

The position of the capital cities and urban agglomerations in the system of classification of territorial units for statistics

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Abstract: The study aims at outlining the position of the capital cities and urban agglomerations within the System of the classification of territorial units for statistical purposes used in the European Union. Eurostat data for the different territorial units included in the NUTS 1, NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 levels of the classification is analyzed. The emphasis is on the comparison of the Bulgarian capital Sofia to the capitals of countries comparable to Bulgaria by population and territory and by time of accession to the EU. Conclusions related to the discussion on the feasibility of separating a metropolitan region at NUTS 2 level were made.

Keywords: capital city, urban agglomeration, classification of territorial units for statistics, region, European Union.

Мястото на столичните градове и градски агломерации в системата на класификацията на териториалните единици за статистически цели

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Резюме: Изследването цели да очертае мястото на столичните градове и градски агломерации в системата на класификацията на териториалните единици за статистически цели, използвана в Европейския съюз. Анализирани са данните на Евростат за различните териториални единици, обхванати от класификацията на нива NUTS 1, NUTS 2 и NUTS 3. Акцентът е поставен върху сравнението на българската столица София със столиците на страни, съпоставими с България по население и територия и по време на присъединяването им към ЕС. Направени са изводи, свързани с дискуссионния въпрос за целесъобразността от обособяване на столичен регион на ниво NUTS 2.

Ключови думи: столичен град, градска агломерация, класификация на териториалните единици за статистически цели, регион, Европейски съюз.

Introduction

A problem of the present day occupying the public attention in our country is the forthcoming change in the range of the territorial units for statistical purposes in Bulgaria, initiated and proposed for public discussion by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. One of the most discussed issues is whether the capital city Sofia should be established into a separate NUTS 2 level region, or should remain part of a region that has a larger number of population and territory. There are various arguments in both directions but a question often asked is: *How is this problem solved in other EU countries?*

The present study **aims** at outlining the position of the capital cities and urban agglomerations within the System of the classification of territorial units for statistical purposes used in the European Union. The emphasis is on the comparison of the Bulgarian capital Sofia to the capitals of countries comparable to Bulgaria by population and territory and by time of accession to the EU (after 2000). These include a number of Central and Eastern European countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Croatia (Table 1).

Methods and data

The main method in the study is the comparative analysis. We used data which was published in the web sites of the European Commission and Bulgarian official institutions –the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the National Statistical Institute.

Results

The NUTS classification aims at ensuring the comparability of the regions in the EU countries when planning the measures and programs for the implementation of the common policies of the Union. Population size has been adopted as a key indicator of comparability. According to Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003, the classification used in the EU includes 5 levels of territorial units:

- NUTS 0 – countries;
- NUTS 1 – large regions/parts of a country (number of the population from 3mln to 7 mln);
- NUTS 2 – medium-sized regions (population from 800,000 to 3 mln);
- NUTS 3 – small regions/cities (population from 150,000 to 800,000)
- LAU 1 – a group of municipalities
- LAU 2 – municipalities

The current Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (after the accession of Croatia in 2013 and before Brexit in 2019) has been valid since 1 January 2018 and includes 28 NUTS level 0 regions, 104 NUTS 1 regions, 281 NUTS 2 regions and 1348 NUTS 3 regions. (NUTS maps (2018); NUTS 2016 classification (2018) Thirteen countries with a small number of population have a status of territorial units at NUTS 1 level. Separate parts of the other 15 countries have the same status – including the metropolitan agglomerations in the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Germany, whose population significantly exceeds the lower threshold of 3 million citizens. In Bulgaria the ongoing process of population decline brings the further existence of two NUTS 1 territorial units in question (BG01 North and South-East Bulgaria and BG02 South-West and South Central Bulgaria). Those units are used only for statistical purposes and are not directly related to the regional policies or other policies of the EU and the member states.

