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*From Antiquity to Nowadays  
От древността до днес*

## THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF BULGARIAN MIGRATION TO ITALY

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**Abstract.** The public consciousness of Bulgarians is dominated by the perception that the large waves of emigration from Bulgaria to the West occurred after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 and were a consequence of the economic crises of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. But this is not the case at all. This process goes back centuries. Various chroniclers attest to the Bulgarian presence in Italy as early as the Middle Ages. They show us that centuries ago Bulgarians chose Italy as their second home. Few historical sources testify to the specific motives for this choice and even fewer to the experiences of these Bulgarian settlers.

The opportunities for scholarly inquiry into the motives of contemporary immigrants are considerably more significant. Therefore, this study will boldly ask: “If for centuries Bulgarians have chosen Italy as their ‘second homeland’, what was, and what is today, the reason for this? To find an answer to this question, besides the analysis of historical sources, this study used the modern possibilities of survey research and studied the motives of 85 Bulgarian emigrants who chose to live in Italy in the 21st century.

This study shows that, both in the past and in the present, the economic lack of resources neither gave rise to nor sustained Bulgarian emigration to Italy. Repeatedly, the search for asylum created streams of those in need of protection, but with tolerance and understanding of the Italic peoples that took them in, the Bulgarians settled the lands given to them, and with work and effort they repaid what was given to them. The Bulgarians chose Italy to strengthen their Orthodox faith, to strengthen the writing of the whole Slavic race, to develop the potential of Slavic culture and to provide for the needs of the Catholics in their lands. The linking of the Bulgarian and Italian families helped in the rescue of thousands of Jews in the Bulgarian lands, expanded charity and care for the poor, sick and war victims. Decades after the most famous marriage in Bulgarian history between a Bulgarian king and an Italian princess, love continues to bring representatives of Italian and Bulgarian families together. And today, Bulgarians choose Italy because they value its education, culture and art and the opportunities to touch, learn and develop their potential. BUT, as in the past so today, Bulgarians give to Italy their

scientific potential, the “beauty” of the greatest basses born on Bulgarian lands; the verses of some of the most popular Bulgarian poets, the grandeur of magnificent sculptures. their parents.

*Keywords:* emigration; emigration of Bulgarians to Italy; emigration waves; motives for emigration

## **Introduction**

Historical documents testify that for centuries, representatives of the Bulgarian nation have chosen Italy as their haven; they chose Italy as a place to shelter their family and develop their human and creative potential. For centuries, Bulgarians have chosen members of the “Italian family” as their companions; they have built a multicultural family, combining the archetype of the Italian and Bulgarian families. What is the reason for this? What makes the Bulgarian replace the “fatherland” with the Italian one? What makes the Bulgarians combine themselves with the Italian people?

These questions captured the mind of a young Bulgarian researcher. In 2021, the opportunities for Italy and Bulgaria to combine themselves in the field of education allowed this young scientist to conduct part of her studies in Italy. Having felt the “thrill” of her ancestors in the encounter with Italian culture, the urge to learn and tell the world what led the ancestors of her Bulgarian nation towards the Italian ones was raised in her mind. She researched historical documents that testify to the Bulgarian nation’s footsteps on Italian soil.

She became interested and asked the academic community in Bulgaria what motivates and what has motivated the Bulgarians to want to unite themselves with the Italian people. Was it the usual search for a “better” place of one’s development or something much more than that?

Seeking an answer, this young Bulgarian scholar put on the stage of scientific research not only the question – Why does the Bulgarian feel attracted to Italian culture and why would one want to “join”?, but also the question – What does one bring with them and what does one give in uniting with it?

This article was “born” out of curiosity by this young Bulgarian researcher. Like many young researchers, she sought the help of her university mentor to turn this curiosity into a meaningful scientific quest and initiate collaborative research. Taking advantage of the chances that the present gives us, unlike the past, we used several scientific methods to investigate what drives the contemporary Bulgarian to the Italian land. We have combined new knowledge with the historical record of our ancestors’ choices and have tried to map the motives of the Bulgarians of the past with those of his contemporary in choosing to exchange his native land for that of the Italians.

