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# **GEO-Working Papers**

"An economic and geographic analysis of Bulgarian - Portuguese foreign -- economic relations"

Slavi Dimitrov

SÉRIE INVESTIGAÇÃO 2007/11

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**Slavi Dimitrov** é Professor no Departamento de Geografia da Universidade de Veliko Turnovo (Bulgária) e encontra-se a finalizar uma dissertação de Doutoramento subordinada ao tema *Regional analysis of agriculture in Portugal*. Em 2005 efectuou duas estadias de investigação no N.I.G.P., sob a orientação da Profa. Doutora Paula Remoaldo. Deu, assim, continuidade ao seu trabalho científico sobre as relações comerciais entre a Bulgária e Portugal, realizando ainda diversas palestras e adquirindo formação na área dos Sistemas de Informação Geográfica.

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## An economic and geographic analysis of Bulgarian – Portuguese foreign - economic relations

Slavi Dimitrov<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract:

The extension of the European Union to the East and the forthcoming membership of Bulgaria in 2007 are sufficient reasons for the significance of the theme of this article. At first sight, the connections between Bulgaria and Portugal are remote; however, many similarities exist. Land area and population number are alike; although in different contexts they have a recent history of moving away from an authoritarian regime to democracy; and they are successfully trying to adapt to the Eurostructures. This article traces the development of diplomatic relations between the Bulgaria and Portugal, the recent increasing trade between them, and the basic goods involved in that trade. The author also investigates the existing contractual and legal basis which regulates their relations. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that the since political relations between Bulgaria and Portugal are excellent, trade between the two countries should evolve positively. In this respect, it is advantageous for Bulgaria to use the Portuguese experience in former Portuguese colonies, and likewise Portugal should use the Bulgarian experience in trade with the former Soviet Union states. A brief analysis of Portuguese investment in Bulgaria and the exchange of tourists between the two countries is also conducted.

 $\textbf{Key words} \hbox{: } European \ Union \ (EU), \ foreign \ trade, \ investment, \ tourism$ 

#### Resumo:

O alargamento da União Europeia para Este e a futura adesão da Bulgária em 2007 constituem razões suficientes para a importância do tema deste artigo. À primeira vista as ligações entre a Bulgária e Portugal são remotas; no entanto, existem muitas semelhanças entre estes países. A área

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e o número de habitantes são análogos, e apesar de contextos distintos, ambos os países têm uma história recente de uma passagem de um regime autoritário para uma democracia; ao mesmo tempo, tentam também adaptarse de forma bem sucedida às estruturas europeias. Este artigo esboça o desenvolvimento das relações entre a Bulgária e Portugal, a crescente troca comercial entre eles, e o tipo de mercadorias trocadas; o autor investiga ainda as bases legais e contratuais existentes que regulam estas mesmas relações. É prestada uma atenção particular para o facto uma evolução positiva nas relações entre os dois países poder resultar do facto das actuais relações bilaterais serem excelentes. A este respeito, é vantajoso para a Bulgária aprender com a experiência comercial presente de Portugal nas suas ex-colónias, e de forma análoga, da experiência da Bulgária com os estados da ex-USSR. É feita também uma breve análise do investimento português na Bulgária e do número de turistas entre os dois países.

Palavras-chave: União Europeia (EU), comércio externo, investimento, turismo

#### Foreign trade between Bulgaria and Portugal

Foreign-trade relations act as a balance in the system of national economies. Foreign trade, which stimulates the productivity in industry and agriculture, has a leading part in these relations and is a source of financial revenue. In the economic crisis associated with the transition period to a market economy in Bulgaria post-1989, foreign trade became a critical factor for improving the economic situation. It is through increasing exports that Bulgaria may pay foreign debts. Trade acts as an indicator of the complex processes within the national economy. It is locally dependent and reflects the peculiarities of the economy of different regions and contributes to their specialisation and adaptation to world markets. Moreover, trade and economic relations, which are a result of the distribution of the labour force, are an indicator of changes in the national economy.