In contrast, the NUTS 2 statistical units, called planning regions, are some of the main objectives of the European regional policy aimed at achieving sustainable and balanced development and reducing the socio-economic and territorial disparities. In Bulgaria there are 6 of them: North-West, North Central, North-East, South-West, South Central and South-East. A seven-year regional development plan is developed for each planning region. The main objective of the regional development plans is the achievement of sustainable growth. They channel the direction of financial resources to the NUTS 2 level regions according to the scope and the specifics of the operational programs which are being implemented during the period.

The NUTS 3 statistical units, called level 3 regions, are also considered a territorial basis for the European and national policies for regional development. In Bulgaria, these are the 28 administrative districts. The state policy at this level is carried out by the district governors and is implemented through the regional development strategies.

In the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, the dominance of the metropolitan cities and agglomerations over the other centers is very pronounced. They concentrate up to 20% of the population and up to 40-50% of the GDP of those countries. In the metropolitan regions of Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland the GDP per capita is more than twice higher than the average for the respective country (Figure 1). (Dijkstra, 2009)

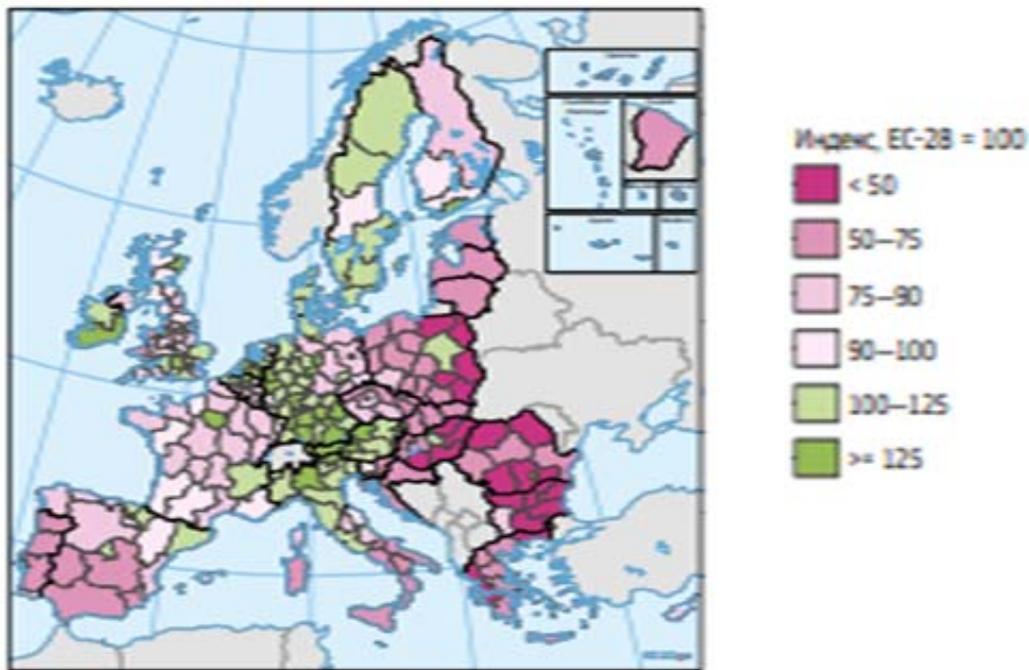


Figure 1. GDP per capita by NUTS 2 regions, 2015

Retrieved 2018 from http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr_bg.pdf.
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Unfortunately, the contrast in Bulgaria is very strong. NSI data for 2016 show that the GDP per capita in the South-West region reaches BGN 21,300, with GDP per capita of BGN 13,200 for the country. The values for the other five regions are in the range from BGN 8,000 in the North-West region to BGN 11,600 in the South-East (Figure 2).

