2	6	67	1511	1969.6
South Western	20306.5	3	52	953	2097.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>111001.9</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>5333</b>	<b>7891.1</b>

**Map 2: Republic of Bulgaria - municipalities, districts, planning regions**



This administrative territorial division of the Republic of Bulgaria corresponds to the EU NUTS system. The territory of the country corresponds to level 1 of this system, the planning regions correspond to level 2, districts correspond to level 3, and the municipalities correspond to level 4 (Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, 2003:268).

**b) History of regional development**

Since the Establishment of the Third Bulgarian State in 1878 over the various periods of the regional development in Bulgaria there has been a struggle between the dominating central government and the attempts to gain a certain degree of autonomy by the local self-government (Petrov Ts., 1999:153). Numerous external and internal circumstances led to the establishment of highly centralized administrative system in the period before the end of the World War II. This high centralization went on after the end of the war by establishing a one-party political system in Bulgaria (Genov and Krasteva, Eds., 2001:91). In search of more effective ways of social development in the 1960s and 1970s, there were some attempts to relieve the centralized control and delegate certain powers to the local authorities. These processes continued in the 1980s, too. But in the one-party system and lack of public control over the local authorities' activities such decentralization led to some kind of "feudalism" of the local authority without giving people the real possibility to participate in the decision-taking processes and defend their interests.

Despite the objective necessity to develop further decentralization, this tendency is not strong yet in the period of multi-party democracy.

Apart from the aspiration of the centralized government to retain its maximal influence, the problem that decentralization faces is the big differences and disproportion in the

development of the territorial units. These differences results from both the policy in the past (including the inherited social, economic and territorial structure) and the changes in the period of transformation.

The status of the towns and villages network in the country also has a great influence on these changes and disproportion. The uneven location of big towns (see Map 2) stands out in the background of the fairly even disposition of villages and small towns.

According to the natural conditions and the urbanization processes, the country has three main types of territories.

- Central highly urbanized territories with big towns and agglomerations. They occupy about 15 % of the territory and are heavily populated with well-developed industry, services and communications. The most serious pollution and environmental problems are concentrated there.
- Peripheral lowly urbanized territories with small towns and villages far from the big town centers. They occupy between 70 % and 80 % of the territory of the country and are mainly agricultural, sparsely populated with low standard of life and progressively diminishing population. In these areas nature is often fairly well preserved.
- Natural non-urbanized territories with no towns and villages. They occupy about 10 % of the territory of the country. Some of the most valuable biodiversity centers in Bulgaria are located there. (Development of towns and villages in Bulgaria, 1996: 10-11, 13).

**Map 3: Republic of Bulgaria – location of towns and villages**



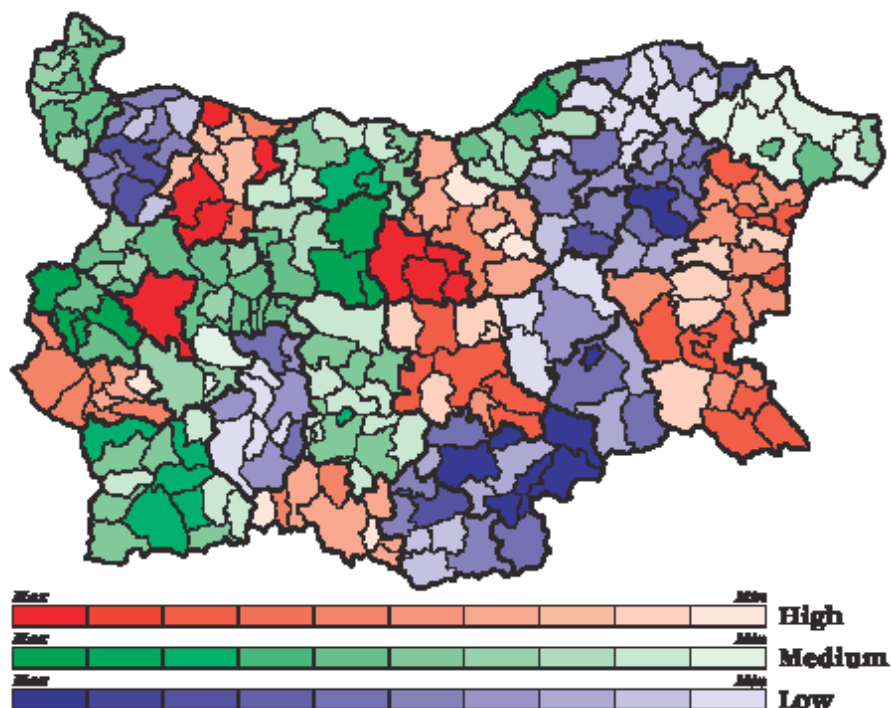
According to this location the number of the people living in towns varies in wide limits in the planning regions (from 57 % in the North Western region to 80 % in the South Western one), and in the districts (from 32.7 % in Kardzhali District to 95.7 % in Sofia District). The number of the people living in towns in such districts as Razgrad (44 %), Silisra (44 %), Targovishte (50 %), Kardgali (32.7 %), Smolyan (50 %) is not more than 50 %. The highly concentrated population in the capital city Sofia (13.5 %) to some degree is balanced by 8 towns with a population of over 100 000 people, which form 17.8 % of the population. They are evenly located in the planning regions as follows –

Sofia in the South Western region, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora in the South Central region, Bourgas and Sliven in the South Eastern region, Varna nad Dobrich in the North Eastern region, Rousse and Pleven in the North Central region. Only in the North Western region there is not a well-developed planning region.

A good synthetic criteria for the differences between the various territorial units is the human development index, which is also related to the concept of sustainable human development (see Map No. 3) (Bulgaria Human Development Index, 2002:7).

The total human development index reflects the average amount of its three components. The first three places on this list are shared between Sofia-city, Gabrovo, Vratza, Stara Zagora, Bourgas and Varna (from 0.849 to 0.805). At the end of the list we can find the districts of Kardgali, Targovishte, Razgrad, Pazardgik, Silistra and Sliven (from 0.776 to 0.756).

**Map 4: Level of human development index by district and municipalities**



- According to the Global Report on Human Development of UNDP the human development index is calculated on the basis of the arithmetical average of the indexes of three variables: a) foreseen life expectancy, b) combined education index, which is the arithmetical average formed by: the literacy index of adults (over the age of 15) with weight 2 of the total index of registration (with weight 1) based on the coefficients of registration for the three education levels (the total coefficient of registration for the three education levels relates to the people between the ages of 7 and 24 and is formed by the ratio between the registered for a regular course of study of the three education levels and the total number of the people of the same age, c) Gross Domestic Product (in \$PPP).

The GDP index has a major influence on the final ranking of the districts (especially at the top places on the list). The other two indexes – the education and the life expectancy ones - have a compensating influence on the lower part of the list and mitigate the negative impact of the low GDP index. The economic component of the human development index emphasizes the development (respectively the lack of development) of the district, whereas good education and the high life expectancy compensate the general ranking of some underdeveloped districts. This accounts for the fairly even distribution of the 28 districts in accordance with the human development index. The really big differences take place in the municipalities within the districts when municipalities with high human development index co-exist with neighbouring societies having a very low index. (Bulgarian Human Development Index, 2002:29).

According to the GDP index there is a high domestic differentiation at the district level. We can outline three territorial zones of comparatively high economic development: the territory around the capital Sofia, the Black Sea zone and the area around Central Stara Planina mountain. There are also three other economic zones that are dropping behind: the North Western Bulgaria in the area of the Rhodope Mountains, and the Central Eastern part of the country. (Bulgarian Human Development Index, 2002:17).

This division is better illustrated by the National Statistics Institute data on the GDP per person, unemployment rate and the direct foreign investments.

The ratio of the GDP per person (for 2000) between the leading (South Western) and the last developed (South Central) planning regions is 1.59 times, and the figures of the other regions vary from 82.7 % (South Central) to 131.3 % (South Western) regions compared to the average figure for the country. The district differences are more visible – the difference between the leader (Sofia) and the least developed district (Kardzhali) is 2.6 times. Twenty out of the 28 districts have lower figures than the average ones for the country. (Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997-2001, 2003:119).

Unemployment rate varies widely. The difference between the region with the lowest (South Western) and the region with the highest (North Western) unemployment rate as of August 2001 is doubled (14.4 % compared to 28.3 %). The figures for the different planning regions according to the average level of the country vary from 73.1 % to 143.6 % and are high not only in the North Western region (43.6 % above the average), but also in the South Eastern and North Eastern (24.8 % and 22.3 % above the average respectively). The fluctuation of the unemployment rate in the district is greater. The difference between the districts with the highest and the lowest unemployment rate is 2.4 times (Sofia – 13.4 %, Vidin – 32.5 %). Low unemployment rate is typical of the districts of Blagoevgrad (11.8 %), Sofia (13.4 %), Gabrovo (15.0 %), Lovech (16.6 %), and Stara Zagora (16.4 %). (Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, 2003:88).