Our research has shown several things, which we will describe later in this

paper. First, Bulgarians' motives for choosing Italy as a place to live are not mainly related to the possibility of living in better economic conditions. In the past, the Bulgarians chose Italy to obtain protection and to preserve their homeland; with tolerance and understanding for the Italian family that took them in, they settled the lands that were given to them, and with work and effort, they repaid what was given to them. Research shows that in the past, Bulgarians associated themselves with Italy to strengthen the Orthodox Church, consolidate the Slavonic script, and develop the potential of Slavonic culture. Bulgarians have chosen and continue to choose Italy for enlightenment, for training Catholic priests and for providing for the needs of Catholics in their lands. Historical memories testify that the linking of Bulgarian and Italian families saved thousands of Jews in Bulgarian lands from perishing and expanded charity and care for the poor, sick and war victims. The research shows that both in the past and today, love brings together representatives of the Italian and Bulgarian families and Bulgarians, with nostalgia for their native home, choose life in Italy when this is the choice of the person they love. The study shows that many Bulgarian children choose Italy out of love for their parents, out of a desire to be with them when work takes them abroad, and out of an ability to accept their choice despite the difficulties they experience in adjusting. The study shows that Bulgarians understand that multicultural marriages to foreigners create a dual identity for their children and that Italy is the more likely future choice for their children; they understand that because of their choice, the Slavic alphabet will only be part of their children's lives in Sunday schools and that Bulgarians' folk costume will only hint at their Bulgarian ancestry on holidays.

This research shows that many Bulgarians choose Italy to get a job when they find it challenging to find one in their home country; to earn income for their work when the income they received in their home country was not enough to cover the challenges that life presented them. They chose Italy because they appreciate the education, culture, and art created in its lands; they find opportunities to develop their potential and that favourable "soil" in which they can unfold what they feel is their essence. This study shows that, by their choice, Bulgarians have given and continue to give to Italy their scientific potential, the "beauty" of the greatest basses born on Bulgarian soil; the verses of some of the most popular Bulgarian poets, the grandeur of magnificent sculptures, one of which still greets all those arriving in Italy at Fiumicino airport.

It is with some concern that we have to say that our research has shown that there are Bulgarians who choose Italy because of the economic and social resources it possesses and the opportunity it offers to alleviate the difficulties they experience in their home country. We say "with concern" because these are not exactly those national psychological traits of the Bulgarians that we are happy to reveal when we study its manifestations. Even less are they the ones we want to emphasize in our studies. Our research has also brought up evidence of ingratitude and unfairness.

Still, we are relieved to see that these cases are rather isolated and do not create negative tendencies about the contemporary presence of Bulgarians in Italian lands.

### **1. Research methodology**

To realize its objectives, this study employs two research methods. One is the analysis of historical documents. The second is a sociological questionnaire. In the analysis of historical documents, sources that testify to the presence of Bulgarians in Italian lands from the Middle Ages to the 20th century are included. The questionnaire is aimed at investigating the motives of contemporary Bulgarians to settle in Italy. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of a pilot survey conducted among Bulgarian emigrants in Italy in 2021 and 2022 and distributed in an online platform to Bulgarian emigrants in Italy in 2023. It was completed by 85 Bulgarian emigrants located in different areas of Italy. Most respondents who participated in the survey were women – 89 % and 11% were men. The age distribution is uneven. One person under 20 participated in the study, representing 1% of all persons surveyed. Individuals aged 20 to 29 years were 4%; individuals aged 30 to 39 were 22%; individuals aged 40 to 49 were 29%; individuals aged 50 to 60 years were 31%; and individuals aged 60 years and over were 13% of the participants. Married ones were 56% of the surveyed individuals. Single – 14% and 9% were widowed. Six percent of the participants did not specify their marital status. Eighty-one percent of the surveyed persons have one or more children, 16% have no children, and 2% did not specify. Most participants, 40%, have lived in Italy for 16 to 20 years, followed by 32% participants who have lived in Italy for between 11 and 15 years. The lowest relative proportion of participants living in Italy was participants residing in Italy for 1 to 5 years. Those who have lived in Italy for more than 21 years are 24% of the participants.