So far, the issues related to geography in economic relations have been considered part of transportation problems and, in previous studies, economic relations have been perceived as a supplement to these problems. In the economic and geographic characteristics of agriculture and light industry, economic relations are analysed concerning the profit that can be received from some territorial structure.

During the last 10-15 years, Bulgarian economic relations have been the object of research and many scientific publications. Bulgarian economic integration into Western Europe has also been studied. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria, there has been very little economic-geographic research on Portugal. However, these studies should be highlighted:

- Analysis of Portuguese agrarian relations after the Revolution of 1974 [Karastoyanov, Kolev, 1975/1976];
- Economic and geographic characteristics of the Portuguese economy [Dermendzhiev, Doykov, 2000];
- Character of the Portuguese economic reform [Naama, 2000];
- Characteristic features of Portuguese agriculture and animal breeding [Dimitrov 2000, 2005];
- Economic and geographic characteristics of Portuguese economy [Dimitrov 2005].

As yet, there is still no analysis of the economic relations between Bulgaria and Portugal.

Economic relations and trade are consequence of other diverse relations and geographic location. These are becoming more important with increases in contemporary labour migrations, informational exchange (know-how, licenses, etc.), international tourism, and transportation.

There are three kinds of economic relations:

- Registration of commercial firms;
- Industrial and technology relations to improve industrial quality;
- Concerning production and consumption.

It is almost impossible to find an example in which the region of consumption coincides with that in which the commodity is produced, and obviously the use of market and trade-relations mechanisms provides for a better satisfaction of human needs. Bulgarian foreign trade reflects the connection between the Bulgarian economy and international markets. Profit is most important in the process of the formation of Bulgarian foreign-trade structure. That is why, it is very important for Bulgarian businesses to be well-informed about world regions and industries and their prospects for business.

The geographical location of Bulgaria is one of the main factors and advantages for intensifying foreign-trade relations. Bulgaria is close to the main European markets and within a good network of communications. Another important factor in international trade relations is the level of economic development and territorial distribution of the labor force of the countries. Very important are the concentration and specialization of

industries, the size of the internal market and the purchasing power of the population of each country. Last but not the least, is the political factor [Mihaylov, 1997].

The changes in East Europe after the end of the cold war influenced Bulgarian economy, too. The country is in a transition from dictatorship and planned economy to democracy and market economy. Due to this transition, Bulgaria had to change its foreign partners, which were the former Soviet Union and East-European countries. Now Bulgarian partners are mostly the European Union countries (56% of the exchange [Bulgaria, 2005]).

In 2004, Bulgaria traded with 199 countries (178 in 1996 and 113 in 1990). Bulgarian goods are exported to 173 countries, and goods are imported from 185 countries. There are 11,628 firms dealing with imports and 26,280 firms with exports (Foreign, 2005).

Irrespective of its distance from Bulgaria, Portugal has similarities regarding the territory, population, the history of an authoritarian regime in the past, the transition to democracy and economic development. Comparative analyses and Portuguese experience may help considerably the adaptation of Bulgaria to Euro-structures. Of course, processes of replication of the Portuguese experience are not desirable since there are very different geographic characteristics which require specific methods of organization and management of economy.

For centuries, Portugal has been engaged in a process of internationalization of its economy, showing interest primarily in Brazil and some African countries. Whereas Bulgaria often is called *the Gate to Asia*, Portugal is called *the Gate to Africa*. Irrespective of the fact that Portugal is a small country and does is not a powerful economic entity, due to its characteristic features in different aspects, it is a suitable and interesting partner for Bulgaria. The Portuguese possibilities of partnership and mediation and its experience in European integration and the adaptation to European requirements may be of great use to Bulgaria (Georgieva, 2003).