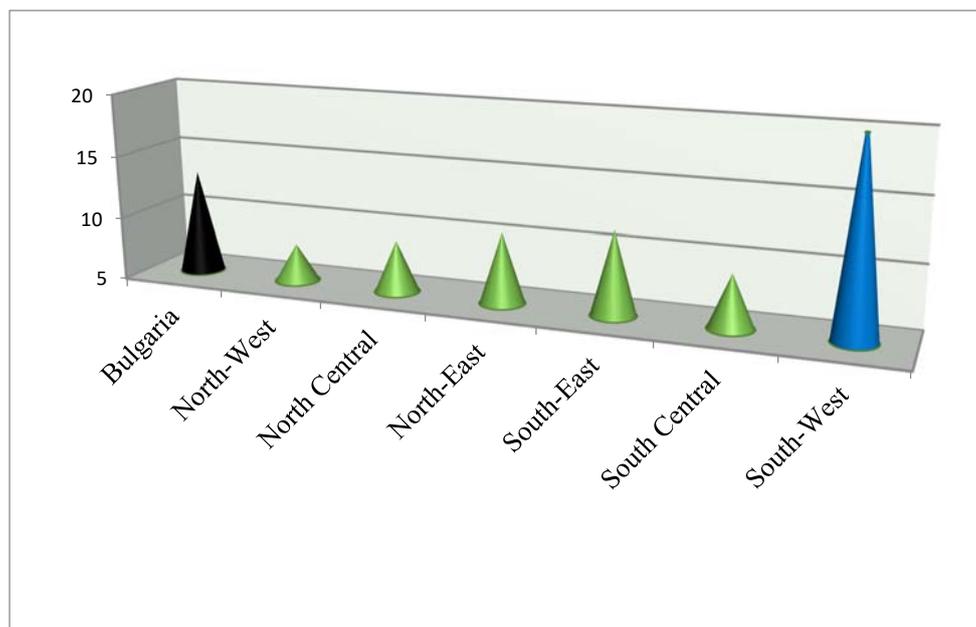


Figure 2. GDP per capita in BGN (thousands) by regions in Bulgaria, 2016

Retrieved 2018 from <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/2215/бвн-регионално-ниво>. Copyright 2016 by National Statistical Institute

The more detailed analysis carried out at NUTS 3 level (administrative districts) shows that except Sofia City District (BGN 28,500) and Sofia Region (BGN 13,200), the other three districts in the South-West Region are also at a lower level than the average for the country with values from BGN 6,900 for Pernik District up to BGN 8,200 for Blagoevgrad District. (GDP and GVA by economic sectors and regions, 2016) This means that the high values of the capital “blur” the situation in the South-West region as a whole and conceal the large intra-regional differences which are not that pronounced in the other regions. From this point of view the establishment of Sofia into a separate metropolitan region at NUTS 2 level during the forthcoming change in the range of the territorial units for statistical purposes is justified.

Let us get back to the question from the introduction: How is this problem solved in other EU countries? Not in the whole European Union but in the seven countries in Central and Eastern Europe we selected for comparison. With the exception of the capitals of Slovakia - Bratislava, and Slovenia - Ljubljana, the number of the population in the other metropolitan agglomerations meets the NUTS 2 quantitative criterion (from 800,000 to 3 mln). However, only the metropolitan regions in the Czech Republic (Prague Region) and Romania (Bucharest - Ilfov Region) have such status (fig. 4 – fig. 7). At the same time, the metropolitan regions of Warsaw, Budapest, Zagreb and Sofia, which have a similar number of population to Bucharest and Prague, are territorial units at NUTS 3 level, like the smaller Bratislava and Ljubljana. (Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27, 2011) It seems that the approach of these countries to the problem is not the same and each of them has sought a solution of its own. The more general case which applies to Bulgaria as well is that the metropolitan region is not differentiated at NUTS 2 level (Table 1).