### **2. Historical information about Bulgarians' settlement in present-day Italian lands during the medieval period, including their participation in battles and seeking refuge in Italy**

According to Georgi Dimov, a Bulgarian associate professor of history, what we know today about the ancient Bulgarians in southern Italy is often based more on comparative and empirical material than on direct sources and archaeological findings (Dimov 2013). According to him, the initial entry of Bulgarians into present-day Italy took place through their recruitment into the Byzantine army during the reign of Emperor Justinian the Great (527 – 565). His claims are substantiated by the books of the Byzantine writer Procopius of Caesarea, composed in the period 545 – 550 (Prokopios 2014), which speak of the recruitment of Bulgarian soldiers to help the empire. In his article “The Bulgarians in Southern Italy in the Middle Ages (from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries),” Dimov describes a series of sources that attest to the presence of Bulgarian soldiers near Calabria (Bruzio), Sicily, the

vicinity of Rome, in Middle Italy, Busta Gallorum, and several others. According to him, some of these Bulgarians, who reached the lands of Modern Italy in one way or another to engage in warfare from different historical contexts, voluntarily, on their own initiative, remained in Italy. In contrast, others stayed to serve as garrisons around the Byzantine territory of the peninsula (Dimov 2013).

One of the most widespread first records of a more substantial and mass presence of Bulgarians in what is now Italian lands is found in the works of Paulus Diaconus – a Benedictine monk, scribe, historian and one of the most popular Italian explorers of the Longobards. According to him, the historical events testifying to the battles of the Longobards in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries show increased participation of Bulgarians. According to these accounts, Alboin (King of the Longobards from about 560 to 572, who put an end to the migration of the Longobards by settling them in northern Italy and founding the Langobard Kingdom in Italy) brought with him to Italy many people from different nations whom he took with him, among them the Bulgarians (Diaconus 1907).

From the same period dates the story told by the Bulgarian historian, Veselin Beshevliev, about Pope Gregory the Great and the sixth century Bulgarian sword-bearer of the general Narcissus, who asked to take care of a boy injured in one of the many battles in the lands of Italy. This Bulgarian spoke to the boy in Bulgarian, and the boy, who, according to Pope Gregory, had miraculously gone to heaven and learned all languages, including Bulgarian, managed to understand what the Bulgarian was saying to him. This story from the sixth century, subjected several times to different interpretations, ranks among those accounts of Diaconus, which testify to a Bulgarian presence in the lands of present-day Italy (Beshevliev 2008), without, however, sharing with us what the grounds were for the settlement of these Bulgarians in Italian lands.

We find a little more clarity about the motives for the settlement of Bulgarians in Italian lands in sources attesting to more mainstream events of the 7th century. One source for these events is the French work *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii libri quattuor: a libri Secundi capite LIII usque ad librum quartum, paucis Abbreviati*. by Bruno Krusch and Andreas Kusternig, which describes a fierce struggle between Avars and Huns in 631 (Krusch & Kusternig 1982). According to this source, the Avars defeated the Bulgars and drove them from their lands due to this struggle. Seven thousand Bulgarians sought refuge in Frankish land and were initially granted such, but overnight 6000 of them, along with their wives and children, were massacred. Seven hundred people and their leader Alzek survived (Fredegari & Rakov 2015) and for a period of several years found refuge with the Wends (western Slavs who in the 7th century lived in large territories in northern and eastern Germany). Years later, evidence from the Lombard theologian, historian and poet Paulus Diaconus (Latin: Paulus Diaconus) suggests that 600 proto-Bulgarians preceded by Alzek came to Italy and sought refuge with the Lombard king