Direct foreign investments are the indicator showing to a great extent the ability of the territorial units to adapt to the changing social economic conditions. Here we can find the big ultimate regional differences. Foreign investments are not only small in amount compared to the Central European countries, but also they are highly concentrated. The difference between the biggest and the lowest investments (South Western and the North Western regions respectively) for the period between 1997-2001 is up from 34 to 51 times. The greatest amount of foreign investments for 2001 went to the South Western region (65.8 %) followed by the North Eastern region (12.4 %) and the North Central Region (9.5 %). In practice the investments have been concentrated in certain areas and centers in these districts – Sofia (51.3 %) and Sofia-District (12.6 %) in the South Western regions, Varna (8.1 %) in the North Eastern region, Gabrovo (4.9 %), Lovech (1.5 %) and Pleven (1.4 %) in the North Central region, Plovdiv (1.9 %) and Stara Zagora (1.6 %) in the South Central region. The difference with the highest and

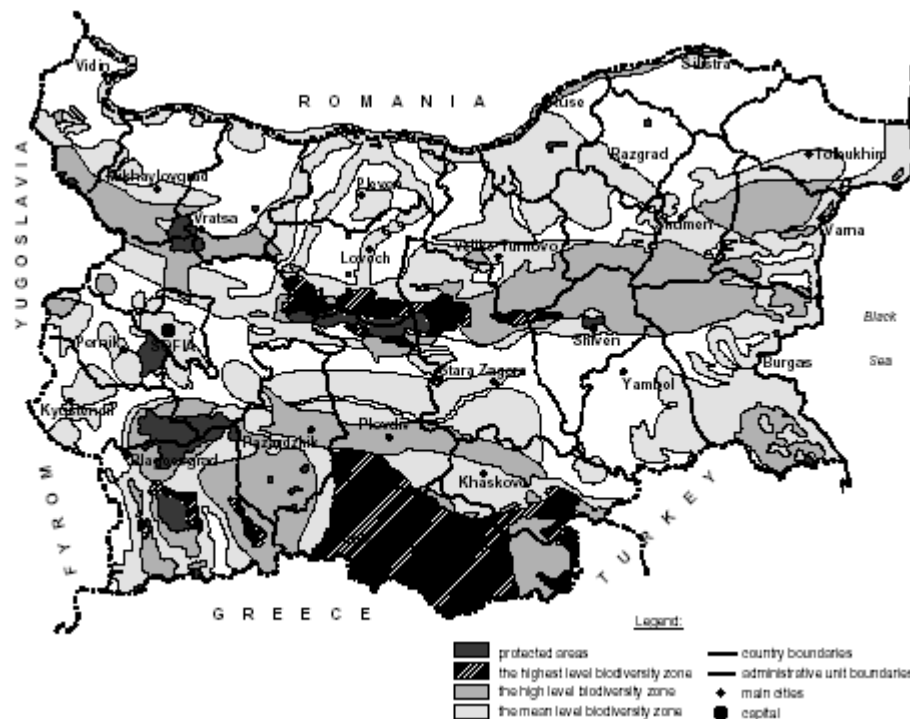
the lowest amount of investments reaches the ultimate figure of over 1000 times. (Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, 2003:140).

The speed at which territorial units adapt to the new circumstances resulting from the transformation is also differentiated. The districts of Sofia, Bourgas, Plovdiv, Rousse, Sofia District, Lovech, Gabrovo, Blagoevgrad and Stara Zagora are the leaders over the period of transformation. They turn into highly attractive territories with the ability to implement enterprise and innovations due to such strong factors as location and variety of economic opportunities. Some tourist territories, which have already been developed, are also profitable in the period of transformation (the Black Sea coastline and the mountains). The transformations are the slowest and problematic in the districts of Montana, Vratza, Vidin, Targovishte, Smolyan, Silistra, Pazardzhik etc. In these districts there are municipalities with very low level of social and economic development, which have serious difficulties related to unemployment, incomes, the manufacturing, technical, social and market infrastructure.

The faster implementation of the economic structural reform has regionally differentiated effect and leads to hot spots, where the various social problems concentrate. These are municipalities with a very high unemployment rate, bounding or peripheral according to the big centers, and also localized mainly in the regions of industrial decay due to the closer of big and sometimes dominating enterprises for the economic structure. The problem areas are “scattered” in a mosaic manner in the planning regions and the districts and are not gathered in big compact territories corresponding to the administrative territorial units of districts or planning regions. The North Western region is the only exception to this rule.

The political, economic and region policy implemented for many years and combined with the crises in Bulgarian economy during the years of transformation worsened the so-called “center – periphery” problems. Periphery has a complex character: geographical and transport isolation due to the incomplete infrastructure and highly limited public transport, lack of effectively developed economic activities, high unemployment rate, depopulation of some towns and villages, difficult access to information, contacts and markets, substandard public services. However the infrastructure deficiency is the main factor. The condition of the road net and the telecommunications also act as impediments to the regions’ integration to each other and to Europe. They limit the work force mobility and lower the access to some services. In the Republic of Bulgaria there are some legally established protected natural areas: reserves, national parks, natural landmarks, maintain reserves, natural parks and protected places. (Protected Areas Act, 1998) (see Map No. 4). The activities carried out there include research, education and ecological monitoring. They protect the most important biodiversity areas in the country, which are also of European significance.

**Map 5: Areas of high biodiversity and protected territories**



Reserves are models of natural ecosystems typical of Bulgaria and Europe and including characteristic or/and remarkable wildlife (including rare, endemic and relict) plant and animal species and their habitats, which have been established in order to protect the ecosystems' natural character and genetic resources.

National parks are territories with no towns, villages and settlement formations, which include natural ecosystems with a great variety of plant and animal species and habitats with typical and outstanding landscape and objects of inanimate nature. The activities carried out in the national parks are: wildlife nature protection and ecosystems maintenance and their biodiversity, creating conditions for ecologically effective business for the people living there (including the development of recreating activities and ecotourism).

Natural landmarks are characteristic and outstanding objects of inanimate nature highly appreciated for their rarity, representative value and estheticism or objects of scientific and cultural importance (rock formations, rock disclosures of scientific importance, earth pyramids, caves, pot-holes, waterfalls, fossil and mineral sources, sand dunes etc.). The aim of these protected areas is to save their natural specific features.

Maintain reserves are ecosystems including rare and/or endangered wildlife plant and animal species and their habitats. The activities carried out there include maintenance of their natural character, restoration of the plant and animal populations and/or the conditions of their inhabitants, genetic resources protection.

Natural parks are territories including a variety of ecosystems of plant and animal species and their habitats with typical and remarkable landscape and inanimate nature objects. The natural parks have been established in order to maintain the ecosystems' variety and their biodiversity preservation, create opportunities for recreating activities, sustainable utilization of renewable natural resources and at the same time keeping the traditional means of living and creating opportunities for tourism development.

Protected places are territories with typical and remarkable landscape including those that have been resulted from the harmonious co-existence of men and nature, endangered habitats, rare or vulnerable plant and animal species and ecosystems. The purpose of their establishment is to protect the landscape components, protect, maintain and restore the conditions in the habitats that meet the ecological requirements for the species and the systems subject to protection and create new opportunities for tourism and spiritual development.

Table 2 shows the number and the territory of the protected scenery - both their number and territory and the main protected organisms as at end of 2001. (Environment 2001, 2003:68)

### Protected natural scenery in 2001

**Table 2**

<i>Kind</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Area - ha</i>
	As of 31.12.2001	As of 31.12.2001
Protected natural areas - total	1695	527418
People's parks	5	39562
Reserves	55	76979
Natural landmarks	473	23318
Protected places	146	39000
National parks	3	150362
Natural parks	6	181540
Maintain reserves	35	4517
Protected plant species	389	x
Protected animal species	473	x
Protected venerable trees	1766	x

### c) National initiatives on sustainable development

Despite the lack of a special document related to the sustainable development problems, a number of acts raise and solves such problems.

Art. 15 of the Constitution states that the Republic of Bulgaria secures the environment protection and reproduction, the animate nature's maintenance and variety and the reasonable utilization of the natural resources in the country. It has also been stated that the ores and minerals, the coastline beaches, national roads, water, forests and parks of national significance, the legally established natural and archeological reserves are exclusive state property and in this respect their protection is a duty of the State.

Environment Protection Act (2002) (EPA) is directly related to the sustainable development problems. It settles the social relations connected to: a) environment protection for the present and future generations and public health protection, b) biodiversity conservation in accordance with the natural biogeographical characteristics of the country, c) protection and utilization of the environmental components, d) control and management of the factor harmful to the environment, e) exercising control on the environment condition and the sources of pollution, f) pollution prevention and reduction, g) creation and functioning of a national system of Environment Monitoring, h) strategies, programmes and plans for environment protection, i) gathering and access to

information on environment, j) economic organization of activities related to the environment protection, k) rights and obligations of the State, municipalities, legal entities and natural persons in accordance with the environment protection.

The Act achieves its purposes through: a) regulation of the regimes of environmental components protection and utilization, b) control over the status and utilization of the environmental components and the sources of their pollution, c) settling limiting levels for emissions and the environment quality, d) environmental components and factors management, e) environment impact assessment (EIA), f) issuing certificates of pollution prevention, limitation and control, g) specifying management of territories with special protection regime, h) development the system of monitoring on the environmental components, i) introduction of economic regulators and financial mechanisms of environment management, j) regulation of the rights and obligations of the State, municipalities, legal entities and natural persons.

