



SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**“HORIZONTAL POLICIES IN THE
BULGARIAN CONTEXT”**

ABSTRACT

OF A DISSERTATION FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND
SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD 3.3.
POLITICAL SCIENCES, DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

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The dissertation work is a total of 195 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The text contains 12 tables and 16 graphs. The bibliography comprises a total of 119 sources, including: 85 scientific publications, 11 regulatory acts and other acts of state authorities, 14 strategic and program documents, and 9 internet portals and websites. Of these sources, 85 are in English and 34 are in Bulgarian.

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I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

Relevance and importance

The formation of contemporary society is accompanied by a series of changes in the nature of public administration, expectations towards public authorities, and communication between the state sector, citizens, and businesses. In the context of dynamic social, political, and economic changes, the requirements for the activities of the public sector increasingly emphasize a striving for efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency. Additionally, an expansion of the range of immediate public issues is observed, characterized by an increasingly complex nature. Within the field of management sciences, research into the nature and dynamics of public policy development has deepened in the last decades. The primary goal is directed towards seeking more effective ways to address public issues.

Government authorities adhere to democratic standards in exercising power, including in the process of formulating and implementing policies. Executive authorities are not perceived as the sole expression of public interest. Representative groups with diverse interests from the non-governmental sector and business participate as stakeholders in defining problems, discussing potential solutions, and overseeing the activities of the authorities. The expansion of the circle of subjects participating in these processes further complicates the governance environment.

Against the backdrop of all these characteristics of public administration and policies, horizontal governance becomes a term gaining popularity as a means to encourage efficiency and effectiveness. It is reflected in approaches to the development and implementation of public policies, problem-solving in the public sphere, the provision of public services, and managerial practices. The concept is considered in some cases as a characteristic of public administration and in others as a process occurring within the executive authority system. Despite the accumulated knowledge and practices regarding horizontal policies, there are still deficits in understandings and the essence of the concept. In the realm of work on horizontal policies, there are gaps in fundamental elements that directly impact the entire policy cycle. Formulating achievable goals that affect almost all sectoral policies, their coordinated implementation by multiple institutional participants, and generating impacts, results, and effects affecting different spheres of public life pose a serious scientific and practical challenge.

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The changes initiated in the early 1990s in Bulgaria, marking the transition to a market economy and political system, necessitated the initiation of numerous reforms across almost all spheres of public administration. The major political, economic, and social transformations faced by the country during this period are reflected in the demographic condition of the population, the dynamics of demographic trends, and the state policy in this area. In a rapidly changing and dynamic environment, the development of demographic policy emerges as a prominent theme not only in the administrative space but also in society as a whole, given that

the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the population significantly influence the overall development of the country.

By the beginning of the 21st century, Bulgaria has experienced a sustained negative demographic trend. All major demographic indicators show a significant decline, characterized by a decrease in birth rates combined with an increase in mortality and intensified internal and external migration, which substantially affects the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the population. Consequently, the structure and territorial distribution of the population directly impact the development and management of almost all public sectors and areas.

The choice of a specific horizontal policy (demographic) is dictated by the circumstances that it embodies a complex nature and vividly illustrates its close connection with numerous sectors of public governance and affected societal groups. Its formulation and implementation are linked to the agenda, issues, decisions made, and outcomes of at least several other policies. The dynamics of its development are influenced by the state of the sectors associated with it, with which it has direct connections. On the other hand, sectoral policies impact demographic policy and the issues it must address through their goals, achieved results, and their consequences.

In this context, there is a need to deepen the coordination of public organizations with a view to the nature of public problems. The functional spheres of competence and authorities of state administrative structures are formally differentiated. In certain cases, optimal satisfaction of the needs and requirements of citizens and their organizations is hindered. Administrative practice necessitates the consideration of interdependencies between structures, management areas, policies, etc. However, executive authority organizations are structured based on areas of competence, hierarchy, and strict delineation of authorities and responsibilities. Communication processes continue to be saturated with vertical dependencies and hierarchical relationships. The sectoral approach to designing and managing policies and programs is widely embraced. At the same time, the management environment is more complex, diversified, and based on the interdependence of issues.

The relevance of the topic arises not only from the need for research on horizontal policies in Bulgaria but also from the consistently established negative trends in the field of demographic policy. Through the dissertation work, an attempt has been made to explore the Bulgarian experience in formulating and implementing horizontal policies. Identifying problematic elements in these processes and analyzing the assumptions that give rise to them in this type of policy has the potential to enrich existing knowledge about the development of

public policy practices in Bulgaria. Examining demographic policy through the lens of its characteristics as a horizontal policy helps identify shortcomings specific to this policy. On this basis, opportunities are provided to define optimal solutions for streamlining the policy process and increasing its effectiveness – essential considerations for addressing demographic trends and the outcomes of policy in the country.

Subject and object

The subject of the current work is horizontal policies, which are addressed through the necessities and challenges inherent in their formulation and implementation within the Bulgarian administrative context. The focus of the dissertation is on demographic policy in contemporary Bulgaria, with a primary emphasis on deficiencies in its development and execution, along with strategies for mitigating them.

Goals

The main goal of this work is to investigate the process of formulating and implementing horizontal policies within the framework of the Bulgarian public management system, focusing on the example of demographic policy in the country during the period 2001-2020. To achieve this primary objective, three specific goals have been formulated:

1. To present and analyze the theoretical framework of horizontal policies, outlining their key characteristics and the factors influencing this type of policy.
2. To present and analyze the concept of "horizontal policies," the capacity for their implementation in Bulgaria, and the factors influencing this process.
3. To explore the planning and implementation process of demographic policy in the country during the period 2001-2020, with the aim of highlighting the manifested features in the national context, identifying deficiencies, and proposing potential adaptations of practices to enhance effectiveness.

The period 2001-2020 has been chosen because it provides a sufficiently long time interval to trace the dynamics of the development of the public management system in Bulgaria, particularly changes in practices related to horizontal policies. During this period, significant events occur that change and influence the governance system and the paradigm of public policies, such as the country's accession to the EU, deepening integration processes within the

multi-level governance system, the development of capacity, and the application of modern requirements to the work of state bodies and public policies.

Regarding demographic policy, it should be noted that demographic trends are shaped by long-established factors in the external environment and the impacts of public policies. This necessitates a sufficiently long time period for the purposes of the dissertation, allowing the identification of trends and practices of paramount importance for the accurate examination of horizontal policies in the country and demographic policy, in particular.

Functions

The two main functions of the dissertation work are descriptive and functional-analytical. The first function involves covering the theoretical framework for horizontal policies, which subsequently serves for a subsequent assessment of manifestations (presence or absence) of the identified critical elements for horizontal policies in Bulgaria and specifically, demographic policy, as identified in scientific research and literature. It is also manifested in the systematization of understandings regarding horizontal policies and the essence of demographic policy in Bulgaria during the considered period. Regarding the second function, the information created through the research methodology is subjected to systematic analysis to identify relationships between individual elements of the studied policy. The main analytical findings about the nature of the investigated horizontal policy (demographic policy) serve as a basis for formulating recommendations to improve the policy process and its constituent elements.

Research Questions

To achieve the specified goals, fundamental research questions have been defined, which are further decomposed during the course of the research.

1. What are the characteristics of horizontal policies?
2. How does the concept of "horizontal policies" enter the Bulgarian public management system?
3. Why is demographic policy defined as a horizontal policy?
4. What are the deficits in the Bulgarian management system regarding the planning and implementation of horizontal policies?