Grimwald I (662 – 671) (Diacono 1907). In his *History of the Longobards*, Paul Diacono says: “During this time a warlord of the Bulgars, named Alzeko, left his people, for what reason unknown, and peacefully entering Italy with the whole army of his duchy, came to King Grimwald, promising to serve him and live in his country. And the King directed him to Beneventum to his son Romuald, commanding the latter to appoint him and his people places to live. Romuald, receiving them kindly, granted them extensive tracts for settlement, which had been abandoned till then, namely Sepinum (Sepino), Bovianum (Boiano), Isernia, and other towns with their territories, and ordered that Alzeko himself should be named, the name of his title being changed gastaldius instead of duke. And they live to the present day in these places, as we have said, and though they also speak Latin, they have by no means abandoned the use of their language” (Diaconus 1907). A little later, this small group of Proto-Bulgarians settled in the south in Campania between Bari and Metapontum opposite the island of Sicily (Miltenova 1993).

Two other sources provide information about the presence of Alzek’s Bulgarians in southern Italy. One is the Salernian Chronicle of 974 and the Chronicle of Monte Cassino of 867 – 920, analysed in detail by Alexander Nikolov in *Alzeko, dux Vulgrum and the Proto-Bulgarian Settlements in Italy* (Nikolov 2013). The former attests to the settlement of the Slav prince Alzeko in Sepinum (Westerbergh 1956). The second testifies to the settlement of Alzek the Bulgar and his people.

To this day, the descendants of the Altsek Bulgarians remain faithful to the choice of their leader and the towns that sheltered them. They inhabit the towns of Saepinum, Bovianum and Isernia in the Molise region. Fourteen centuries later, they are still preserving their national identity as Bulgarians, assisting in the reconstruction process and preserving the history of their leader and the Italian people who welcomed them into their lands in times of hardship. Coincidentally, 14 centuries after the events of the 7th century, a large Proto-Bulgarian necropolis with the grave of Alzek was discovered and excavated near the town of Boyano in Vicene-Campocchiaro (Genito 2001). The findings were transferred to the museum in Campobasso, and a monument to Khan Alzek was unveiled in the town of Cele di Bulgheria in Italy on 8 June 2016.

### **Historical records of diplomacy and spirituality that unite Bulgarians and Italians**

One of the most significant events in the history of Bulgarians and the whole Slavic race is the work of the Thessalonian brothers Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher and Methodius and their missions in Italy. Although their work is not directly related to Bulgarians’ migration to Italy, it defines the nature of the spiritual relationship between the two peoples and how Bulgarians perceive the Italian nation today.

Constantine Cyril the Philosopher and Methodius are Christian enlighteners canonized by the Orthodox and Catholic Church as saints and equal apostles.



Cyril and his brother Methodius created the Slavonic script – called Glagolitic – and translated the Divine Scriptures from Greek into Bulgarian, thus creating the conditions for the enlightenment of the Bulgarian people, the strengthening of the Divine Church with holy icons and the establishment of Orthodoxy (Popruzhenko 1928, p. 77).