EPA sets forth the principles which serve as a basis for the state policy according to the environment protection: a) sustainable development, b) prevention and reduction of the risk to human health, c) advantage of the pollution prevention to the following repair of the damages done to it, d) participation of the public and transparency of the decision-making process, e) keeping people informed about the environment conditions, f) polluters pay for the damages done, g) conservation, development and protection of ecosystems and their typical biodiversity, h) restoration and improvement of the environment quality in polluted and damaged territories, i) prevention of pollution and damages to the clean regions and other harmful effects on them, j) integration of the environment protection policy to the sector and regional policies of economic and social relations development, k) access to legal procedures in case of problems related to environment protection. The state policy concerning the environment protection is integrated to the sector policies – transport, energy, construction, agriculture, tourism, industry, education etc.

The issues related to environment protection are specified in other acts such as Atmospheric Air Cleanliness Act (1996), Farm Land Protection Act (1996), Forestry Act (1997), Protected Areas Act (1998), Water Act (1999), Subsurface Resources Act (1999), Protection against the Harmful Impact of Chemicals, Preparations and Products Act (2000), Medical Plants Act (2000), Hunt and Game Protection Act (2000), Biological Diversity Act (2002), Waste Management Act (2003).

National Strategy for the Environment and Action Plan 2000 – 2006 (2001) (NSEAP) specifies a system of goals and measurements concerning the sustainable development in the Republic of Bulgaria. The long-term National Strategy for the Environment has been formulated as an activity to improve the quality of life of the population by ensuring favorable environmental conditions and preservation of the rich nature based on sustainable management of the environment. This Strategy will be implemented through achieving the following purposes: a) ensure sufficient quality and quantity of water to the population and industry sectors (overcome the crises in the provision of waters, provision of water for irrigation, create awareness and interest in economical use of water resources, preserve and improve the quality of underground and surface water, b) compliance with ambient air quality standards in settlements “hot spots” (reduction of the concentration of harmful substances in air in the regions known as “hot spots”, elimination of transboundary pollution in the Danube River cities, c) maintain and enlarge good environmental quality territories (implement pollution prevention tools (EIA, permits, ISO 14000, etc.), develop and implement regional policies to enlarge the scope of the territories of good environmental quality, d) closer integration of the environmental policy in the policies on development of industrial sectors (develop and implement strategic EIA for sectoral plans and programmes, take into consideration environmental

requirements in the process of restructuring and development of the energy sector, mining industry, other industrial sectors and transport, develop environment friendly agriculture and stock breeding, preserve the environment in the most developed tourist regions), e) protection and preservation of the rich biological diversity (conservation, protection and recovering of key ecosystems, species and genetic resources, provision of conditions for sustainable use of biological resources, improve forests quality, f) create conditions for the implementation of the EU environmental legislation and international conventions in the field of the environment (improvement of institutions' administrative capacity to implement EU environmental legislation and international conventions, completion of the process of approximation of the Bulgarian legislation with the EU environmental legislation, provision of funds for the implementation of the EU legislation and international conventions, g) improve waste management (establish integrated system of waste treatment facilities, create mechanisms for a system of separate collection, recycling and reuse of waste, improve considerably the cleanness of cities in Bulgaria, h) reduction of noise pollution (reduce noise pollution from industrial sources in cities, reduce noise pollution from transport), i) larger public participation in environmental decision-making (increase public awareness for and interest in environmental issues, involve citizens in the decision-making process).

The National Plan for Economic Development of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period of 2000 – 2006 (2003) (NPED) also concerns some national sustainable development issues. It is the first document executed in the period of transformation to a market economy, which addresses long-term issues of the social and economic development in Bulgaria.

Implementation of the Plan suggests at least the achievement of three strategic medium-term purposes: creation of suitable social economic environment that favours Bulgarian integration to the EU; achievement of sustainable and balanced economic growth comparable to the other countries undergoing the process of integration and improvement of their competitiveness at industrial, company and human resources levels; decrease in the differences between the regions and the social groups and general betterment in reliance to employment, income and the infrastructure quality.

The first goal of the NPED has been set as creating stimulating conditions for the local, foreign, public and private investments to stimulate the economic development while satisfying the requirements of the primacy of law and the market economy principles, meeting the EU environment protection requirements, state benefits, public services quality, equal chances, publicity and transparency etc.

The sustainable and balanced growth set as the second goal includes achieving economic growth above the average one for the Member State of EU, low inflation rate, steady reduction of the deficit under the current account of the balance of payment and unemployment reduction. These goals require the development and implementation of environment protection policy in order to ensure medium and long-term sustainability.

The achievement of sustainable and balanced growth is the necessary preliminary condition to reduce the income and life standard differences with the states in EU.

The third goal is motivated by the big differences in employment, income and the local infrastructure quality between the regions and social groups. The experience shows that the market forces tend to make the differences between the regions greater. As a rule, investments are directed into regions with well-developed infrastructure and stock and services market. The mitigation of the differences by conducting active measures at the labour market, qualification improvement of employees, encouraging the small and medium business, as well as investing into a better local infrastructure quality are some of the measures to correct the market forces of supply and demand and decreasing the

differences between the regions and social groups in reliance to employment, income and the infrastructure quality.

In order to achieve these strategic goals of the Plan, until 2006 the state policy will concentrate on five key national development priorities: improving the competitiveness of Bulgarian economy; human resources development; basis structure improvement and environment protection, agriculture development in the rural areas; balanced and sustainable regional development.

In practice these five components are more or less related to different aspects of the sustainable development. This especially concerns the overriding human resources development, environment protection and the balanced and sustainable regional development.

The National Plan for Economic Development for the period of 2000 – 2006 is closely linked in contents and periods of time to the National Plan for Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period of 2000 – 2006 (NPRD) and the National Agriculture and rural Areas Development Plan under SAPARD (2000 – 2006).

## **6. Regional sustainable development**

### **a) National initiatives linked to regional sustainable development**

The most significant national initiatives linked to regional sustainable development are the various government instruments outlining the future guidelines of the regional development and the measures for environment protection.

The most important document of this type is Regional Development Act (1999) RDA. It regulates the planning, management and security of the regional development resources. The main goal of the above Act is to give the preconditions for sustainable balanced development of the different regions of the country. In accordance with it, the aim is to reduce the inter-regional differences in the employment and revenue and to implement regional and cross-border cooperation and Eurointegration.

According to the above goals the RDA defines the terms “regional development” as a process of achieving sustainable and balanced development through direction of resources, infrastructure development and economic activity in certain regions and “regional development policy” as a part of the structural policy implemented through goal-oriented, planned and financially secured influence of the state and the municipalities on the regional development.

The Act defines different regions of goal-oriented influence according to the EU requirements: a) regions of growth, b) development regions, c) cross-boundary cooperation and development regions, d) regions with specific problems and priorities.

The Act sets forth: a) establishment and development of cross-boarder, national and regional infrastructure, b) establishment of favourable regional and local environment for investments, c) utilization of local, national and international resources d) increase in the human resources quality, e) implementation of economic initiatives, f) coordination of the sectoral policies and actions g) participation in non-government organizations.

The regional development plans are the main instruments of the regional development. The National Plan for Regional Development is worked out for a period of seven years. It is a combination of initiatives for development of the districts and municipalities in accordance to the Act. The national plan contains: a) the principles, goals and priorities of the regional development of the country b) goal-oriented development regions, c) the instruments for achieving the regional development purposes d) the regional development initiatives, e) specific projects for regional development, including projects

of inter-district significance, scientific research programmes, educational programmes, district and municipal informational systems; the projects are oriented mainly to developing the infrastructure, economic development and new opening of new work places, as well as to the services linked to the projects' encouragement, f) all the recourses, necessary for the implementation of the projects for the seven-year period divided into years, districts, municipalities, ministries and other agencies and goal-oriented regions. National programmes may be developed as a part of the National Plan for Regional Development for the regions with specific problems and priorities.

The mechanism to work out of the National Plan for Regional Development is effected through cooperation of the central government and district authorities.

The Council of Ministers ratifies the basic criteria for developing the National Plan for Regional Development pursuant to a proposal by the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works. The term is until the end of March of the year proceeding the seven-year period of the plan implementation. The district governors organize the preparation of the district draft-plans for development, based on the ratified criteria and present them by first of June of the same year to the Minister of the Regional Development and Public Works.

On the basis of the drafts district plans for development the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works organizes the preparation of a draft of National Plan for Regional Development and submit it for coordination with Regional Development Counsel. The National Plan for Regional Development is coordinated with the National Plan for Economic Development.

The District Plan for Development specifies the goals, priorities, instruments and initiatives of the National Plan for Regional Development for the district territory and contains projects developed according to them. The District Plan for Development includes also projects, which are part of the Municipal Plans for Development as well as projects by other legal entities.