5. Which factors have the greatest influence on the cycle of horizontal policies in Bulgaria?
6. How does the process of formulating demographic policy unfold at the theoretical and practical levels?
7. What is the significance of coordinating participants in the process of formulating and implementing policy, and through what mechanisms is it realized?
8. Who are the main participants, and what is their role at each stage of the policy?
9. What approach is chosen to adapt demographic policy and the sectoral policies directly associated with it?
10. What changes can be introduced to promote the effectiveness and efficiency of demographic policy?

Tasks

To achieve each of the specific objectives throughout the research, the following research tasks have been outlined:

1. Clarifying the genesis of the concept of "horizontal policies."
2. Presenting the main understandings and characteristics of horizontal policies and deriving a working concept for the purposes of the dissertation.
3. Analyzing the key elements of horizontality in public management – coordination, policy adaptation, policy integration.
4. Analyzing demographic policy and its "horizontal essence."
5. Investigating the main factors mediating the introduction of the concept of "public policies" and specifically "horizontal policies" into the Bulgarian administrative system.
6. Deriving key characteristics of the management system that influence the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies in Bulgaria.
7. Identifying and analyzing deficits in working on horizontal policies in the Bulgarian administration.
8. Analyzing the processes of formulating and implementing demographic policy in Bulgaria.
9. Investigating the institutional coordination mechanisms and policy networks.
10. Analyzing key strategic documents in the field of demographic policy to identify a model for adapting sectoral and horizontal policies.
11. Formulating recommendations to improve the policy process based on the identified specifics in Bulgarian conditions.

Thesis

The process of formulating and implementing horizontal policies in Bulgaria is centralized, with limited participation of non-governmental participants, ineffective coordination among key participants in the process, and weak adaptation of the objectives of horizontal policies to the sectors with which they are directly linked.

- In administrative practice, there is no unified understanding of horizontal policies in Bulgaria, despite the increased use of the concept.
- The main problematic elements in the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies in the country are associated with ineffective coordination between administrative structures, lack of communication and information exchange, shortcomings in formulating common goals and priorities for all participants, and the adaptation of sectoral and horizontal policies.
- Although institutional coordination mechanisms have been established, their practical operation is weak and does not support the coherence of horizontal and sectoral policies.
- The effectiveness of the process of formulating and implementing the examined horizontal policy is significantly influenced by informal rules, practices, and a culture of cooperation and interaction between institutional and non-institutional actors in the policy cycle.

Research Results

The anticipated research results include:

1. Identification of current issues and trends in the field of horizontal policies at a theoretical level.
2. Examination of the characteristics of Bulgarian practices in the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies – factors in the process, key problems, and dependencies.
3. Investigation and definition of approaches to formulating and implementing demographic policy in Bulgaria.
4. Analysis of the process and forms of coordination among participants in the formulation and execution of policies.
5. Identification of the model for adapting horizontal and sectoral policies in demographic policy in Bulgaria during the examined period.

6. Formulation and evaluation of options for improving the process of formulating and executing policy objectives.

Research Methods

To achieve the set objectives and tasks, a combination of information gathering methods was employed. The primary applied method was desk research, including a survey among 351 representatives of specialized administration in central structures of the executive branch engaged in formulating and implementing horizontal policies in Bulgaria, in-depth interviews with 14 representatives from the state administration, non-governmental organizations, and private research/consulting agencies, and a case study.

Analysis Methods

For the analysis of the gathered qualitative information, content analysis, analysis using the Theory of Change method, stakeholder analysis, and comparative analysis were employed. Descriptive analysis, analysis of one-dimensional and two-dimensional distributions, and secondary data analysis were applied to analyze the gathered quantitative information.

Limitations

The limitations of the work are associated with both the scope of demographic policy and its complex nature. It involves numerous institutional representatives and public groups, is tied to various sectoral policies, and affects different levels of governance (strategic, tactical, operational). For this reason, it is not possible to cover all directions of demographic policy; instead, basic sectors and policies with the strongest interaction, allowing for the generalization of the main manifested characteristics of the policy, have been selected.

The conducted analysis and the recommendations made within the dissertation primarily pertain to demographic policy in Bulgaria during the period 2001-2020. The research methodology is tailored to the specifically chosen policy and the defined period of study. Directly applying them to other policies, political systems, or periods requires additional verification.

II. EXPOSITION OF THE DISSERTATION

1. CHAPTER 1: PUBLIC POLICIES AND HORIZONTAL MANAGEMENT. THEORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT HORIZONTALITY IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Emergence of the Concept of horizontality in public governance

The shaping of modern society has been accompanied by numerous changes in the nature of public administration, expectations towards public authorities, and communication among various stakeholders in the policymaking process: the government sector, citizens, and businesses. In the context of dynamic social, political, and economic changes, the demands on the public sector increasingly emphasize efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency. Concurrently, there is an expansion of immediate public issues characterized by a more complex nature.

During the 1980s, new socio-economic relations began to evolve in the public sphere, directly influencing the conceptual framework of governance. The ideas of New Public Management (NPM)¹ started to be incorporated into administrative practices. The goal of NPM is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services by applying managerial principles from the private sector. Under the influence of NPM reforms, the public sector aimed at decentralizing management, borrowing from market logic and orientation by introducing market mechanisms to measure results, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the results-based public sector, and adopting a "customer-oriented" approach by outsourcing specific functions to external providers. During this decade, the term "new public policy" became widespread.

The implementation of New Public Management in practice created challenges for public administration. Based on the works of researchers such as B. Guy Peters², Bakvis and Juliet³, Christensen and Laegreid⁴, the main negative manifestations resulting from practices in line with New Public Management have been identified. They are primarily associated with strong fragmentation of the administrative system, inconsistency in policies, programs,

¹ Маринов. Ал. Увод в публичната администрация. (2012). Флорир., стр. 120 – 124 [Marinov. Al. Uvod v publichnata administratsia. (2012). Flyorir., str. 120 – 124]

² Peters. B. Guy . The Future of Governing: Four Emerging Models. (2001). University Press of Kansas

³ Bakvis, H. & Juillet, L. The Horizontal Challenge: Line Departments, Central Agencies and Leadership. (2004)

⁴ Christensen, T., P. Laegreid. Democracy and administrative policy: contrasting elements of New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM. (2011). Cambridge University Press

projects, and services, work on different priorities and goals, competition for resources, an excessive focus on efficiency, and other issues outlined in scientific studies.

Alongside this, contemporary challenges are complex and multifaceted. Addressing these problems requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that transcends the boundaries of individual sectors. There is also interconnectedness between different areas of public policies. To address the complex policy issues, there arises a need for holistic and sustainable development goals that optimally satisfy the needs of citizens. The circumstances mediating the pronounced trend towards "horizontality"⁵ in public administration and governance are associated with the fact that traditional hierarchical models are giving way to network forms and increased collaboration between administrative structures, non-governmental organizations, business organizations, and other stakeholders. Given that the sectoral approach in public policies cannot find suitable solutions to interconnected problems, new types of requirements and expectations emerge for public authorities. Therefore, the need for introducing horizontality in management comes to the forefront in both scientific and practical debates, focusing on horizontal policies.

Key Ideas and Understandings of horizontality

Horizontality in public management is a comprehensive collective term that encompasses various approaches to the development and implementation of public policies, problem-solving in the public sphere, provision of public services, and administrative practices. In some cases, the concept is considered a characteristic of public administration, while in others, it is viewed as a process taking place within the executive branch system. It affects and is realized within an organization among its constituent parts, between independent structures of the same order, across different levels of management, as well as between the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. Horizontality replaces hierarchical management and centralization with cooperation, collaboration, coordination, shared responsibility for decisions and outcomes, and a willingness to work through consensus.