Three significant events link the lives of the two enlighteners to Italy. The first, which Bulgarian students still study in school today, took place in Venice and dates back to 867. It is connected with the defenders of the trilingual doctrine, which raised before Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher the question of the right of the Slavs to worship in their native language. In the words of Clement of Ohrid (a Bulgarian scholar of the 9th century) in a lengthy hagiography of Constantine-Cyril from 869, *“When he was in Venice, bishops, popes and Circassians gathered against him like crows against a falcon, and raised the trilingual heresy, saying: ‘Tell us, man, how do you now invent books for the Slavs and teach them? So far no one else has invented [such books], neither the apostles, nor the Roman Pontiff, nor Gregory the Theologian, nor Jerome, nor Augustine. We know only three languages in which it befits God to be glorified by books: Hebrew, Greek, Latin.’ And the philosopher answered them, ‘Does not the rain fall from God equally on all? Does not the sun also shine on all? Do we not all breathe the same air? How are you not ashamed to define only three languages, but wish that all other nations and peoples were blind and deaf? Tell me: do you consider God powerless, so that he cannot give this, or do you consider him envious, so that he does not want [to give it]? But we know many nations which have books, and give glory to God, every one in his own language. It is known that such are the Armenians, Persians, Abazgians, Iberians, Sughds, Goths, Avars, Tyrians, Khazars, Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians and many others. If you do not want to understand from these [examples], then at least from the Scriptures know the will of God. ... But unto you, O teachers of the law, he saith, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for neither enter ye in, nor let them enter in, that would enter in. “And again [he says], “Woe to you, scribes, because you have taken the keys of knowledge; you yourselves have not entered, and you hinder those who would enter.” ... “If I pray in [an unknown] tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind remains unfruitful. So what? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the mind. If you bless [only] in spirit, how will he who is of the simple say “Amen” to your prayer, since he does not understand what you are saying? You praise God well, but the other is not taught. I thank my God that I speak in languages more than you all; but in the church I would rather say five words understood to teach others than a thousand words in [an] unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in mind; be babes unto evil, but in mind be ye perfect. It is written in the law, “In strange tongues and with strange*

*mouths will I speak to this people, and even so they will not hear me, saith the Lord” (Ohridsky 1986).*

This evolutionary moment in the historical and spiritual development of the whole of Europe marked the beginning of a recognized and established spiritual and educational activity in the Slavic world. When he heard of what had happened in Venice, Pope Nicholas extended an invitation to Cyril and Methodius to visit him in Rome. The two, along with several of their disciples, set out for Rome (Petkanova, 1983), but arrived after Pope Nicholas’ death in November 867 and were received with great honors by Pope Adrian.

The welcoming of the two brothers in Rome was also significant for Pope Adrian for another reason, related to the mission of the two brothers to Cherson in 861, during which they discovered the relics of St. Clement, Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century AD, which were of great importance for the Italian people. He was one of the earliest figures of the Christian Church, high priest of the Christians in still pagan Rome (Zukhlev 1911; Cross & Livingstone 2005). St. Apo. Clement was the third successor of St. Peter in Rome (according to the oldest list of Roman bishops). The discovery of the relics of St. Clement by the Thessalonian brothers played an additional and very important role in establishing the authority of the two brothers in the Western world. Invited by the Pope in 867, Cyril and Methodius carried the remains of St. Clement to him.

Pope Adrian II and the Roman citizens solemnly welcomed the Holy Brothers to Rome. They received the Slavonic books and consecrated them in the Church of St. [Virgin] Mary (Ohridsky 1986) and ceremoniously escorted and buried St. Clement’s remains in the Basilica of San Clemente, where they are preserved to this day (Chapman 1908).

The work of Cyril and Methodius testifies to the spiritual-educational and diplomatic activity of the two brothers in Rome and Moravia about the ecclesiastical politics of the East, but it also connects with the liturgical sequence and the services performed after the consecration of the Slavonic books (Stoykova 2008; Cotsonis 1994). They have been called “the Spiritual Fathers of the Slavic people” – writes Vodopivec, who “contributed with a missionary spirit to the development of the liturgy and the popularization of the Holy Scriptures (Vodopivec 1985), saints for both the Eastern Church and the Western Church (Ivanov (Kyumurdzhiyski) 2021). The Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius were canonized as saints and, in 1980, were proclaimed co-patrons of Europe by Pope John Paul II.

Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher died in Rome days after his arrival. By the decision of Pope Adrian and the bishops of Rome, he was laid on the right side of the altar in the church of St. Clement, where, writes St. Clement of Ohrid, “many miracles immediately began to happen.” Seeing these miracles, the Romans became increasingly attached to his sanctity and honor. They painted an icon over his tomb and began to burn [a candle] over it twenty-four hours a day, praising God, who glorifies those who glorify him in this way. St. Cyril’s



remains are still preserved in the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome” (Ohridski 1986).

Another event from the 13th century connects again the head and supreme sovereign of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Innocentius, with the then king of the Bulgarians, Tsar Kaloyan, but this time after the division of the Eastern and Western Church. At a critical moment for the Bulgarian people, unrecognized by the Latin Empire, the Bulgarian king showed his diplomatic skills and subordinated Bulgaria in ecclesiastical terms to Rome to receive in return recognition from “the most significant factor at the time” (Voinov et al. 1965).

Historical documents testify that, in spiritual terms, the relationship between Bulgaria and Italy continued in the following centuries. In the 17th century, many Bulgarian boys of the age at which they were ordained priests were sent to study theology in various seminaries, colleges and schools of Catholic orders in Italy and lived in the monasteries around them. After their ordination as priests, they were returned to Bulgaria or sent as missionaries to other countries. Their training was possible thanks to the intercession of the first Bulgarian Catholic bishops, Peter Solinat and Ilia Marinov. With their help, many Bulgarian boys received their education at the “Illyrian College” in Loreto and the “Clement College” in Rome.

The complicated situation in which Orthodox Christians found themselves under the Ottoman rule and the freedom of Catholics in the Ottoman Empire attracted groups of Bulgarian society to Catholicism in the 17th century. They hoped that liberation from Ottoman rule could come from the united European states, which could provide religious and political protection for the people. So young Bulgarians settled in Italy to become monks, and then, as educated Catholics, they developed an essential and very useful cultural and political activity. Among them was Archbishop Peter Parchevich, whose remains rest today in the Chiesa di San Andrea della Frate. In the history of Bulgarian diplomacy, Peter Parchevich is considered a first-class diplomat, ready to sacrifice everything for his country. He made the liberation of his homeland the main goal of his life, using his exceptional qualities, his great erudition acquired in the Catholic colleges of Renaissance Italy, his excellent command of languages, and his sharp mind. He made numerous attempts to attract Italy to his cause, the success of which came 200 years after his death (Aslanian & Aslanian 2011).

The settlement of young Bulgarians in Italy for the purpose of spiritual education and development continues to this day. At the beginning of the twentieth century, dozens of Bulgarians were educated in the “Latin College” in Assisi and the Pontifical Theological Faculty “Seraphicum” in Rome (Eldarov 2002).

### **Historical information about Bulgarians in the Bologna area related to the development of university higher education in Italy**

We also find evidence of the presence of Bulgarians in Italy-related education in the Bologna city, where a large community of Bogomils settled

during times of persecution. One of their heirs is Dr. Bulgarus de Bulgariis of the 12th century, famous for his qualities and connection with the establishment of the oldest active university in Europe. These accounts say that Bulgarus de Bulgariis, a lawyer by formation, was one of the 4 most famous students of Irnerio, considered the founder of the University of Bologna. With his activities, Dr. Bulgarus de Bulgariis became not only one of the most famous lawyers of his time but was also considered one of those who stood at the foundation of the building of the University of Bologna. The fact that, for five centuries, the teaching activities of this University were held in the professors' homes, leads to the home of Dr. Bulgarus de Bulgariis today being one of those that still belongs to the University. The house in which he lived and probably gave lessons is remembered today from a chapel built in the middle of the 16th century in the Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio (Bocchi 2007). The chapel is named Santa Maria dei Bulgari and was constructed in memory of a chapel that probably existed in the past.