The first information about Bulgarian-Portuguese formal relations dates from 1893. By then, the Bulgarian diplomatic agency in Istanbul was informed that the Italian embassy in Bulgaria was entrusted with the task of defending Portuguese interests in this country. In 1918, the defence of these interests was entrusted to the Dutch embassy. The first information about a Portuguese minister plenipotentiary, accredited in Sofia (with a seat in Bucharest), dates from 1925. This is considered to have been the beginning of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Portugal.

Bulgaria opened a delegation in Lisbon on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1942, led by a minister plenipotentiary. In November 1944, the government of the *Fatherland Front* demanded the approval of a new minister plenipotentiary

in Portugal but it did not receive an answer. As a result, the staff of the Bulgarian embassy in Lisbon was recalled. At that time, the Yugoslav embassy took the defence of Bulgarian interests. In an official note, September 15<sup>th</sup> 1945 it is indicated as the suspension date of Bulgarian-Portuguese diplomatic relations. There were no official relations between the two countries until 1974. Months after the fall of the dictatorship in Portugal (April 25<sup>th</sup> 1974), in Paris, the diplomatic relations were restored between the two embassies (Milkov, 2004).

Political and economic contacts between Bulgaria and Portugal improved after the revolution of 1974. During the agrarian reform, in Portugal, similar cooperatives to those found in Bulgarian were founded, and Bulgarian experience in farming was studied and applied (Dimitrov, 2004). Democratic changes in Bulgaria after 1989 created the conditions for more active bilateral political relations, but did not lead to the expected improvement of trade and economic relations. In Bulgaria there are only 3 companies with 100% Portuguese capital, 4 Bulgarian-Portuguese firms and only one delegation is registered by *Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry*. Portugal is not in the list of the 30 most important investors in Bulgaria (Nozharova, 2002).

In the sphere of foreign trade, Portugal is a country which is very active and oriented to foreign markets. Although the EU countries are Portugal's main trade partners, there is a constant look for new markets and for developing the economy. In that regard, Portugal is very enthusiastic about improving relations with Central and Eastern European countries, especially Bulgaria.

Since the signing and coming into force of *the European Agreement* on Association of Bulgaria and its complementary protocols, the trade between Bulgaria and Portugal has been regulated by the established terms, alleviations and preferences to Bulgaria as an associated member of EU.

There are many treaties, signed between Bulgaria and Portugal:

- An Agreement on Mutual Protection of Investment, signed in1993;
- A Long-term Agreement, signed in 1975;
- A Long-term Agreement on Economic, Industrial, Science and technical Collaboration, signed in 1975;
- An European Agreement on Association of Bulgaria, coming into force on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1995;
- An Avoidance of Double Taxation Treaty, signed on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1995, ratified by the two countries;
- An Agreement on Collaboration in the Sphere of Tourism, signed on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1999 in Sofia during the visit of the prime minister António Guteres:

• An Agreement between Bulgaria and Portugal on the Mutual Employment of the Citizens of Both Countries, signed on September 26<sup>th</sup> 2002 during the visit of Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio in Bulgaria (coming into force at the end of 2003).

At the same time, the migration of Bulgarians to other countries has affected Portugal. The Bulgarian community there consists of 12000 people working in farming, building and services. Bulgarian people are accepted very well by the Portuguese and generally they are not part of the criminal quota. In 2001, in Lisbon, a Bulgarian orthodox church was sanctified, *Saint John of Rila*, and *A Bulgarian orthodox church community* was founded, which became an unifying centre for all Bulgarians in Portugal.

In Bulgaria, in the 90s, a department of Portuguese philology was established in the universities in Sofia and Veliko Turnovo and Portuguese language is studied in several schools in Sofia. A Portuguese language centre of the *Instituto Camões* was established, too. All this contributes to the cultural exchange between the two countries.

On the one hand, today, because Bulgaria is a full member of NATO and a forthcoming member of the EU, there is a potential for a new type of relations with Portugal. On the other hand, the Portuguese foreign economic policy, which has a firm orientation, may have a different approach to Bulgaria. Thus, the increasing collaboration between the two countries may be a fact.