Based on all the examined positions and descriptions of the concept, several fundamental propositions form the foundational framework for the research. Non-hierarchical structures in management, including planning and implementation of public policies, are

⁵ Bakvis, H. & Juillet, L. (2004). *The Horizontal Challenge: Line Departments, Central Agencies and Leadership*.

distinctive. Horizontal management contrasts with the "vertical" power structure, where decisions regarding policy development and service implementation are made in a centralized manner. In the horizontal approach, issues are addressed by participants who collaborate and share power and responsibility. However, in government, horizontal initiatives cannot replace or function without final review and approval by a specific administrative structure. The effective formulation and implementation of horizontal policies primarily rely on partnerships among participants, overlooking potential competition between them for resources, representation, vision for policy implementation, and preferences for their own sector. In these conditions, coordination becomes of paramount importance.

Sectoral and horizontal policies

Sectoral and horizontal policies exhibit differences when compared across several key elements of policies. In this dissertation, the distinctions manifest in terms of the scope of each type of policy, coordination and collaboration in the policy cycle, goal-setting processes, the types of problems they aim to address, and adaptability to the managerial environment.

Building on existing understandings of sectoral policies, it can be generalized that they refer to a set of government measures, strategies, and initiatives specifically designed to address problems and promote development within a specific portion of the public sphere regulated and governed by public authorities according to established norms and practices. Sectoral policies focus on the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of a specific sector, aiming to enhance the results, competitiveness, and sustainability of the target sector.

The concept of horizontal policies emerged in response to the recognition that many public challenges and problems are complex, interconnected, and cannot be effectively addressed within the confines of traditional sectoral approaches. The term "horizontal policies" refers to strategies and initiatives that span different sectors and levels of management to achieve integrated and coordinated solutions to multifaceted problems.

A horizontal policy is one that directly influences the development of individual sectors through its impact within its designated sphere. The reverse influence is also valid. The outcomes of horizontal policies are achieved through activities and measures taken as part of sectoral policies, to which they are invariably linked. In this way, sectoral policies with horizontal impact are distinguished. In such policies, the various areas managed by the responsible institutions undergo synchronized action to achieve a common result. Horizontal

and sectoral policies are linked by the result, which cannot be achieved through independent intervention in a single sector alone. Usually, the policy process involves multiple institutions and authorities, and its implementation is not within the competence or capabilities of a single institution. This necessitates goal coordination, ensuring that all participants in the process are aware of their collective aspirations regarding the specificities of each area.

The Role of Coordination in Horizontal Policies

Concerning the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies, coordination assumes crucial importance for the entire policy cycle and the achievement of objectives. The theoretical approaches isolated by B. Guy Peters concerning the establishment and maintenance of coordination through hierarchy, market, and network have been examined. The distinguishing line between the three is the way coordination is generated, either through imposition (from central to peripheral levels) or negotiation (among equal participants). The benefits and drawbacks of these approaches have been analyzed in the context of horizontal policies.

Practical options for establishing a coordination mechanism within public administration have been presented. This classification of possibilities reflects the degree of interaction and collaboration between key political participants and administrative structures, i.e., it considers the stage where the policy is already institutionalized and "largely takes place within the institutional order."⁶ The levels are differentiated based on the extent of shared actions and engagement. Depending on this, 9 levels⁷ are delineated, with the review starting from the weakest manifestation of coordination and ending with an ideal model of policy implementation coordination: the central collegiate body of the executive authority, prime minister, deputy prime minister, minister, deputy minister, minister without portfolio, separate central administration, interdepartmental commission, working group.

In organizational terms, Peters also explores the institutionalization of the coordination mechanism during policy implementation. However, this approach can be adapted to policy formulation. Techniques have been analyzed that differentiate from each other in terms of initiative and supporting roles in the process of horizontal governance in practical terms, rather

⁶ Томова, Т. Публичните политики. София, УИ Св. Климент Охридски. (2003), стр. 121 [Томова, Т. Publichните politiki. Sofia, UI Sv. Kliment Ohridski. (2003), str. 121]

⁷ Peters, B.G. *Managing Horizontal Government: The Politics of Coordination*, (1998), p. 7

than in relation to normative powers and competence. The leading role belongs to the executive authorities.

Adaptation Models for Horizontal and Sectoral Policies

The most popular approaches in the creation and implementation of horizontal policies are distinguished based on decision-making and dominance in the conditions of interaction between horizontal and sectoral policies. Depending on the intensity of information exchange, coordination maintenance practices, decision-making, and policy process support, three main approaches are distinguished: center (horizontal policy) – periphery (sectoral policies), periphery (sectoral policies) - center (horizontal policy), and a hybrid variant of balanced interaction.

Theoretical models for adapting horizontal and sectoral policies are also analyzed based on the fundamental ideas of Whole-of-Government Approach⁸, Nested Governance Model⁹, Adaptive Management Model¹⁰, and the Network Governance Model¹¹.

Networks in Policies and Horizontal Management

The development of understandings of policy networks dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers view networks as a "collection of political actors inside and outside the government who participate or are interested in the creation of public policy and/or relations between these participants."¹² The minimal generalized definition of a political network shows that "each network operates in a specific sector of particular policies and has no influence on the rest of the political decisions."¹³ Pluralistic theory considers interest representation as a system in which numerous participants, not hierarchically organized, compete, collaborate, and are diverse in their nature. The corporate concept of public policies adopts a more structured view of interest representation, where "public policy is a product of negotiation within a closed

⁸ Hill, M., Peter L. Hupe. (2002). Implementing Public Policy: Governance in Theory and in Practice

⁹ Kashwan, P., R. Holahan. Nested governance for effective REDD+: institutional and political arguments, International Journal of the Commons, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August 2014), pp. 554-575

¹⁰ McLain, R., Robert G. Lee. (1996). Adaptive management: Promises and pitfalls

¹¹ Keith G. Provan, Patrick Kenis, Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management, and Effectiveness, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Volume 18, Issue 2, April 2008

¹² Compston, H. (2009). Policy networks and Policy change. Putting Policy Network Theory to the Test, p. 7.

¹³ Танев, Т. (2008). Анализ на публичните политики. София: Военно издателство, стр. 39 [Tanev, T. (2008). Analiz na publichnite politiki. Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, str. 39]

community.¹⁴" According to the political network concept, "interest representation differs in various spheres of political governance, and dependence within the political community is not hierarchical.¹⁵" This section of the dissertation summarizes the types of networks and their characteristics in policies.

The significance of networks for horizontal policies is expressed in the specificities that can manifest in decision-making processes, stakeholder engagement, communication, coordination, conflict resolution, policy planning and implementation, effective policy integration and synchronization, resource sharing, and the potential for capacity complementarity from various types of participants.

Benefits and Drawbacks of the Horizontal Approach

Based on the literature review, the main benefits of the horizontal approach have been outlined. In a generalized manner, the primary positive consequences that can be achieved through this approach revolve around creating conditions for an optimal response to complex management issues, promoting policy efficiency, supporting the effective allocation of resources, and involving various stakeholders. It facilitates the selection of policy instruments that best meet the needs, limits a strictly bureaucratic approach, and improves formal and informal coordination and communication.