The projects included in the Plans for Regional Development are financed by: a) the State Budget, b) the Municipal Budgets through goal oriented subsidies and own proceeds, c) international programmes, projects, agreements and other foreign sources, d) other sources including extrabudget funds of the state bodies and budget organizations and municipalities.

The informational services of the regional development are provided by the National Statistical Institute which gathers, processes and gives the statistical data on the regional development to the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, district Governors and municipalities.

The National Plan for Regional Development for the period 2000 – 2006 (NPRD) has an important place among these initiatives.

NPRD is considered as a main instrument for development of complete, long-term oriented and resource-secured policy of regional development on the basis of balancing the national, regional and local interests and priorities. The necessity of such policy is motivated by the fact that the regional differences threaten social, political and economical problems, national economy dependents to a great extend on its regional components and the market forces themselves cannot provide balanced regional development. The Plan is the answer to the requirements entailed by the integration of Bulgaria to the European Union in the area of regional policy and the social and economic association and the possibilities to use EU pre-accession instruments.

NPRD is a combination of the district plans worked out on the basis of rules, principles, goals and priorities set forth at a national level. The District Plans, which develop the specific content of the plan, reflect the initiative of the district administrations and local

government, non-government sector and all other significant partners in the regional development.

The main goals of the regional development policy for the planning period of 2000 – 2006 are set forth by the Regional Development Act (RDA): creation of preconditions for sustainable and balanced development of the regions, mitigation of the regional differences in the employment and income of the population and in the potentials for development, opening of the national space and solution of regional and local development problems through cross-border cooperation.

The development and implementation of the National Plan for Regional Development are subordinated to the following principles: limited intervention of the State to the market mechanism: the measures of the regional development policy accelerate and facilitate, but do not substitute the activity of the economic subjects, concentration and priority: efficient utilization of the resources by concentration on limited number of priority goals and areas, integrated complex approach: recognition of all significant factors of the regional development, integration and balance of the economic, social and ecological goals and aspects of the development, commitment and complementation: the measures of the national policy and the relevant resources do not substitute, but add to the local measures and resources, integration of the sectoral policies: specific measures of the regional development policy are comparatively limited, planning as constant process: defining and implementation of the regional development policy on the basis of plans and programmes subject to actualization as a result of observation and assessment of their implementation, decentralization: tendency towards solving the problems at the level on which they arise while the responsibilities of the local government gradually extend from planning towards direct management of the regional development programmes, partnership: development of the activities on working out and implementing the plans through dialogue and joint actions of the main subjects of the regional development (central and local government, non-government organizations, business), competitiveness: regional, district and municipal plan compete to use the resources on the base of the quality of the offered projects and in accordance with the national goals and clear and transparent procedure, information services: provision of reliable and current regionally differentiated information on the preparation and observation of the plans for regional development.

The National Plan for Regional Development includes a lot of programmes for solution of problems in the different regions for planning. Several guidelines for action are given priority: a) development of infrastructure project for increase in the investments attractiveness and competitiveness, b) improvement of accessibility and standards of living for the population in different regions, c) assist the establishment and functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in the regions on industrial decline and undeveloped country regions d) projects for employment and restructure of the manufacturing enterprises mainly in the regions with high unemployment rate and risk of intensified social problems, e) initiate enterprise and support innovative environment (incl. establishment of cooperation networks, regional marketing and distribution of information, assistance in establishment and functioning of market and technology infrastructure, business services, improvement of the human resources quality), f) opening to intensified cooperation with the neighboring countries in order to solve the problems of the regional and local development and establish trustfully and friendly relations of good neighbours.

The Regional Action Programme (RAP) for Bulgaria 2004 – 2006 is another important instrument. The Programme has the same goals as the National Plan for Regional Development and sets them in five priorities: a) the regional and local economy increase mainly throughout improvement of the business development conditions at

local and regional level and stimulation of the regional potential for tourism, b) infrastructure improvement linked to the business development through building, rehabilitation and modernization of the infrastructure (transport, energy networks, telecommunications, water and sewage systems), c) development of professional skills to support local and regional activity and transition to information society through stimulation of business, education and research institutions cooperation (for professional skills development in the area of enterprise, tourism, preservation of cultural and nature heritage, technology transfer and innovations, energy effectiveness) through improvement of educational and training environment for transition to information society, d) development of peripheral regions by improvement of their infrastructure, environment protection and stimulation of the regional cooperation in the field of business and culture, e) increase in the regions' part in the specification and application of policies for regional development through strengthening the regional consultation and partnership structures by an increase in the administrative capacity to manage programmes and projects related to the EU Structural Funds.

RAP specifies three horizontal priorities, too: local initiatives, sustainable development and equal chances. These priorities should be taken into consideration in the specific programming and implementation of the measures concerning the regional development.

The local initiatives are regarded to be an important instrument for its implementation and a key factor for generating added value and successful achievement of the programme's purposes.

The sustainable development is regarded as a way to harmonize the ecological, social and economic aspects of the development. It is defined as preservation and contribution to the economic, social and natural capital. The solution of the regional problems should include all the sustainable development parameters connected to the environment, social and economic aspects and the interaction between them. The education and introducing the best national and European practices of sustainable development give advantages when planning and implementing the regional development.

The equal chances are the third horizontal priority. It envisages giving equal chances to all people and groups threatened by social isolation when planning and implementing the policies for local and regional development.

National Plan for Biodiversity Preservation (1999) and the Environment Strategy for the purposes of the instrument ISPA (2003) are other important documents concerning the sustainable development.

### **b) Regional initiatives linked to regional sustainable development**

The regional initiatives linked to sustainable development are most frequently related to the active role of foreign and local NGOs. These initiatives have the longest relative history and, in their majority, are related to environment protection in certain regions of the country, including education and training of the local people for sustainable utilization of natural resources and for self-organization for environment protection.

A good illustration of initiatives of such type is the Bulgarian-Swiss Programme for the biodiversity preservation operating in Bulgaria since the early 1990s. Its strategic goal is the preservation of biodiversity through efficient cooperation between state institutions and civil society.

In its operation, the Programme renders support in the following spheres: a) achievement of efficient and sustainable management of the protected territories, b) stimulating the sustainable utilization of natural resources, and c) increasing public commitment in favour of the preservation of endangered species, habitats and landscapes.

The basic activities are implemented in several directions: a) environmental protection activity and management of endangered territories, b) developing of management plans, c) expanding the network of protected territories, and d) application of priority management activities with the wide participation of local organisations and structures (environment protection activities, action plans in favour of protected species and measures for natural resources preservation), as preliminarily described in the protected territories management plans and for which there is a wild consensus reached between the parties involved; e) introducing environment friendly techniques for preservation of valuable forest habitats (in cooperation with the Bulgarian-Swiss Forest Programme); f) environmental monitoring; g) development of the potential of key institutions responsible for the biodiversity preservation and the management of natural resources; h) improving the partnership and coordination between all parties involved and the main participants involving into the management and preservation of resources; i) increasing the public commitment; j) increasing the knowledge of nature and biodiversity, as well as the public “environmental culture”; k) generating revenues related to the sustainable management of natural resources; l) support to eco-tourism; m) encouraging environment friendly economic activities in and around protected territories (the reasonable use of medical plants, pastures, forestry, fishery, salt production, etc.); n) finding mechanisms for providing additional funding for the preservation of biodiversity – this refers to the wide range of activities specific of each individual case, which will be targeted providing financial stability for environment protection.

The main regions of operation of the Programme are: a) coastal Dobrudzha (located at the Northern Black Sea coast), b) the complex of Bourgas wetland areas and Ropotamo (at the Southern Black Sea coast), c) in Strandzha Natural Park (located in the Southeast, near the Turkish border), d) the Eastern Rhodopes (located in the South, near the Greek border), e) the Central Balkan National Park (located in the central part of the country), and f) Pirin National Park (located in the South- Eastern part of the country).

In the course of its operation, the Programme achieves results that confirm the concept of sustainable development in the regions of its operation.

Thus, for instance, in the area of the Bourgas wetland areas, the Programme has: a) supported the preservation and the reasonable utilization of the Bourgas lakes with their characteristic biodiversity through the establishment of a regional forum, bringing together the institutions and organizations interested in the lakes; b) contributed to the improvement of natural conditions in the lake area and had a positive effect on the rare bird species inhabiting this region; c) supported the development of eco-tourism (Bourgas Wetland Areas Project, 2001).

In the region of coastal Dobrudzha., the Programme: a) implements measures for the Durankulak Lake, the Shabla lake complex and Kaliakra Reserve management, aimed at improvement of key habitats, preservation and increasing the number of rare and endangered biological species, and biodiversity protection in general; b) has developed, and is in the process of implementing hydrotechnical projects for improving the conditions of the Durankulak Lake, where the natural balance for many years has been disturbed as a result of the unreasonable use of resources from the lake and the surrounding lands; c) developed a model for sustainable use of resources (fishing in the Durankulak Lake and the aquatory of Kaliakra, mowing of reeds, etc.), the application of

which will contribute to the achievement of sustainability in the overall management of valuable natural territories and especially of the wetland areas; d) with people's support, it created the first information centre for environment protection at the Northern Black Sea coast – Kaliakra Information Centre at the village of Balgarevo, which popularizes the natural features, specific of the region, informs the public, supports the development of ecological tourism in Dobrudzha; e) implements a large-scale educational programme with the schools in Kavarna, Shabla, Balgarevo and Durankulak for enriching the students' knowledge of nature and forming environmentally oriented behaviour and thinking (Dobrudzha Project, 2001).

