

EU Membership Dreams

For the last few years Bulgaria has been trying very hard to meet all the EU requirements so that it can access the organization in 2007. The efforts of the Bulgarian politicians are generally approved by the common people but everybody keeps asking one and the same question – will the accession of Bulgaria into the European Union be enough to make people stop migrating and stay in their own country?

The migration, also called 'working abroad' factor, is among the

greatest challenges Bulgarians are facing as a nation and individuals. Almost in every fifth family there is at least one relative working abroad in order to support financially the others. Close to 100 million euro is the amount sent by 185 million immigrants to their homes every year. In Spain alone there are more than 130 000 Bulgarian workers forming 10.9% of all 1.3 million foreigners working there. Among these almost 6 000 are staying and working in Spain without the proper documentation. At the same time each year

between 800 000 and 1.1 million young people leave for the EU countries for summer jobs, but at least 1/3 of them stay there, starting a new life. Experts warn that this is a considerable annual export of educated and qualified people of birth-giving age which has its negative consequences on the population growth and birth rates in the country.

Bulgarians look upon EU membership as a means of making their lives easier. Judging from the current situation in Spain we can only hope that soon people will come to work in Bulgaria rather than go abroad looking for new opportunities. With the considerable EU funding in different economical fields it will soon be possible for the government to supply low interest credits for students and young families as well as people living in the regions with bad demographic conditions. If such policy is to be undertaken there is not only the possibility of keeping young people in the country but also tempting many of the immigrants back to Bulgaria.

Tolerance

The European Centre of Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna, sponsored by the European Union, recently conducted a survey in tolerance among 25 000 people in all member and applying countries. Most of the citizens in the EU member countries do not approve immigration and every fifth of them prefers that there are no immigrants in their countries at all. Most Europeans believe that immigrants are the ones to take away jobs and bring up crime ratios thus making the countries less secure. Germans, Swiss and Austrians are estimated most xenophobic of all European nations. Among the new members of the EU Latvia and Estonia are extremely intolerant to immigrants.

Bulgaria is among the few countries (together with Poland and Rumania) with tolerant attitude towards immigrants and foreigners. Bulgaria is said to have always been an excellent example of religious and ethnical tolerance. It is very common for the Balkan area to see people of different nationalities and cultures living in one and the same country. But only in Bulgaria is such a co-existence a peaceful and friendly one. To give you just a few examples: it is very common for Muslims and Christians to celebrate together both religions holidays. What most foreigners find surprising is that people from different religions are all buried together in one and the same graveyard and very often side by side.

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Growing To Extinction

At the beginning of 2005 Bulgarian Minister without Portfolio Filiz Kusmenova announced that Bulgarian population has shrunk by 1.2 million people over the last 15 years. It was estimated that for the period 1991-2001 alone Bulgaria's population has dropped by 514 000 people.

Experts believe that this unfortunate data is due to two main reasons. First of all is the aging of the population as the number of Bulgarians aged above 65 is going up, while the number of children below 15 is going down. Data from the Bulgarian Social Ministry also showed that birth rate in the country has decreased by 8.3% over the past year which is the other significant cause. The actual birth

deliveries in 2003 were still less than the number of those in 1980. The same survey pointed out that half of the children born in Bulgaria last year were out of wedlock. The report pinned that percentage at 48.7. Experts commented that the tendency was linked to the growing number of love couples living like families but without marriage vows.

Probably that is the reason why pupils in Bulgaria have shrunk by half a million for the last year. A survey of the National Statistics Institute revealed that in school year 1990-1991 there have been about 1.86 million pupils and in 2004 there were just 1.4 million. At the same time the number of students in Bulgarian universities has grown

rapidly from 148 000 students in 1990 to 288 000 in 2005. The good news, according to the minister is that now there are many more well qualified teachers for Bulgarian children than 15 years ago-their number has grown from 20 000 (1990) to 122 000 (2005). So, we can all lay back and relax as our children will be well taught no matter how few they are!



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