Despite its advantages, horizontal governance has limitations. These can arise from systemic and cultural challenges, as well as a lack of capacity in the management system. Systemic challenges include processes and structures in governance, such as management, accountability, budgeting practices, or existing legislation and policies. Cultural challenges involve the influences of values and understandings of collaboration, both within government structures and among specific groups in society. It reflects a lack of trust, reluctance to take risks, unwillingness to participate, and a sectoral mentality within an organization, leading to competition and perceptions of interference in the sphere of competence. Challenges to capacity are related to the inadequacy of resources such as infrastructure, human resources, and horizontal skills and training.

¹⁴ Танев, Т. (2008). Анализ на публичните политики. София: Военно издателство, стр. 23 [Tanev, T. (2008). Analiz na publichните politiki. Sofia: Voенно izdatelstvo, str. 23]

¹⁵ Танев, Т. (2008). Анализ на публичните политики. София: Военно издателство, стр. 23 [Tanev, T. (2008). Analiz na publichните politiki. Sofia: Voенно izdatelstvo, str. 23]

2. CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF "HORIZONTAL POLICIES" IN THE BULGARIAN CONTEXT

Introduction of the Concept of Horizontal Policies into the Bulgarian Administrative System

The introduction and broader application of the concept in Bulgaria have followed a different trajectory compared to Western European administrative systems. A series of global and European events have exerted their influence on the transformation of the character and nature of governance in the country. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bulgaria underwent a transition from a totalitarian to a democratic governance regime. Considering the international political events, the country embarked on a new path towards democratization, a market economy, and a change in constitutional order and state power structures¹⁶. The changes in political governance not only reflected but also transformed the entire society, impacting not only the political sphere but also the economic, social, and cultural aspects.

As a result of these changes, the state governance system aligns with the "paradigm shift in public policy in Western European-type societies, carried out in the 1980s of the same century.¹⁷" The country begins to embrace new democratic values in governance, including citizen participation in policy processes. Changes are also noted in the instruments used for public policies. Politics is shaped as a process in which various types of participants, even those outside the state apparatus, can be involved. The hierarchical relationships between the state and society have undergone a complete transformation.

Within the framework of the national governance system, the use of the concept is influenced and accompanies the country's membership in the EU. The use of "horizontalism" and "horizontal policies" has been documented since the pre-accession period (up to 2007) in practice. A considerably more active use is noted with the development of capacity in the field of European policies, interdependence with European Union law, and supranational strategic and planning documents. A leading influence is observed regarding the embedded European horizontal principles, operational programs, and managerial instruments. Concerning Bulgaria, it can be argued that their integration is linked to external factors that connect the governance

¹⁶ Rossi, F. M., (2012). *The Elite Coup: The transition to democracy in Bulgaria*. COSMOS, European University Institute

¹⁷ Томова, Т. (2003). *Публичните политики*. София: УИ Св. Климент Охридски, стр. 176
[Tomova, T. (2003). *Publichните politiki*. Sofia: UI Sv. Kliment Ohridski, str. 176]

environment. The realization of the need to enhance horizontal and specificity in this type of policy is directly influenced by the European integration of the country.

Institutional Conditions for Implementing Horizontal Policies

Both at the formulation stage and during the execution of the policy, the fundamental coordination procedures within the executive authority in Bulgaria should be analyzed. Article 32, paragraph 1 of the specified act regulates that "Members of the Council of Ministers coordinate issues on which they are initiators with the other ministers." Thus, an explicit obligation is created for the coordination of expediency among the individual bodies of the executive authority that propose and submit drafts of acts within the competence of the government in their respective areas.

This procedure is binding for all central and territorial bodies of the executive authority and structures created by law or decree of the Council of Ministers, related to the exercise of executive authority. A framework is established for the mutual exchange of information and opinions among the administrative units in various sectors of public administration, taking into account their functional and thematic competence, i.e., the sector of administration and the thematic area they are engaged in. The requirement not only obliges initiators to inform other institutions but also commits the structures in the executive authority system to participate in the coordination and conciliation mechanism.

This is explicitly stated in the requirement that "ministers express their opinion on the conformity of the presented draft acts with the government's program for the governance of the country and ... the determined state policy in the area of public life led or coordinated by them." On one hand, this coordination procedure has informative value as it provides necessary information in terms of quality and quantity about planned and targeted measures in individual sectors. On the other hand, it allows for the synchronization of activities in specific sectors of governance. The positive effects that its effective application can create are related to improving the decision-making process. Collaboration enables a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of issues depending on current problems and characteristics of each policy. Different institutions can contribute with their professional knowledge, understanding of the sectoral management environment, the presence of influential interest groups and stakeholders, trend data, etc. It also helps avoid negative impacts of decisions and interventions from one sector on other areas of governance.

It should be noted that through this procedure, the critical minimum requirements are set to assess managerial intentions and reduce the risk in policy implementation. Collaboration allows for a more in-depth assessment of the impact of each intervention not only in the respective sector to which it is directed but also overall for other sectors. The coordination procedure is primarily internally institutional-oriented, but given the requirements for the publication of some acts, it can improve transparency in the decision-making process.

In certain cases, the opportunity to participate in the formal coordination procedure is provided for advisory bodies. The practical possibility of participation through expressing opinions and views based on specific expertise is granted to a wider range of entities. However, participation limitations are set at the regulatory level, as systematic coordination with advisory councils is not required.

The next element for creating conditions for effective coordination of policies, including horizontal policies, is the available institutional mechanisms for consultation and coordination. With the Law on Administration¹⁸, the possibilities for establishing coordination and consultation councils by various bodies of the executive authority are regulated—the Council of Ministers, ministers, the chairperson of a state agency, executive directors of executive agencies. The main forms include advisory councils, working groups, and interdepartmental commissions.

The distinctions among them are based on the format and composition, functions, method of establishment, and thematic scope. Councils created for the Council of Ministers have the broadest thematic scope and a combination of functions and powers. The higher an organ is in the hierarchy of the executive authority, the more comprehensive organizational structures for coordination it can create. Councils subordinate to the Council of Ministers, in addition to being advisory bodies, are established with an explicit assignment of coordination functions. The examined forms of coordination indicate that both political and expert levels of coordination are covered. Typically, these forms involve various institutional participants. In some of them, especially advisory councils, there is the possibility of including representatives of non-governmental actors. The formal mechanisms for their operation only provide a general framework and often do not specify the ways in which accountability and transparency in their work are ensured. While councils are permanently established bodies, working groups and

¹⁸ Обн., ДВ, бр. 130 от 5.11.1998 г., в сила от 6.12.1998 г., посл. доп., бр. 88 от 20.10.2023 г., в сила от 20.10.2023 г. [Promulgated, State Gazette No. 130 of 5.11.1998, in force as of 6.12.1998, amended, State Gazette No. 88 of 20.10.2023, in force as of 20.10.2023]

commissions are temporary for resolving specific problems. This provides alternatives for choosing an appropriate approach depending on the scope of the issues that need to be coordinated.

In the practice of administration, several requirements and procedures have been included, which can be used to improve the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies in the country. Although not specifically created for the needs of horizontal policies, they still contribute to the rationalization of work on such policies. These include the requirements for impact assessment and conducting public consultations. The main positive effect from their perspective on horizontal policies is that they create conditions for a more comprehensive view of policy issues, the interests of stakeholders, and the identification of The main drawback of both tools is that they are mandatory in specific cases and do not accompany the overall activity of the administration.

Impact assessment is crucial for improving horizontal policies because it influences all theoretically problematic elements in this type of policies: improving understanding of the nature of policy, decision-making, accounting for the complex nature of policy, involving stakeholders, optimizing resources, sharing experience and information, creating better conditions for adaptation to the environment and between different types of policies, adapting to changing environmental conditions, monitoring and evaluating effects and results.