The activity of the Bulgarian-Swiss Programme is a good example of activity in the spirit of sustainable development, taking environmental protection as its point of reference. Over the recent years, another type of regional initiatives has also appeared. They are oriented towards sustainable development, but with a point of reference other than environment protection - the development of local economy in a way that would not cause damage to the environment; for instance, in the field of increasing energy efficiency, including the establishment of local sustainable energy planning as a precondition for development of sustainable communities in the Republic of Bulgaria (Bulgaria: Local Sustainable Energy Project, 2002; Local Sustainable Energy Planning Project – Precondition for the Development of Sustainable Communities in Bulgaria, 2003). The main goals of the Project, which is financed by the British Government through the Department for International Development, are: a) developing the capacity of municipalities in Bulgaria to work out sustainable energy plans and to control their successful application as a part of the general local development strategy, b) provision of materials, means and guidance for efficient training of the leading municipalities and regional administrations based on practical knowledge and assessment of the needs for training, c) sharing knowledge, skills and experience by leading municipalities (for instance, those that have already been trained to develop local sustainable energy planning) with neighbouring municipalities, d) for the regional administrations to encourage and assist local sustainable energy planning in the whole region, e) for the municipalities to build the necessary structures and to acquire skills for management of local sustainable development energy plans, while achieving the social and economical goals and the goals related to the environment protection, f) for the regional administrations and the respective parties involved, at a national level (for example, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources, the National Association of Municipalities, etc.) to take their part in encouraging and assisting local sustainable energy planning in all regions and municipalities in Bulgaria.

A relatively new type of regional initiative is the development of municipal and regional strategies for sustainable development (for example, Strategy for Sustainable Development of Lovech Region, 2002; Strategy for Sustainable Development of Teteven Municipality, 2002). To a great extent, the Government has encourages their creation since the approach for their preparation, their goals and approaches are to a great extent in conformity with those of the National Plan for Regional Development 2000 – 2006 and in the Regional Action Programme for Bulgaria 2004 – 2006. Being the first documents of this type concerning regional development, such strategies allocate a lot of space for description and assessment of the situation in the respective territorial unit (trends in the development of the local economy: its branches, the employment level and the man power quality, local revenues and expenses, resource availability; tendencies of development of the social sphere: demographic condition, education, health care, culture, sports, human development index; condition of the environment and its protection: natural conditions and resources, condition of the basic components of the

environment such as air, water and soils, biodiversity, the problems with the various types of waste; condition of the infrastructure: technical, transport, energy, water supply communication; condition of the local self-governance, including the role of NGOs; condition of the administrative-territorial structure and of the use of land). A considerably smaller part of the documents is dedicated to specifying the basic priorities of the goals for development, i.e. for the desirable future. In addition, the means by which these goals can be achieved are only scarcely mentioned. This comes to show that the development of such type of strategies is only in its initial phase and a lot of work is yet necessary to be done for what is written to be 'translated' into the language of the particular action plans. Furthermore, the local self-governance bodies (there are such bodies only in the smallest administrative-territorial units – the municipalities), in their majority have rather limited financial and material resources and limited personnel capacity. The local NGOs are generally weak, and the local business is most frequently focused on its short-term prosperity and has no capacity and/or desire to get engaged into long-term and unclear in terms of their final results initiatives such as these for regional sustainable development.

A number of other smaller in terms of their scope and goals initiatives related to regional sustainable development have been and are being implemented in the country. As a rule, they are relatively limited in terms of duration and scope. In most cases their practical achievements are related to examination of the factual condition of natural and social environment and to the development of environmentally friendly trends of economic development (such as ecological agriculture and eco-tourism, for example), as well as to educational activity among the population in whose regions these initiatives take place.

### **c) Pre-accession Funds and sustainable development**

Pre-accession funds influence to an ever greater extent the development of the country in conformity with the requirements of the European Union. They do not just contribute to, and provide investments for the implementation of particular projects, but also support the establishment of up-to-date standards of activity in the spheres of their influence.

The Phare programme allocated commitments of € 1.35 billion to Bulgaria during the 1992-2002 period, including € 122.9 million in 2002. For the years 2000-2003, total financial assistance to Bulgaria amounted to around € 155 million annually from Phare, approximately € 55 million from SAPARD, and between € 83 and € 125 million from ISPA (2003 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, 2003: 7).

Although none of these funds has as its officially formulated goal assisting the regional sustainable development, the projects implemented with their help objectively encourage such type of development.

Since 2000, the Phare National Programme in the field of environment has been oriented exclusively towards institutional projects, i.e. projects for training and improvement of the administrative capacity of institutions for application of environment legislation. The projects are implemented under the so-called 'twinning' scheme. What is characteristic of this type of projects is the joint work of experts from Bulgarian Ministries and other administrative institutions with competence in the field of application of environmental legislation with experts from environmental ministries and agencies from the Member States. Some basic activities that can be performed within the twinning projects are: preparation and holding of training seminars; development, printing, distribution of methodical and information materials, holding of information campaigns.

The Phare National Programme supports also individual projects which bear a more direct relation to sustainable development through perfection of the Bulgarian legislation in conformity with the EU legislation, for example, in the sphere of control over chemical substances, the monitoring of air quality, water management in the Danube River basin (Phare National Programme for Bulgaria 2003, 2003: 6,8).

Through the laws and enactments passed in the environmental sphere over the recent years, a number of rights and obligations were delegated to the municipal administrations for application of this legislation. Through their regional and national associations, the municipalities can propose and implement successful projects under the 'twinning' scheme.

Through the Phare Cross-Border Cooperation Programme: Bulgaria – Greece and Bulgaria – Rumania, under the guidance of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the implementation of both projects for technical assistance and of investment projects is possible, including municipal projects. Irrespective of whether they are investment or technical assistance projects, they should be related to the application of the European environmental legislation. Such an example is the Phare Cross-Border Cooperation Project Bulgaria – Greece for construction of three municipal waste water treatment plants in the Arda River valley /Madan, Zlatograd, Rudozem/. Not only Bulgaria, but also Greece benefits from it. These are projects as a result of which the quality of cross-border rivers is improved. Work continued on rehabilitating roads in Southern Bulgaria, completing the railway electrification and installation of optical cable, opening of new border crossings, closing of Uranium Mines and setting up of structures for a Joint Small Project Fund (The Phare Programme Annual Report 2001, 2003: 8). There is a requirement of the Phare Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Rumania for 'mirroring', i.e. implementation of identical project on the territories of Rumania and Bulgaria in the border regions. This means that there should be a preliminary agreement and arrangement between the two countries for preparation and implementation of such projects. A typical example is the currently implemented project for construction of air quality control systems in four pairs of Bulgarian and Rumanian towns along the Danube River. Under the Cross- Border programme with Romania activities continued on construction of a Winter Camp on the Danube, upgrade of basic energy infrastructure, opening of new border crossings, establishment of a monitoring system for air pollution and set up of Joint Small Project Fund between Bulgaria and Romania (The Phare Programme Annual Report 2001, 2003: 8).

In the area of regional development Phare projects continued supporting the preparation of the National Development Plan, strengthening institutional capacity of the involved institutions in the management of the Pre-accession Instruments and in the preparation for the management of the Structural Funds. Bulgaria has continued to make progress in terms of transposition of the EU environmental acquis and for the preparation of the implementation of EU directives. Phare projects contributed in the adoption and practical implementation of the legislation in the areas of waste management, water, air, nature protection, Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control (IPPC) and Seveso Directive mainly through twinning arrangements with different Member States (The Phare Programme Annual Report 2001, 2003: 9).

The SAPARD Programme supports the modernization of agriculture and its sustainable development. The fund plays an important part in the application of legislation related to the overall agricultural policy of the EU. The fund supports heterogeneous measures related to investments, improvement of processing and marketing of agricultural products, perfection of professional training in this sphere, development and diversification of economic activities for the purpose of ensuring additional income, restoration and development of villages, etc.

Each applicant country shall present to the European Commission its National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas Development. Based on this plan, the European Commission will develop the particular SAPARD programme for the respective country. The Bulgarian National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas Development for the Period 2000-2006 was submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and was accepted by the Bulgarian Government in October 1999.

The main objective of the National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas Development is the achievement of sustainable low-inflation economic growth as a precondition for increasing the income and improvement of the conditions of life with a view to further integration of Bulgaria in the European economic and social space.

The economic and social policy of the country will be forwarded to the following long-term priority trends: a) completion of the transition to market economy and construction of an institutional system in harmony with the European legislation; b) improving the competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy; c) accelerated building and improvement of the quality of the basic infrastructure and ecology; d) improvement of the quality of life and adaptation of human resources to the new economic conditions and European integration; e) establishment of balanced sustainable development in regional aspect.