On the background of very good political relations, economic relations between Bulgaria and Portugal are also advancing, although at a slower pace. By 2003, Bulgarian trade with Portugal was almost symbolic and Portuguese investments in Bulgaria were quite modest. Yet, there are possibilities of activating the economic relations between the two countries in the European Union after the new type of political relations has been established.

Recently, the trade between the two states has slightly increased. By 1999, the Bulgarian balance of trade was positive. Since that year it became negative (Serafimova, 1999). In 2004, Bulgarian exports to Portugal were only 0,15% (34<sup>th</sup> place) and imports were 0,27% (30<sup>th</sup>). The value of imports in 2004 was 38,6 million Euros while exports accounted for 15,2 million Euros (Table 1). As a partner to Bulgaria in the EU in 2004, Portugal was at the 12<sup>th</sup> place regarding exports and at the 14<sup>th</sup> regarding imports. In 2004, compared to 2003, Bulgarian imports from Portugal increased by 32% while export grew by 21%.

 Table 1 - Exchange of merchandise between Bulgaria and Portugal (million Euros)

Year	Exchange of	Export	Import	Balance
	merchandise			
1993	30,3	10,1	2,3	+7,8
1994	8,5	4,3	4,2	+0,1
1995	19,9	14,7	5,2	+9,5
1996	11,7	4,3	7,4	-3,2
1997	30,9	19,9	11,0	+9,0
1998	30,3	18,2	12,1	+6,1
1999	24,4	12,9	11,5	+1,4
2000	17,8	6,4	11,4	-5,0
2001	40,4	18,9	21,4	-2,5
2002	34,6	11,8	22,7	-10,8
2003	44,3	14,3	30,0	-15,7
2004	53,9	15,2	38,6	-23,4

Source: National Institute of Statistics

The structure of the Bulgarian exchange of merchandise with Portugal has been almost unchangeable lately. Bulgarian export consists primarily of raw materials and slightly processed goods (Figure 1), usually metals – since 1995 [Foreign, 2004].

Agri-Food
Chemistry
Skins / Wood / Paper
Textile / Vesture / Pants
Machine
Material Transport
Finished Diverse
0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Figure 1 - Structure for groups of products (%): Export

Source: National Institute of Statistics

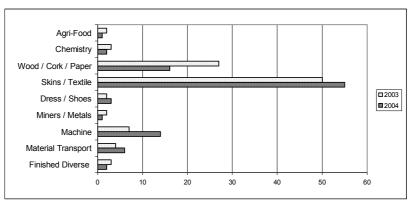


Figure 2 - Structure for groups of products (%): Import

Source: National Institute of Statistics

In the trade of agricultural products, the Bulgarian trade balance is positive. The main export goods are maize, wheat, wheat mixed with rye, barley, sunflower-seeds, raw or unprocessed tobacco, wine (227 000 bottles in 2004 – Table 2). In 2004 second in the export list is maize, followed by tobacco and foods.

Table 2 - Main Bulgarian export goods to Portuguese market, 2004

Exported goods	In million dollars	
Sheet iron products	3,4	
Ether, ether alcohol etc.	1,1	
Wheat and wheat mixed with rye	1,0	
Raw or unprocessed tobacco	0,5	
Electric boilers and water-heaters	0,4	
Craft-paper and craft-cardboard	0,4	
Sunflower-seeds	0,3	

Source: National Institute of Statistics

Bulgarian imports from Portugal are not diverse, either. 70% of it consists of agglomerated cork, processed cork, and cork articles (the firms *Amorim and Irmão*, *Subercor* – Table 3). This tendency is stable, for the time being. After cork, the import list contains some industrial goods as cotton materials, shoes, parts of shoes, etc. The import of wine is 15-30 000 bottles per year (primarily of the brand *Porto*).