An examination of the formal conditions of the governance environment that influence horizontal policies reveals the existence of a critical minimum of conditions to promote their effectiveness. The elements and procedures considered are not specifically designed to address the specificities of horizontal policies, but they play a positive role in their implementation. The established coordination procedure has a specific order of interaction among the multitude of administrations, but for it to serve effectively in adapting policies in the context of horizontal ones, the primary role is assigned to individual experts participating in it. Formally, all coordination requirements can be met, but it is advisable to allow for flexibility.

Regarding the organizational forms of coordination, it is observed that the success of their activities is influenced by non-systemic factors such as participant engagement, motivation for collaboration, voluntary participation, rather than clearly defined requirements and metrics for their work and activities. There are significant gaps in controlling their activities, public awareness and transparency, regulating the regularity of their work, and accountability for the completed or unfinished work. In the impact assessment, a standardized impact assessment form (formula) has been developed, which in some cases requires marking

the presence or absence of certain general impacts rather than a detailed analysis of the dimensions of these impacts. In this sense, the practice is still evolving, and the capacity for impact assessment has not been fully utilized.

Practical Measurements of Work on Horizontal Policies in Bulgaria

Results from In-depth Interviews

Based on the expressed opinions and assessments of participants in the in-depth interviews, it can be summarized that there is no universally accepted understanding of the concept of "horizontal policies" in practice. To a large extent, in the administration, the concept is used "intuitively" without in-depth knowledge of the specifics of this type of policies. There is a common idea in which the main focus is on coordination and collaborative work among many structures with functions related to the discussed policy. Among representatives of the civil sector, as well as those from private research agencies, similar positions and opinions are largely observed. The consensus is that active advocacy for horizontal policies in public administration is influenced by the country's membership in the EU.

There is a conditional capacity for collaboration between different institutions on policies that affect more than one governance sector. The degree of development of practices depends on the specific policy rather than a systematic approach to working on horizontal policies in the administrative system. The main challenges to formulating and implementing horizontal policies are related to coordination, adapting sectoral and horizontal policies, and aligning goals and their implementation, monitoring, and evaluating these policies.

Regarding the available coordination mechanisms for various horizontal policies, deficits are also noted. One of them is the lack of resource provision. Regardless of the institutional form of these mechanisms (councils, commissions, groups), the lack of resources limits their ability to directly influence policy. Another problem is that some of them only have advisory functions. In policy planning, the highest engagement is observed in the main administrative structure whose functional competence covers a specific area of public relations. The goals of sectoral policies are rarely formulated with a view to the objectives of horizontal policies.

Results of Survey

To enrich the study on the topic within the Bulgarian management system, the practices, attitudes, and issues encountered by employees engaged in work on horizontal policies were examined. Although the conducted quantitative survey is not representative of those employed in state administration specifically working on horizontal policies, the accumulated database with individual responses from 351 participants allows for outlining problematic areas in the practical implementation of horizontal policies.

More than half of the participants (53%) in the survey share the opinion that horizontal policies are specific and have peculiarities in planning and execution. This result indicates that a significant portion not only recognizes the concept but also perceives that working on horizontal policies requires a different approach.

When asked about the problems they have personally encountered in working on horizontal policies, results are categorized into three groups:

- **Major Problems:** This group includes responses gathering over 50% support from respondents. Such frequency of encountering the problem has the strongest significance for the policymaking process. According to the data, the main problem with horizontal policies in Bulgaria is coordination between different administrations.
- **Strongly Expressed Problems:** These problems gather a share of 25% to 50% of respondents. Their frequency of occurrence in administration work is smaller, but they have the potential to create difficulties in the policymaking process. Their impact is felt, and they negatively influence the policymaking process. This group includes weak communication and information exchange, inefficient execution of agreed-upon activities, insufficient resources, lack of interest and weak engagement from participants, ineffective working groups, committees, and councils, lack of clear responsibility for work and leadership.
- **Moderately Expressed Problems:** This group receives a share below 25% of responses from participants. It includes problematic elements that influence policymaking but do not have a decisive impact on its formulation and implementation. It can be assumed that they have a weaker influence on horizontal policies in Bulgarian conditions. This group encompasses difficulties in uniting around common goals and priorities, coordination within the administrative structure, limitations in regulatory frameworks and functions of each structure related to horizontal policy, weaknesses in publicity, transparency, and accountability, working with stakeholders, and political factors.

Although participants in the study indicate an understanding of the specificity of horizontal policies, the challenges they encounter in their work are not isolated deficiencies unique to these policies. The majority (62%) share that these aspects create difficulties regardless of the type of tasks they work on and are not limited to horizontal policies. This implies that administrative capacity in the administration as a whole has significant gaps. This directly impacts the environment for working on the discussed type of policies. It is confirmed that deficiencies in horizontal policies are a reflection of more extensive deficits in the organization and management of administrative work, the capacity for working on public policies, the culture of collaboration, and practices.

Considering the highlighted issues in working on horizontal policies, participants in the study were asked to share the five most important elements, according to them, to promote efficiency in both the formulation and implementation of horizontal policies in Bulgaria. Respondents identify coordination with other administrative structures, communication and information exchange, defining common goals and priorities for all participants, coordination within the administrative structure, and resource provision as the most significant elements. This would have the strongest effect on both the working process and the achievement of policy goals.

After expressing their opinions and attitudes, participants in the study were asked to assess the administrative capacity and culture for collaborative work on horizontal policies in the Bulgarian state administration as a whole and in their own structure on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Weak," and 5 means "Excellent." Civil servants themselves are more critical of the administration as a whole, rating it an average of 3 out of 5. All participants give a higher rating to their respective administrative structures. Self-assessment for their own administration averages 3.6 out of 5, approaching more towards the "very good" capacity and culture for working on horizontal policies.

3. CHAPTER 3: DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY IN BULGARIA DURING THE PERIOD 2001-2020

The Essence of Demographic Policy as a Horizontal Policy

There is no single definition for demographic policy. The various interpretations pass through "the efforts of the national government to influence the three demographic variables,

namely, birth rate, mortality, and migration,¹⁹ "a set of coordinated rules aimed at achieving certain demographic goals, such as achieving a stable population or zero population growth²⁰," or "direct and indirect measures formulated by various social institutions, including the government, which intentionally or unintentionally can influence the size, growth, or geographic distribution, as well as the age structure of a specific population²¹." Among the fundamental understandings of demographic policy is "consciously constructed or modified institutional measures and/or specific programs through which governments directly or indirectly influence demographic changes²²."

From the presented fundamental definitions at both theoretical and practical levels, demographic policy emerges as a concept through the examination of sets of governance policies, measures, and initiatives designed to influence population dynamics. The population is traditionally confined within the limits of a specific geographical area. These policies aim to address various demographic challenges and opportunities related to the nature of demography as a science. Examples of such challenges include population growth or decline, age distribution, migration patterns, fertility, and the overall population structure, among others. The elements that create surpluses or imbalances in a given society are considered. Demographic policies often involve a combination of social, economic, and health interventions to achieve specific demographic goals.

Demographic policy is defined as horizontal for two mutually interconnected reasons. The first is that its goals and outcomes directly impact the state and development of several sectoral policies simultaneously. On the other hand, the goals and outcomes of this policy are generated as a result of the dynamics of the development of sectoral policies. Demographic policy "intersects" with the rest. This creates a two-way dependence. Some of the interconnections between demographic policy and other policies arise directly from the nature of their relationships. In other cases, the consequences of and for demographic policy are indirect. They manifest mainly because public administration operates within a common system.