The following goals of the National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas Development for the Period 2000 – 2006 have been as: a) improvement of the efficiency of agricultural production and encouraging the establishment of a competitive food-processing sector through a better market and technological infrastructure and strategic investment policy aimed at satisfying the European standards, and b) sustainable development of the rural areas in accordance with the best environmental practices, through creation of alternative employment, diversification of economic activities and construction of the necessary infrastructure.

Both goals are aimed at improving the economic and social conditions in rural areas. They are mutually complementary and correspond to the final objective of the National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Areas Development. They are clearly oriented towards improvement of agricultural structures and market efficiency and application of the achievements of the Community through creation of employment opportunities and raising of the standard of living in rural areas.

The conditions of living and labour to a great extent depend also on the preservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage, the development of recreation possibilities and the improvement of the conditions of life in rural areas. A goal of the development of rural areas is the complexity in their development, i.e. the implementation of a policy for overall development of economy, society, infrastructure, nature and culture in rural territories. National Plan points out that this can be achieved through a series of actions such as: a) diversification and structural adaptation of production structures especially in problematic regions, establishment of favourable conditions for production of goods and services based on the intellectual and craftsman's skills of the rural population, creation of small and medium-sized enterprises; b) improvement of the basic infrastructure in rural areas, which will establish the foundations for the development of new enterprises and will raise the rural life quality; c) reviving the specific cultural and historical identity of rural areas; d) preservation of the traditional values of rural community – family traditions, which stop the migration of young people, strengthening the identity of the community, including these in the local level planning and in the implementation of projects for integrated development of rural areas; e) rational, reasonable and sustainable utilization of natural resources, preservation of the beauty and specificity of rural areas, rational preservation and managing of forests, etc. (National Plan for Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas 2000-2006, 102 – 104).

The ISPA Programme supports projects for implementation of measures in the sphere of environmental protection, which should support the beneficiary countries in meeting the requirements of the EU in this sphere, as well as projects in the transport infrastructure, mainly those ensuring interrelation of the national and European transport networks. The projects are proposed by the Government of Bulgaria through the National ISPA Coordinator – the Ministry of Finance.

The funding is for large investment projects, amounting to a minimum of EUR 5 million, constituting a priority for the country in accordance with the adopted National Programmes in the 'Water Quality Improvement', 'Waste Management' and 'Air Quality Protection' sectors. Up to 75% of the value of projects approved can be financed by ISPA funds, and up to 85% - in exclusive cases. The Commission may also deem it necessary to make a reduction of the EU share, provided that co-financing exists, should the project be capable of generating income (for example, road tolls, or if production investments are to be made in the sphere of ecology), as well as when the "polluter pays" principle can be suitably applied.

The projects are proposed and managed at a national level, although the municipalities take an active part in their preparation. The projects supported by ISPA should also be sustainable after the accession date. The projects should be in compliance with the EU norms and standards and EU sectoral policies and they should comply with the sustainable development principle.

Through the ISPA Programme, projects related to waste management and waste water treatment are funded: regional waste disposal landfills in Montana, Rousse, Pernik, Sevlievo, Silistra and Sozopol, wastewater treatment plants in Blagoevgrad, Bourgas (Meden Rudnik District), Gorna Oryahovitsa, Lovech, Montana, Pazardzhik, Popovo. Sevlievo and Targovishte (Financial implementation of the ISPA Programme, 2003). In accordance with the ISPA requirements, an Environmental Strategy (2003) (ES) has also been adopted. Its purpose is to delineate the framework and the directions for efficient utilization of the ISPA financial instrument for the environmental sector. The Environmental Strategy for the purposes of the ISPA instrument and the measures envisaged therein form an integral part of the National Plan for Economic Development (NPED) – 2000 – 2006. Therefore the document is focused on the following three sectors: a) waste management b) air quality and c) water quality.

The long-term goals of the strategy are: reaching the norms for air quality in the towns and villages where it is heavily polluted, the so-called 'hot' spots, b) reduction of the concentrations of harmful substances in the 'hot' spot areas, and c) termination of cross-border pollution /gas pollution/ of the cities and towns along the Danube. Each one of the strategic goals is particularized in a series of sub-goals.

With regard to the improvement of water quality, they are: a) preservation and improvement of the quality of ground and surface water used as potable water by the population; b) provision of sufficient quantities and quality of water for potable and household water supply; c) overcoming the water supply restrictions; d) provision of water for irrigation and the industry, forming awareness and interest in water resources savings.

The main goals of Bulgarian waste management policy are: a) prevention and reduction of waste generation; b) re-use and recycling; c) improvement of the collection and transportation organisation; d) utilization of waste and rendering it safe in an environmentally-oriented manner, by means of constructing an integrated system of facilities; e) reducing the risk of former contaminations; f) legal regulation of waste management; g) working with the public; h) ratification of the monitoring and control system (Environmental Strategy for the Purposes of the ISPA Instrument 2003: 12- 14).

In general, the pre-accession funds are a powerful instrument for stimulating the development in the country. Their more efficient utilization faces two basic problems: a fuller utilization and much closer binding of the funds allocated for the environment, the development of transport infrastructure and the agriculture in compliance with the principles of sustainable development.

## **7. Multi-level governance**

### **a) Regional issues and cases which involves EU, national and sub-national coordination**

Projects related to regional sustainable development in the Republic of Bulgaria vary a lot both in terms of their content and in terms of the types of stakeholders (foreign and Bulgarian, representatives of the central and the local government, NGOs, business organisations, scientific and educational institutions, etc.) participating therein. It depends on the various networks of relations that become established among the various stakeholders that the proper guidance and performance of activities for implementation of the projects.

Despite this diversity, it is possible to distinguish, although provisionally, three types of networks of relations from this viewpoint: which stakeholder has the leading part in the execution of the projects.

Networks of the first type are constructed within projects and initiatives, where bodies of the central state power play the leading part.

A typical example is the role of the state in the execution of the prescriptions of such programmes as Phare, ISPA and SAPARD. In the institutional funds management scheme, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Work, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy perform various coordinated functions. They represent a intermediary between the EU institutions, on the one hand, and the various types of potential beneficiaries in the country, on the other, and they ensure the compliance with the rules set by the EU for allocation and use of funds under the three programmes.

Another example of such type of projects is the preparation of national and regional strategies, programmes and development plans. Despite the objective possibility for self-initiative of the local authorities and for active participation of the representatives of NGOs, of business, science and education, the active part is actually played by the central government authorities. This situation is related, to a great extent, to the psychological inertia that has still not been overcome since the time of the highly centralized socialist state, and also to the lack of sufficiently developed capacity of the local governance bodies and the various NGOs. Therefore the central governance bodies will play for a long time yet the lead role in the preparation of guiding documents for national and regional development both as an initiator and as a basic source of models for their preparation.

With the second type of networks, the leading part is played by one or several non-governmental organisations. Usually these are foreign organisations since they, unlike their Bulgarian analogues, have both sufficient financial resources and extensive organisational experience so as to organise and implement projects related to regional development.

An example of such type of network is the above-mentioned Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Preservation Programme, which implements a number of projects in some

of the richest in terms of biological species areas of the country. It is an inter-governmental programme funded by the Swiss government and assigned to two Swiss non-government organisations – Pro Natura (a Swiss environmental protection league) and SVS-BirdLife Switzerland (the Swiss Association for Bird Protection). In its implementation, the Programme seeks cooperation from various stakeholders. Its partners are the Ministry of Environment and Water, scientific institutions, local governments and Bulgarian non-governmental organisations. The municipalities are very important partners in most of the regional projects both in the capacity of main stakeholders in the management of natural resources and due to their tasks with regard to the inspection and control of these projects. In most of the regional projects the local schools are also related to the programmes for increasing the commitment of the public. Partnership with the business (public and private) is also intensely sought in order to link local economic development with the preservation of biodiversity.

With the third type of networks, the initiative for their creation lies with one or more of the local stakeholders (the local government bodies, representatives of the business or local NGOs). In such networks, both Bulgarian and foreign participants may be involved. Usually networks of this type are constructed for implementation of projects, which although being useful, are relatively modest in terms of their scope and goals. Most frequently they affect only certain aspects of local sustainable development.

A network of this type is the Pirin Tourist Forum (PTF), which includes the municipalities of Blagoevgrad District, Pirin National Park, The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the town of Gotse Delchev and the Business Information and Advisory Centre in the town of Sandanski. The main goal of PTF is the creation of a database (on the natural specific features of the region, its cultural and historical places of interest, the towns and villages and the municipal infrastructure, the various types of tourist establishments and services, etc.) for promoting the region of Pirin Mountain (located in the Southwestern part of Bulgaria) as a place for development of sustainable tourism. The information in such databases provides a possibility for description and assessment of resources for development of the local tourist industry, for improvement of the information servicing of clients, for improvement of marketing and for the development of new products and kinds of services (Partners for Local Development, 2001:24-27).

### **b) Multi-level interaction among the different stakeholders**

The relations between the various stakeholders involved in projects and activities related to regional sustainable development is strongly influenced by the overall condition of the system of multi-level governance in Bulgaria.