Table 3 - Main Portuguese goods imported to Bulgaria, 2004

Imported goods	In million dollars	
Boards, furniture	4,9	
Materials of synthetic and staple fabrics	4,7	
Cotton materials	4,4	
Materials of wool	2,5	
Agglomerated cork	1,6	
Products of natural cork	1,4	
Vehicles for transporting goods	0,9	

Source: National Institute of Statistics

There are possibilities to diversify Bulgarian-Portuguese exchange of merchandise by exporting to Portugal and importing from it more industrial and machine-building products. Portuguese investment in Bulgaria is insignificant. Its value for the period 1996 – 2004 amounts to 5,35 million US dollars. Mainly, it is in the cork, wine and shoes industries and in the financial and crediting spheres. The major investment is made by the firm *Vinprom – Servise – Cork* in its workshop in the village of Nadarevo, in the region of Turgovishte (721 000 dollars).

Bulgaria should attract the interest of Portuguese investors in the sphere of agriculture (especially vine-growing). Portuguese contractors have shown interest in the Bulgarian food-processing industry – tobacco, cigarettes, canned fish products; and in light industry – materials, fabrics, clothing. They are interested, too, in the conditions in which they may invest, buy land, build, etc. The main Portuguese firms, which have demonstrated an interest are *Banco Espírito Santo* and *Banco Português de Investimento*; in the sphere of tourism and hotel-keeping – *Grupo Pestana*. Of great importance is the established *Special fund of internalization of Portuguese firms*, which helps Portuguese investors enter foreign countries.

On March 29<sup>th</sup> 2005, in Sofia, the contract of the *Trakija* highway was signed. The concession was given to the Bulgarian – Portuguese company *Trakija highway*. 49% of it belongs to the state firms *Technoexport* and *Avtomafistrali* (*Highways*). The other 51% is divided between the Portuguese companies *MSF* – *Moniz da Maia*, *Serra* and *Fortunato Empreiteiros*, *Lena Engenharia e Construções* and *Somague Concessões e Serviços SA*. According to *The Economist*, this contract, which is valued at 700 million Euro, is the largest infrastructure project on the Balkan Peninsula.

An important aspect of Bulgaria's collaboration with Portugal is the possibility of teamwork in other countries. The Portuguese have suggested that many times. They propose:

- Mutual trade on the markets of the former Soviet Union, using Bulgarian experience. This could happen through mutual projects of investment and participation in auctions. After a Portuguese firm has been profitably employed, it will involve Bulgarian partners in the work;
- Mutual trade on markets in former Portuguese colonies in Africa (Angola, Mozambique), using the positions of Portuguese firms and also Bulgarian experience in these countries (Dimitrov, 2004]).

The possibilities of collaboration in the sphere of tourism are significant but still not used enough. On March 30<sup>th</sup> 1999, in Sofia, a new agreement on collaboration in these sphere was signed which replaced the old one of 1977. Overall, the number of Portuguese tourists in Bulgaria is significantly low. In the period 1991 – 1999 it was 8 725. Of them, 1 870 visited the country in 1998. In 2002, 2 000 Portuguese citizens visited Bulgaria and in 2003 their number increased to 2 093. This is a rise of 4,7%. In September 2004, the number of Portuguese tourists was 2 174. This is a rise of 68 % compared to the same period of the preceding year. The great majority of tourists come on group package holidays to the Black Sea coast, or the winter resorts. The biggest complexes on the Black Sea coast are Slunchev Briag, Zlatni Piasatsi, Albena, St Konstantin, Duni, Eleni and in the mountains - Borovets, Vitosha and Pamporovo.

During the 90s, the number of Bulgarian tourists who visited Portugal was insignificant. In 2003, 5445 Bulgarian citizens visited Portugal. A year later this number was 8 830 (a rise of 62%), but mainly due to the European football championship and the participation of the Bulgarian national team in it.

As a concluding remark, attention should be drawn to the fact that, irrespective of the rise or fall in the exchange of goods between Bulgaria and Portugal, this exchange is very low and does not utilise the potential of the economies of the two countries. The good relations between Bulgaria and Portugal and the Bulgarian membership of the EU should contribute to a better economic and cultural collaboration between these countries.

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