¹⁹ Sarikaki, A., Institutional Reactions towards low fertility trends in Greece, Wales, 2001, p. 4

²⁰ Sarikaki, A., Institutional Reactions towards low fertility trends in Greece, Wales, 2001, p. 4

²¹ Sarikaki, A., Institutional Reactions towards low fertility trends in Greece, Wales, 2001, p. 4

²² Demeny, P., Population Policy: A Concise Summary, New York, 2003, p. 3

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination

A comparative analysis of councils operating during the period 1995-2020 was conducted based on two groups of qualitative and quantitative criteria: those related to structure and those related to functioning. The criteria system allows for the equal interpretation of individual aspects of coordination mechanisms. This approach complements the analysis with in-depth information, leading to sustained and logical conclusions and findings. The comparative analysis ensures that different manifestations of the studied mechanisms over time are taken into account. The following bodies were examined: the National Council on Social and Demographic Issues (NCSDI), the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCEDI), the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI), and the National Council on Demographic Policy (NCDP).

During the period under consideration, four councils with coordination functions in the field of demographic policy were established, with an increasing duration of operation for one council. The average duration of existence is just over 4 years. The review reveals that changes in the acts regulating the status, structure, and functions of the councils are frequent. On average, changes and amendments to the acts occur over a period of 1 year. The frequent changes pose challenges to establishing a consistent practice in coordinating and aligning sectoral policies with demographic policy.

The grounds for adopting resolutions for the establishment of the first two councils refer to Art. 105, para. 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria during that period. There is no clear defined role and significance of such forms of consultation and coordination during this period. Subsequently, the grounds are contained in the Administration Act. There is legislative regulation of the creation, closure, operation, composition, and membership of the councils, their accountability, etc. This facilitates the broader use of such coordination mechanisms in practice.

Regarding the chairmanship of the councils, the most common scenario is for it to be assumed by the Deputy Prime Minister. This figure has the potential to bind the structures into a common mechanism, fostering interest and responsibility for the quality of coordination and effectiveness. Issues related to membership and eligibility criteria for participation are also significant. There is a systematic increase in the number of state participants. Initially, the concentration and level of representation are primarily at the ministerial level. With the establishment of NCSDI and NCCEDI, the number of participants is expanded, including

representatives from various ministries and central administrations. NCDP goes beyond the executive branch, incorporating structures subordinate to the National Assembly.

In all the councils under consideration, non-governmental participants are included, but there is a tendency towards narrowing down the number and type of organizations. The first three councils set different conditions and requirements for non-governmental organizations to be included as members of the respective council. Gradually, these requirements increase and become more stringent, with the latest active council explicitly regulating the possibility of participation only by the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) and representatives of social partners. NCEDI is the only council where, regardless of changes in activity and structure, representatives of the scientific community participate as permanent members.

The secretariat of each council is a standard form for operational support of activities, communication between members, and organization of meetings. Usually, these functions are undertaken by a unit from the specialized administration of the department responsible for demographic policy. Convening working and expert groups and committees is a situational approach to addressing specific issues or problems and does not have permanent action. A specific practice is observed in NCEDI, which develops the most auxiliary structures to implement its powers. The introduction of regional councils for cooperation on ethnic and demographic issues, and later municipal ones, is a feature, an expression of the processes of decentralization and coordination between different administrative levels of governance. After their cessation, NCDP shows consolidation of its composition and structure.

The first council has a general scope of powers. With the development of practices in the subsequent councils, this scope gradually expands and becomes more detailed. From studying, analyzing, and developing proposals to improve the relevant management systems related to demographic policy, there is a transition to responsibilities regarding the formulation and implementation of leading strategic documents in this policy, a role in the development of legislative and sub-legislative acts, and the implementation of projects, programs, etc.

The set of policies explicitly mentioned in the regulations for the organization and activities of these structures, included in the coordination process, also gradually increases. This reflects the scope of coordination between horizontal policy and policies directly related to its formulation and implementation. NCSDI gives a leading role to coordinating demographic policy with social, health, educational, and cultural policies. NCEDI reinforces the importance of coordination regarding Roma integration, migration, policies towards Bulgarians abroad and refugees, and 10 other policies, for which there are ministerial representatives in the

composition of the then Council of Ministers. For NCEDI and NCDP, the expansion of the policy set is significantly deepened, reaching up to 20 sectoral policies defined by the executive branch.

Demographic Policy Networks in Bulgaria

The network of demographic policy can be defined as a "bureaucratic network." There is a significant number of state actors with limited participation from non-state participants. Non-governmental organizations engaged in this policy have minimal influence on policy formulation and implementation. In addition to the overwhelming number, representatives of state authority dominate all participants in the network, exerting primary influence in policy determination. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy carries the greatest weight in this policy.

An "alienation" is observed among state participants from different administrative sectors within demographic policy. Within sectors influencing demographic trends and dimensions, distinct networks and influential stakeholders are identified, playing a role in directing public decisions. They do not find a place in the demographic policy network. The main leading role based on resources, influence, and interest in the scope of demographic policy belongs to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The main benefits of such a network are that the multitude of state representatives can cover various manifestations of problems arising from demographic policy. Deficiencies in multiple sectors can be identified with fewer resources, pinpointing specific social needs that public administration must address. Decisions formulated within the network gain legitimacy. The influence of private interests is limited. Intensive partnership between institutions provides the necessary conditions for streamlining policy management processes. A favorable environment for consensus among participants is created, conflicts are limited, and competition is not evident. Decisions have greater lasting impact over time.

The drawbacks of this network are that other state actors assume a more passive role, as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy dominates the network. A secondary entanglement with sectoral policies and the effective adaptation of these policies to the goals of demographic policy is questioned. With such a distribution of participants in the network, opportunities for changing the set course are limited if policy instruments fail to achieve set goals. Additionally, a limited number of alternatives are proposed to address defined problems. The capacity of

participants and their resources can pose a risk to the success of the policy. Generated support for the policy is usually weak, decisions are not recognized by all stakeholders, and demographic policy remains "outside" the focus of governance debates.

Analysis of Strategic Documents in the Field of Demographic Policy

The review of key policy documents that are crucial for the development of demographic policy in Bulgaria highlights two strategies that form the basis of this policy. During the period 2001–2020, there are two political documents that explicitly express the goals of demographic policy. These are the National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006–2020 and the Updated National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012–2030. Documents operationalizing the goals in these strategies are the plans for their implementation. Sectoral documents that can mutually influence these demographic strategies during the examined period are numerous and have multiple updates. For this reason, specific documents from sectors with primary relevance to demographic policy during the period have been selected in this dissertation.

The main findings from the review and analysis of strategic documents are related to several fundamental elements. Identifying the main shortcomings in the strategic approach and adapting sectoral policies in demographic policy involves recognizing areas where deficits exist in terms of interconnectedness between the goals. Despite the presence of individual strategic documents for demographic policy, there is a lack of a comprehensive strategy that specifically encompasses approaches for interventions in sectors. The documents take into account the problems of both demographic policy and individual sectors and analyze them thoroughly. However, the main focus is on the issues within the sectors and their subsequent impact on demographic policy. This approach is not flawed but simply reveals the nature of the practices. It is assumed that the impacts of sectoral policies alone are sufficient to improve demographic trends.

However, in individual sectoral strategies, it is more challenging to recognize alignment with a comprehensive and integrated demographic strategy. There is no overarching plan directing various sectoral policies (such as healthcare, education, employment) toward demographic goals. This, in turn, may limit the effectiveness of individual policies and lead to gaps in synchronizing policy expenditures without ensuring the desired effects and results.