The relations between the central and the local authorities are crucial for the whole system of multi-level governance in the country. The main problem of these relations since the early 90-s of the last century is decentralization. In the first years of transformation of the Bulgarian society, preconditions for transition to decentralized government mechanisms were established. Changes of political, economical and cultural nature acted in this direction, such as: establishment of a multi-party political system, creation of possibilities for development of market economy (elimination of the highly centralized economical structures from the time of socialism, the gradual privatization of state property, land reform, creation of possibilities for development of private property, etc.), development of free mass media, including at a local level. As time passed, the steps towards decentralization that had been made at the beginning of the transformation of Bulgarian society turned out to be unstable. There appeared even the reverse tendency – towards re-centralization of economic and political power at the expense of local authorities in the municipalities (Minev *et al.*, 2003A: 11-12).

The governance bodies of the districts (NUTS level 3) represent a powerful instrument in this direction. Governance of the district is performed by a district governor assigned by the Council of Ministers. His/Her chief duty is to implement the state policy in the sphere of regional development. He/She has the right to suspend the execution of acts of the mayors elected directly by the people and of the municipality councils, if he/she deem them unlawful. The governors of the districts play an essential part also in determining the national policy for regional development.

Pursuant to the Regional Development Act (1999), which postulates the main bodies and tools for implementation of regional development, the Council of Ministers accepts: a) criteria for determination of the regions for targeted influence and their territorial scope; b) the National Plan for Regional Development, as well as the amendments and supplements to it; c) the annual report on the execution of the National Plan for Regional Development, which is entered for information in the National Assembly.

A Regional Development Council is established at the Council of Ministers. Its duties are: a) to assess the initiatives of the Ministries and the other departments in the sphere of regional development; b) to coordinate the National Plan for Regional Development; c) to express an opinion on the annual report for execution of the National Plan for Regional Development; d) to coordinate the activities of regional nature of the Ministries and the other departments within the National Plan for Regional Development; e) to accept a National Strategy and a National Report on Sustainable Development and to solve other issues of sustainable development having national importance; f) to coordinate the annual plan-accounts of off-budget funds of the state bodies and the budget organisations supported by the state.

Chairman of the Council is the Minister of Regional development and Public Works, and its members are the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Agriculture, Forests and Agrarian Reform, the Minister of Environment and Water, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education and Science, and the Minister of Culture. The district governors and a representative of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria participate in its operation with the right of deliberative vote. The Chairman of the Council may invite to its meetings also other persons bearing any relation to regional development. Thus all directly elected bodies of local authorities have the right of one deliberative vote in the body that has decisive impact on regional development.

District governor plays the leading part in the preparation of district development plans, organising their elaboration on the basis of the parameters approved by the government. He is also rep of the district regional development council, whose main task is to support the district governor in the performance of his functions. Members of this body, advisory in its essence, are the mayors of municipalities in the district and one representative of the municipality council membership of each municipality. At his discretion, the district governor may invite for participation in meetings of the district council representatives of the regional associations of municipalities and other persons bearing any relation to regional development.

There is a substantial disbalance between the powers of the powers directly elected by the people at the central and the local level. It is further aggravated by the disbalance in terms of resources. The budgets of municipalities depend to a great extent on the transfers from the state budget (both along the line of return of a part of local taxes and as direct subsidies). For 2001, the share of transfers from the state budget represents 78% of all municipal budgets, whereas the share of local revenues was 18 % (Minev *et al.*, 2003A: 113-114). The right of local powers to decide on the sources and the amounts of the local revenues is highly limited. At the same time, although their big

relative share, the receipts from the republican budget are not sufficient for covering the basic needs of municipalities, for instance, in the sphere of education and health care. This average image conceals the really dramatic situation of a considerable number of the least developed municipalities, characterized by a lasting economic, demographic and cultural decline. Due to this decline, they are in a situation of social exclusion from the economic, political and cultural life of the country as a whole and of the districts whereto they belong. These municipalities do not have an actual opportunity to influence the higher levels of governance and to defend their interests. This type of municipalities fall into a vicious circle – the more their decline aggravates, the feebler is their access to political and economic resources. This, on its part, is conducive of their further decline (Minev *et al.*, 2003B: 48 – 50). Very often these municipalities are located in regions that are particularly valuable for their well-preserved natural environment.

These disbalances place the central power and the municipalities in a situation of long-term confrontation and hinder to a considerable extent the development of an effective system of multi-level governance. In a situation of strong centralization of the political power and deficit of resources, the role of other stakeholders in the processes of governance (non-government organisations, research units, educational institutions, etc.) is rather limited.

### **c) Cross-sector policy integration**

The idea of integrated and interdependent development of the economic, social and environmental sphere finds a rather limited partial application in practice. Individual projects related to regional development seek mutual coordination between environmental protection and the development of certain specific economic activities such as agriculture or tourism. Mainly the environment evaluation and the Environment Impact Assessment is related to the principles of sustainable development, which is to be made by authorized institutions for plans, programmes or investment proposals for construction, activities and technologies or their modifications, during implementation of which considerable impacts on environment are possible (Environment Protection Act, 2002).

The principles of sustainable development find considerably wider, although still insufficiently full, application in the various strategies and programmes developed over the recent years for the future development at national and regional level, oriented towards the prospective future membership of Bulgaria in the EU.

## **8. Evaluation methods and tools for regional sustainable development**

### **a) Existing evaluation methods and tools (including indicators)**

Various groups of indicators are used in parallel in Bulgaria, bearing a relation to the sustainable development of the country as a whole and to regional sustainable development in particular.

The most diverse and most widely applied group of indicators is related to the condition of the environment.

Pursuant to the Environmental Protection Act (2002), there is a national environmental monitoring system in the country, which covers the territory of the whole state, includes

national networks using a diversity of indicators and means for implementation of: air monitoring, precipitation and surface water monitoring, groundwater monitoring, seawater monitoring, geological environment monitoring, lands and soils monitoring, forests and protected territories monitoring, biological monitoring, radiological monitoring, monitoring of noise pollution in environment, monitoring of non-ionizing radiation, monitoring of waste disposal depots and former waste pollution. The national networks for environmental monitoring are designed and constructed in accordance with the national, European and international standards.

Each of these national networks uses various indicators for description of the objects monitored. Thus, for instance, the main measured indicators of the condition of air include some basic contaminants such as: total dust, sulphur dioxide, nitric dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, lead aerosols, fine dust particles, ozone, carbon oxide, as well as ammonia, chlorine, sulphuric acid aerosols, hydrochloric acid aerosols, phenol, arsenic aerosols and heavy metals, and meteorological data – temperature, wind velocity and direction, solar radiation, atmospheric pressure, air humidity.

The National Statistical Institute collects a wide range of data on the social and economic development and the condition of environment in the regions planning (NUTS2) and the districts (NUTS3), and individual indicators which show the condition in the municipalities is also shown (NUTS4) (The Regions and Districts in Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, 2003). The main groups of indicators are: territory, surface and climate; environment; population; labour market; revenues and expenses of households; regional accounts; investments; finance; general data on the economy; agriculture; industry; construction; transport; communications; domestic trade and public catering; tourism; health care; education; culture and art; judicial system.

With the assistance of the UNDP representation in Bulgaria since 1999, within the annual national reports on human development, the indices of human development at district level and at municipality level have been presented. The idea of sustainable human development underlies the human development index, i.e. the development of those human capacities thanks to which people can choose to live as they like. The human development index provides an idea of the quality of human life only in its first approximation. The basic principle on which the index was based is that a person needs equally good income, good health and good education<sup>1</sup>. The achievement of high values of the human development index presupposes participation of people in the governance, existence of political freedoms, of safety and of a favourable natural environment (Bulgaria Human Development Index, 2002: 7). The index provides a possibility to delineate the differences between the various in terms of their extent of progress territorial units in the country. It also signals the authorities and the citizens for the need for adequate national and regional policies targeted at overcoming these differences. Within individual projects, various combinations of indicators of sustainable development of cities and towns have been applied in Bulgaria. An example in this respect is the European City Indicators for Blagoevgrad Project, which is a part of another, more

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Global Report on Human Development of UNDP the human development index is calculated on the basis of the arithmetical average of the indexes of three variables:

a) foreseen life expectancy, b) combined education index, which is the arithmetical average formed by: the literacy index of adults (over the age of 15) with weight 2 of the total index of registration (with weight 1) based on the coefficients of registration for the three education levels (the total coefficient of registration for the three education levels relates to the people between the ages of 7 and 24 and is formed by the ratio between the registered for a regular course of study of the three education levels and the total number of the people of the same age, c) Gross Domestic Product (in \$PPP).

comprehensive project – European Initiative for Common Indicators, of the European Environmental Commission (European Indicators for Blagoevgrad, 2002). During the implementation of the project, two groups of indicators were used: basic and supplementary. The basic ones include: satisfaction of citizens from the municipality, local contribution to the global climatic changes, local mobility and town transport, availability of public open spaces and local services, air quality. The group of supplementary indicators includes: trips of children from and to school, sustainable management of the local authorities and local business, noise pollution, sustainable use of land, use of products contributing to sustainability. These indicators are viewed as a new tool in the hands of the local authorities, the NGOs, the scientific community for a more precise identification of the problems of the town and taking adequate measures for their solving.