Figure 3. БЪЛГАРИЯ - NUTS level 2

Source: Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union



Figure 4. БЪЛГАРИЯ - NUTS level 3

Source: Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union

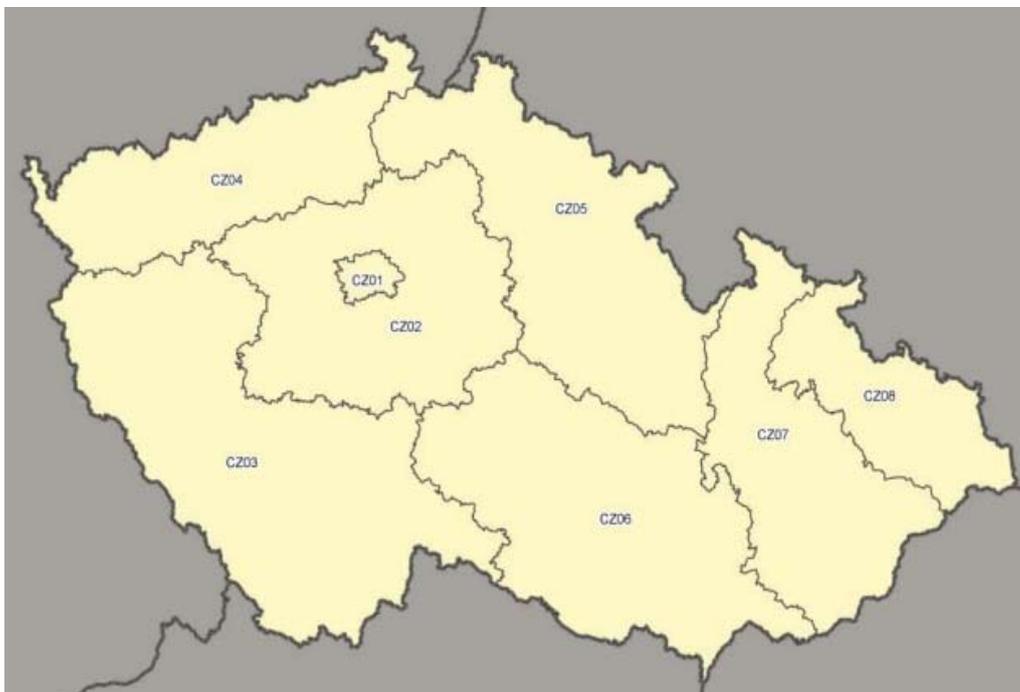


Figure 5. ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA – NUTS level 2

Source: Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union



Figure 6. ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA – NUTS level 3

Source: Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union



Figure 7. ROMÂNIA – NUTS level 2

Source: Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union



Figure 8. ROMÂNIA – NUTS level 3

Source: *Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union*

Table 1. Territorial units for statistical purposes at different levels which include the capitals of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe

Country	Unit	Code / level
БЪЛГАРИЯ	Югозападен регион София (столица)	BG41 - NUTS 2 BG411 - NUTS 3
ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA	Praha Hlavní město Praha	CZ01 - NUTS 2 CZ010 - NUTS 3
MAGYARORSZÁG	KÖZÉP-MAGYARORSZÁG Közép-Magyarország Budapest Pest	HU1 - NUTS 1 HU10 – NUTS 2 HU101- NUTS 3 HU102 - NUTS 3
POLSKA	REGION CENTRALNY Mazowieckie Miasto Warszawa Warszawski-wschodni Warszawski-zachodni	PL1 - NUTS 1 PL12 – NUTS 2 PL127- NUTS 3 PL129- NUTS 3 PL12A- NUTS 3
ROMÂNIA	MACROREGIUNEA TREI București – Ilfov București	RO1 - NUTS 1 RO32 – NUTS 2 RO321- NUTS 3
SLOVENSKO	Bratislavský kraj Bratislavský kraj	SK01 – NUTS 2 SK010 - NUTS 3
SLOVENIJA	Zahodna Slovenija Osrednjeslovenska (with Ljubljana)	SL02 – NUTS 2 SL021 - NUTS 3
HRVATSKA	Kontinentalna Hrvatska Grad Zagreb Zagrebačka županija	HR04 – NUTS 2 HR041 – NUTS 3 HR042 - NUTS 3

Source: *The data in the table is adapted from Regions in the European Union. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NUTS 2010/EU-27. 2011 edition. Eurostat. European Commission. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. Retrieved 2018 from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5916917/KS-RA-11-011-EN.PDF>. Copyright 2011 by European Union*

Conclusion

Whichever approach Bulgaria chooses - to establish a metropolitan region at level 2 or not, it has to do much more than what has been done so far to clearly define its regional policy objectives and to effectively use the means for their realization.

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