Mid-term planning periods have been identified. However, the long-term perspective of demographic processes is not adequately covered. This, in turn, reflects on the goals in sectoral policies. Regarding the data and information used for planning demographic policy, a broad set has been utilized. The description of the situation is general for demographic policy, with specific attention to measurements in sectoral policies. There is an excessive focus on currently pronounced issues within sectors that require urgent government intervention and policy instrument implementation. Questions related to longer periods are broadly covered. The future dynamics of the environment in which the goals and measures of demographic policy must be implemented are not accurately accounted for. The coverage only of the current demographic picture is a positive observation, but it should be noted that demographic trends are permanently established in Bulgaria. All strategic documents analyze the applied measures concerning the creation of the documents rather than a deep future horizon.

In the development and adaptation of demographic policy concerning sectors, optimal stakeholder participation is not adequately considered. Even in conducted public consultations, there is weak and limited activity from non-governmental actors in these processes. Successful implementation of demographic policies requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including the administration, NGOs, and the private sector. The lack of participation of these parties in the development and implementation of policies has the potential to limit the impact of the documents. In this situation, an administrative approach is primarily followed in developing the examined documents, especially those in the field of demographic policy. Limited stakeholder participation creates a risk of policy non-recognition, distancing demographic policy from its target groups, neglecting demographic inequalities, and disproportionately distributing benefits.

The defined frameworks of strategic documents in the field of demographic policy during the examined period do not provide mechanisms for adapting to changes in the management environment. Such changes are potentially feasible at the initiative of the administration or an authority but are not systematically included in the documents. This creates a risk of increasing the ineffectiveness of goal implementation if sectoral policies are not adaptable to the dynamics of demographic processes.

Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches are advocated in demographic policy but are not applied in sectoral policies. Thus, only demographic policy aligns with the specifics of the sectors with which it has a primary connection. The reverse linkage (from sectors to horizontal policy) is not developed in the examined documents. By definition, according to the

theoretical framework in Chapter One, demographic policy requires an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account economic, social, cultural, political, ecological, and other factors. A deficiency may arise when sectoral policies act in isolation without considering the interconnectedness of demographic issues.

Furthermore, mechanisms for measuring the impacts of sectoral actions and measures on demography are not established. A significant drawback is the absence of well-defined indicators and metrics to measure the success or impact of demographic policies. Without clear reference points, it becomes difficult to assess progress and analyze the overall state of demographic trends without specifying which elements of the policy were ineffective. There is limited progress in addressing interconnected issues of demographic policy and sectoral policies.

Results of Demographic Policy

Based on the reports of the current strategic document in the field of demographic policy, the development of the demographic situation in the country is observed across key indicators such as birth rates, mortality rates, population structure, migration, etc. However, there is no analysis and/or reporting on the impact of the measures aimed at influencing demographic trends. The adopted format summarizes the data for the current demographic situation up to the respective year.

The policy implementation analysis does not examine the direct consequences of implementing the formulated measures in the strategic documents. The structure of the documents reflects whether the planned measures and activities have been implemented, but not how they have been executed specifically and what effects and results they have yielded. The implementation of demographic priorities is presented through information from individual administrative structures of the executive branch on the state of sectoral policies and measures. Weaknesses are identified in determining the degree of influence on demographic issues in this regard. The interconnections between implemented measures in different sectors are not analyzed. A subsequent evaluation of the impact of strategic documents and the implemented measures and activities in the field of demographic policy was not carried out during the period 2001-2020.

In addition to the reported gaps in monitoring and evaluating the results of demographic policy, another crucial element for analyzing the state of demographic trends during the period

2001-2020 is tracking the key population indicators outlined in strategic documents. All major indicators, towards which the goals of demographic policy were directed during the period, continue to deteriorate from 2001 to 2020. Through policy implementation, not only have fundamental problems not been positively influenced, but the level of the negative trend has not been halted. Negative trends in Bulgaria are summarized as "Deepening demographic crisis and its associated adverse quantitative changes in demographic parameters exhibit very high intensity over the last three decades, reaching threshold states where permanent destabilization in the natural reproduction regime is observed."²³

Recommendations for Improving Coordination and Adaptation of Policies

One potential avenue for enhancing effectiveness in the process is the adoption of common principles and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Concerning horizontal policies, the method offers significant advantages that can improve both goal-setting and the implementation of formulated objectives. The OMC supports the rethinking of goals and ideas with a view to information exchange. This influence extends to changing norms and rules, allowing the participation of both state and non-state actors in the policy cycle, aligning positions towards common goals, encouraging discussions and expertise, and more²⁴.

The method itself combines "mutual learning and joint consensus-building for a shared interpretation of problems, goals, and results as factors for the development and change of public policies."²⁵ Through its application, the entire policy cycle can be influenced as it develops practices in collaborative work. In the case of demographic policy, this is of exceptional importance due to its nature and the multitude of influences from sectors, stakeholders, institutions, etc. The OMC supports the establishment of sustainable collaborations, improves the relationship between individual participants affected by the policy, creates conditions for better understanding the role of each sectoral actor in the field of

²³ Бърдаров, Г., Н. Илиева. (2018). Хоризонт 2030. Демографски тенденции в България. София. Фондация Фридрих Еберт, Бюро България, стр. 5 [Bardarov, G., N. Ilieva. (2018). Horizont 2030. Demografiski tendentsii v Bulgaria. Sofia. Fondatsia Fridrih Ebert, Byuro Bulgaria, str. 5]

²⁴ Петров, С., Отвореният метод на координация – нещо ново, нещо старо или нещо назаем. // сп. Публични политики.bg, 2014, Г.5, бр. 1, стр. 101 – 106 [Petrov, S., Otvoreniyat metod na koordinatsia – neshto novo, neshto staro ili neshto nazaem. // sp. Publichni politiki.bg, 2014, G.5, br. 1, str. 101 – 106]

²⁵ Петров, С., Множество актьори с противоречащи си интереси – институционална среда, в която копирането на политики е невъзможно. // Публични политики.bg, 2018, Г.9, бр. 1, стр. 53 [Petrov, S., Mnozhestvo aktyori s protivorechashti si interesi – institutsionalna sreda, v koyato kopiraneto na politiki e nevazmozno. // Publichni politiki.bg, 2018, G.9, br. 1, str. 53]

demographic issues, and reinforces formal and informal channels for communication and coordination.

Introducing demographic policy as a horizontal principle in policy work means advocating for it as an element in all sectors during their overall execution of the powers and functions of public institutions. This avoids centralizing processes and creating more cumbersome administrative procedures for controlling the adaptation of sectoral and horizontal policies. It provides a way for individual authorized structures to autonomously engage in aligning sectoral management with the broader context of demographic policy.

Improving the Coordination and Adaptation of Demographic and Sectoral Policies, which Impact Demographic Conditions and Trends, can be achieved through the incorporation of demographic policy as a mandatory element in the impact assessment of legislation and governance documents (strategies, programs, projects) in Bulgaria. Assessment, as a "means for better decision-making and ensuring the quality and sustainability of public policies²⁶" and aimed at "identifying, predicting, and evaluating possible positive and negative results of adopting a given public policy²⁷," contributes to streamlining the process. In the case of demographic policy, this method provides opportunities to encompass all aspects of demographic policy and all connections between it and the sectors. This characteristic of horizontal policy is also the main challenge to its formulation and implementation. For this reason, the method is valuable because it addresses the fundamental critical elements in the policy process.