Of the assessment tools, SWOT-analysis is most frequently one used recently. It is applied chiefly in the national and local regional development strategies, plans and programmes that were under preparation for the last couple of years.

### **b) Types of measurement**

The most widely used procedure is the one for Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) (Environmental Protection Act, 2002). It is aimed at reflecting the environmental protection requirements as early as the creation of plans and projects in the sphere of those branches of economy that may have a potentially harmful impact on nature. This procedure is made compliant with the EU requirements, according to which preventive activity is a basic principle of environmental protection.

The Act also regulates clearly the procedure for court appeal the decisions taken with regard to EIA by the competent authorities – the Ministry of Environment and Water or the Regional Inspections of Environment and Water.

The participation of the public is mandatory and forms a substantial part of the EIA procedure in Bulgaria; the possibility for it to express its opinion with regard to the results of the EIA performed is also regulated as a legal one. This provides a possibility for the public to actually influence the making of this or that decision – with regard to the existing alternatives, proposing new alternatives, or in some cases even refusal to permit the implementation of the project or a partial stopping of projects in operation.

By means of the use of the human development index, through the annual reports on human development, the UNDP branch in Bulgaria examines the relation between the index and its components, on the one hand, and key social and economic changes at district and municipal level. Thus, for instance, in the 2002 report, an analysis is made of the relation of the economic component of the index (the gross domestic product per capita of the population) with the condition of investment, with unemployment, with the concentration of minorities, with migration and with the role of municipalities for the economic development of society. The second component of the index – the life expectancy, is examined through the prism of environmental, infrastructural and ethnic factors. The third component – the combined educational index, is examined in the light of the ethnic factor, the remoteness from the school and the economic situation. Thus a synthesized social and economic characterization of districts and municipalities is made, their strengths and their problems are delineated, and this is a reference point for the preparation of a more adequate regional policy at national and local level. The human development index is more and more used as a means for assessment and argumentation in a number of strategies, plans and programmes for the future development of the country.

In 2000, several Bulgarian cities and towns – Bourgas, Veliko Tarnovo and Troyan, were included in the Global Urban Observation Project, which was implemented in three different parts of the world. This project had as its task to observe and control the conditions and tendencies and to make the way for progress in the application of the Habitat Agenda, adopted in Istanbul in June 1996. Its aim is the creation of sustainable national and local structures for monitoring of progress of cities by means of city indicators and by using the results for improvement of the urban development policies. The indicators are arranged in several groups: shelter, social development and poverty eradication, environmental management, economic development, local governance, international cooperation.

### **c) Harmonisation**

The processes of harmonisation depend first and foremost on the state policy and the public attitudes to the problems of sustainable development. A decisive step along the way of harmonisation of methods and means for assessment of sustainable development, and in particular, of regional sustainable development, is the preparation of a National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the country as a whole and its territorial units. It should include a clear formulation of the basic concepts, main goals and ways and their achievement. Such a document would create the necessary preconditions both for integration of the existing ones and for inclusion of new indicators and methods of assessment. Essential for harmonisation is the maximally efficient utilization of the national research potential and the more active involvement in the dynamically developing European area of research.

## **9. Evaluation of regional sustainable development**

### **a) Experiences with regional sustainable development**

The problems of the sustainable development as a whole and the regional sustainable development in particular practically do not attract the attention of Bulgarian politicians and public. There is not a National Strategy for Sustainable Development. Certain strategies of regional sustainable development appearing recently lack not only a clear conception how to achieve their goals, but the necessary resources, too.

The negotiations for a possible Bulgarian membership in EU and some recently adopted acts and plans for the development of the State until 2006 to a great degree have led to the use of such terms as “sustainable development” and “regional sustainable development”. However they are used without being determined in any way. Defining these terms and developing a long-term National Strategy for Bulgarian sustainable development on this basis at national and regional levels is still ahead. This process requires wide public discussion including all stakeholders concerned. It is not likely for this discussion to be initiated soon. The main reason for this is politicians and citizens plan their activities only on a short-term basis. The numerous everyday social and economic problems make the people fight for their survival. For many years the sociological researches have shown that a very small number of people plan their life for a period longer than six months. For politicians this period is four years – the period between the regular national and local elections. In such circumstances it is practically impossible to draw people’s attention to a multi-plan and strategic concept of sustainable development. Despite the fact that in Bulgaria there are a lot of people who have the intellectual and educational potential to understand its essence and importance, our

everyday life makes it very difficult to motivate them to discuss it in detail and work on its practical implementation.

This explains why the projects related to the regional sustainable development are carried out usually without being linked to each other and to the real tendencies and sustainable development plans.

The situation described shows why the projects implemented with or without the support of the pre-accession Phare, ISPA and SAPARD programmes do not have a strong influence on the regional sustainable development. This also leads to the fact that these programmes being initially planned as an instrument of influence by EC and in the way of their application are not directly forwarded to the regional sustainable development.

The projects implemented with their support are no doubt very useful for the country. However, even if they are directly linked to the environment protection (as in some projects under ISPA or the cross-border Phare programme) they cannot lead the respective region into the sustainable development direction.

The ultimate centralization of power and resources does not stimulate the possibility for regional sustainable development. The insufficient resources and experience of most of the non-government organizations also contributes to this. Almost all Bulgarian business is very weak from the economic point of view. It usually plans its activity on a short-term basis and is not attracted by the possibility to coordinate its plans to the long-term solution of social and ecological problems.

In such conditions it is very difficult to work for the harmonization between the existing indicators and the methods of sustainable development evaluation. Neither the means of evaluation can be enriched with other methods successfully tried out in other fields of the social development.

## **b) Practical implications of regional sustainable development**

The practical results of the projects connected to the regional sustainable development rarely have a long-term influence on the life of the people on the respective territory. Often after the completion of the project its positive results (related to the environment protection and the positive changes in the people's means of living) sooner or later fades away. Due to the lack of sufficient resources, experience and motivation, it is difficult for the local citizens to use the positive inertia caused by the successful project. In the cases when the project is completed with recommendations for a change, the same factors prevent it.

## **c) General trade-offs**

The basic trade-offs are mainly oriented to the future and result from the need for the fastest possible economic growth and the necessity to protect and enrich the environment. Several points of contradiction can be outlined:

The first one is connected to the further intensive development of agriculture, forestry and tourism especially in the areas rich in biodiversity. These regions are usually characterized by the highest unemployment rate and the lowest standard of living. So far the development of these three sectors is at the expense of the environment.

The second controversial point is caused by the need to modernize and widen the transport infrastructure of the country. This way of development is very much encouraged by EU. So far this development does not take into account the long-term consequences for the environment. Additional problems may arise from the possible

establishment of oil pipelines through the country from Bourgas via Macedonia to an Albanian port and from Bourgas to Alexandroupolis in Greece.

The third controversial point is linked to the energy industry. It is one of the few sectors still profitable of the Bulgarian economy. At the same time the development of the atomic engineering and the electricity supply by using local kinds of coal make the ecological problems of national and international significance very difficult to solve.

The pressure put on the environment by the big towns is another important point of contradiction.

The State faces the need to find a compromise between the traditional purpose of the regional policy to reduce the differences between the regions (the argument of equality) and the purposes connected to the growth, which can be achieved most efficiently and quickly in the well-developed and adapting to the new social and economic conditions regions and centers (argument of growth).

All these problems need a strategic compromise subject to the sustainable development principles. The achievement of this aim is still ahead. However, the sooner it starts, the better it will be for the present and future generations.

#### **d) Top-down and bottom-up relations**

When carrying out the regional sustainable development projects the top-down approach is a lot more applicable.

The “outside - inside” approach turns out to be the most successful one for the country. In it one or more external for the region non-government (as usual foreign) organizations take the initiative to carry out the project. While working on it they can involve partners at regional and national level - state institutions, non-government organizations, research institutes, schools and universities.

Nevertheless, the regional sustainable development will not have a future perspective without initiating the “bottom-up” approach and receiving the active state support especially for the municipalities in long-term decline.

#### **e) Post-2006**

Bulgarian politicians and some of their EU colleagues often point out 01.01.2007 as the date when Bulgaria will be a full member of the European Communities. Bulgarian Government tries to conduct pre-accession negotiations in the most intensive and successful manner. Accepting the achievements of the EU law is also taken into consideration (National Programme of Accepting Achievements of EU law, 2001). Strategy for the participation of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Structure Funds and the Cohesion Fund of EU (2002) and Plan for coordination, control and realization of the strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Structure Funds and the Cohesion Fund of EU (2002) have also been worked out. They are necessary and useful measures for the possible full membership of the country in the EU.

These measures themselves are not sufficient to ensure that Bulgaria will be steadily oriented to sustainable development at national and regional levels. A National long-term Strategy for sustainable development should be worked out, implemented and adapted to the changing conditions. But the future of the EU strategy for its sustainable development including the place and the role of such countries as Bulgaria in this process will be far more important for the country. Without the long-term cooperation with the EU the sustainable development of our country will be just a good intention.

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