Positive impacts on horizontal policies would result from the implementation of voluntary forms of cooperation. They have the potential to create links for informal collaboration and resolution of mutual problems in the field of horizontal policies. Informal committees or groups encourage collaboration between different administrative units, create a platform for dialogue to smooth out issues and conflicts among participants in the policy cycle, and facilitate information exchange. Limiting the bureaucratic approach and supplementing "hard" rules with voluntary forms of cooperation can lead to streamlining the entire policy cycle, as they influence the administrative culture for collaborative work.

²⁶ Калфова, Е. Лекционен курс „Оценка на въздействието“, 2017, [Kalfova, E. Leksionen kurs „Otsenka na vazdeystvieto“, 2017, <https://elearn.uni-sofia.bg/>]

²⁷ Калфова, Е. Лекционен курс „Оценка на въздействието“, 2017 [Kalfova, E. Leksionen kurs „Otsenka na vazdeystvieto“, 2017, <https://elearn.uni-sofia.bg/>]

III. CONCLUSION

Horizontal policy can be defined through the process of coordinating and managing a set of activities between two or more organizations that are not hierarchically dependent on each other and collaborate to achieve results and policy effects that they could not attain independently.

In Bulgarian administrative practice, there is still no clearly recognizable unified understanding of horizontal policies. Although the need for mutual policy coherence, coordination, and collaboration between individual administrative structures and between them and stakeholders is acknowledged, significant gaps are still evident. These gaps jeopardize the overall management of complex issues. The problems are most clearly outlined in the establishment of institutional mechanisms for coordination, adaptation of horizontal and sectoral policies, policy assessment and monitoring, as well as the overall culture of working on such policies, including commitment, role recognition, leadership, and readiness for collaboration. Alienation often occurs among administrative structures responsible for collaboration on horizontal policies.

It is noted that within the institutional system, there are prerequisites for coordinating and adapting horizontal policies. The existing requirements for legislative impact assessment, the coordinating procedure under the Regulations of the Council of Ministers and its administration, the requirements for conducting public consultations, and the available opportunities for creating coordination councils, commissions, and working groups can be used for horizontal policies in Bulgaria. However, these mechanisms are not specifically created with a focus on the nature of horizontal policies but represent a broader framework for governance. It is established that the full capacity of the created opportunities is not fully utilized in practice.

In the context of demographic policy, a hybrid approach has been chosen to integrate its goals and priorities into the sectors it is associated with. An explicit approach to defining policy has been applied, where it is specified and declared in a document with stated objectives and formally applied measures directly addressing population dynamics. However, concerning adaptation, the reflection of demographic goals in target sectors for interventions is weak. Sectoral policies are formulated and implemented based on the needs of the sector itself rather than considering the needs of demographic policy and cross-sectoral interdependence. The reliance is mainly on secondary impacts on target demographic issues. The results of sectoral policies are not examined in terms of their influence on demographic policy.

The review of the structures and functions of the councils operating during the period 1995-2020 shows, in addition to their characteristics, that a foundation and form for coordination effectiveness are created. Framework rules and procedures have been established to assist the process, but the result of coordination and its depth depend on the participants' behavior, mutual recognition as partners, and the resources for influence. A bureaucratic network of demographic policy has been formed during the period.

The composition of the councils is dominated by state participants, as these bodies largely play a role in maintaining institutional coordination. Regarding non-state participants, there is a trend of narrowing the circle of representatives. Improving the functioning of the councils as an institutional coordination mechanism can be achieved by involving the civil sector and external actors not affiliated with the administration. The utility of this is expressed in expert support, governance transparency, and providing support for decisions.

Demographic policy in the Bulgarian institutional context needs the implementation of elements to make the process more coordinated, establish mechanisms to link sectoral policies with demographic policy, and create conditions for the participation of various types of participants beyond authorized government bodies and their supporting administrations at the central level.

Borrowing fundamental provisions and principles from the Open Method of Coordination, introducing demographic policy as a horizontal principle by positioning it as a mandatory element in impact assessments in Bulgaria, and utilizing voluntary forms of cooperation create mutually reinforcing effects. These effects are intended to positively influence the identified deficits in horizontal policies, particularly in demographics. They set the potential for creating conditions to enhance the effectiveness of policies, which are of paramount importance considering the state of demographic trends and the strategic significance of demographic policy in Bulgaria.

IV. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. The key theories and ideas related to horizontal policies have been summarized and analyzed, highlighting the most significant characteristics of such policies and the factors influencing their effectiveness.

2. Weaknesses in the process of horizontal policies have been identified. The features of the public governance system that create conditions for formulating and implementing these policies have been analyzed.
3. An overview of horizontal policies in Bulgaria has been conducted, and the specific practices in the areas of horizontal policies within the national context have been formulated.
4. Critical points in the implementation of horizontal policies in Bulgarian practice have been investigated. Practical dimensions of issues in the demographic policy process have been examined through the opinions, attitudes, and assessments of experts and practitioners in the field of horizontal policies. The capacity and factors influencing the horizontal policy process have been analyzed.
5. The formulation and implementation of demographic policy in the country during the period 2001-2020 have been examined, focusing on the deficits in horizontal policies in the Bulgarian context. It has been demonstrated that the process of formulating and implementing horizontal policies, particularly in demographic policy in Bulgaria, is centralized, with limited involvement of non-governmental participants, inefficient coordination among key participants in the process, and weak adaptation of horizontal policy goals to sectors directly related.
6. Proposals have been formulated with the potential to improve the effectiveness of demographic policy. The benefits of applying the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) within the internal, national public management system, introducing demographic policy as a horizontal principle and criterion in the impact assessment of normative documents and public management documents (strategies, policies, programs, and projects), and the use of voluntary forms of coordination have been analyzed.

V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Ilieva, V. (2019). *Horizontal Policy – Making Approach in Goal Setting – Specifics and Results within Bulgarian Demographic Policy*. Conference Proceedings “30 REFORMS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE”, Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISBN 9789540748436, pp. 285-300
2. Ilieva, V., (2021). *Theories and ideas about horizontality in public management*. Conference Proceedings “Doctoral Readings 2020”, Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISSN: 2603–3453, pp 387-403

3. Ilieva, V., (2021). *Dimension of intergeneration justice in Bulgarian demographic policy*. Conference Proceedings “Administrative fairness as good governance, Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISBN 978-954-07-5251-8, pp. 315-332
4. Ilieva, V., (2023). *Comparative analysis of Coordination mechanisms in horizontal policies in Bulgaria*. Conference Proceedings “Doctoral Readings 2021”, Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISSN 2603-3453, pp. 465-483
5. Ilieva, V., M. Vladimirov (2022). *The National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria: Deficiencies in the formulation of horizontal policies*. Conference Proceedings “Public Governance after the 2020: What do we know when we know nothing”, Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISBN 9789540754840, pp. 198-216
6. Ilieva, V., (2021). *Mechanisms for Coordination of Horizontal Policies: Nature and Functions of the National Council for Demographic Policy*. SPACE - SOCIETY – ECONOMY, Volume 3, Sofia, Atlasi Press, ISBN 978-619-238-200-1, pp. 216-233
7. Ilieva, V. (2023). *The advisory councils as tools for coordination of horizontal policies – the example of Demographic Policy in Bulgaria in the period 1995-2020*. Conference Proceedings “Public Administration in global crisis: between liberalism and statism. Sofia, University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", ISBN 9789540757322, pp. 413-428
8. Ilieva, V. *Political network of demographic policy in Bulgaria*. Conference Proceedings “Doctoral Readings 2023” - The final revision has been completed, and the accepted text is ready for publication; publication is pending.