The personality of Bulgarus de Bulgariis and its connection with Bulgaria has always attracted the attention of Bulgarian researchers (Chilingirov 1941), who argue about the origins of the famous scholar. In the words of prof. Boris Janovski, however, in the monastery of St. Salvatore, one of the most interesting medieval monuments of Bulgaria was discovered – the “Bolognese Psalter”, which confirms the Bulgarian origin of Bulgarus de Bulgarins (Yanovski 1990; Duychev 1968). The Bolognese Psalter is a 264-page parchment manuscript, which is now kept in the Bologna Library under the title *Athanasius Psalmorum Romae*. The same also attests to the settlement of a large Bulgarian Bogomil colony in Bologna, the result of persecutions of Bogomils from Bulgaria, the most likely successor of which was Bulgarus de Bulgarins (Chilingirov 1941).

According to the Bulgarian source, Bulgarus de Bulgarins is known as a great representative of the early generation of the interpreters of the old Roman and ancient law in general, adapting it to the changed conditions and creating the basis of the legal systems of the new states and new nations. He is also known as one of the scientific scholars who brought fame to the Faculty of Law of the University of Bologna, and even as one of the founders of the University as a special kind of institution of higher learning of the highest rank, with a main faculty of law and intended primarily to train lawyers. He also gained popularity as a first-class orator who revived the art of the great orators of antiquity and, because of this, received the nickname of “golden mouth” – “Bulgarus os aureum” (Janovsky 1990). According to D'Amico, the University of Bologna, for several hundred years, had the name “Curia Bulgar” which could be translated as “Bulgarian House of Legal Science”, and the university temple built next to his house still bears the name “Cappella di S. Maria dei Bulgari” (D'Amico 1942).

### **3. Historical information about the presence of Bulgarians in Italy in the modern times and their participation in the Italian movement for unification and independence of Italy**

Historical records from the 19th century testify of the participation of Bulgarians in the movement for the unification of Italy. In 1860 – 1861, the Bulgarian Stefan Dunov took command of a volunteer detachment to Giuseppe Garibaldi's movement for the unification of Italy (Kerchova-Putsan, Velchov-Dede, Rankov 2018). For his bravery in the face of a numerically superior enemy, he was personally awarded by Garibaldi. He received the rank of colonel, and his unit was given the name "Regiment Stefan Dunnov".

In 1866, another Bulgarian, Petko Voevoda, along with Garibaldi, formed the "Garibaldi Brigade," which included 220 Italians and 67 Bulgarians. Petko Voevoda initiated the unification of the then-still-enslaved Balkan nations. His idea turned out to be a winning one, and during the Cretan Uprising, he received the rank of captain as a reward for his bravery and revolutionary spirit.

In 2006, a bust of Captain Petko Voevoda was placed on the Gianicolo hill in Rome. Next to this is a memorial plate on which the following is inscribed: "In memory of the Bulgarian Garibaldians who, with self-renunciation and heroism, fought for the freedom, unity, and independence of Italy. From a grateful Italy."

#### **Historical records of the love that bound Bulgarian and Italian heirs in marriage.**

Probably both before and after this marriage, which has remained in history as the most famous between Bulgarian and Italian heirs to the throne, there have been and will be cases in which love created families of Bulgarian and Italian origin at the same time. One of them, however, leaves a special mark not only in statistics but also in the historical events of both countries and in the development of humanity, kindness and charity in Bulgaria.

In 1927, the fourth child of King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy and Queen Helena, Giovanna met the Bulgarian King Boris III. The two young people fell in love and married in 1930 in Assisi. The religious ceremony took place in the Franciscan Basilica of Assisi, where the two were married in the Catholic rite (the choice of the place was due to the vow of devotion to St. Francis, given years earlier by Giovanna). As king of the Orthodox religion, a second ceremony was celebrated in Sofia, Bulgaria, where Giovanna's official coronation as Bulgarian queen took place (Sicardi 2003). In Bulgaria, Queen Giovanna was known for her charitable devotion to the poor, sick and disadvantaged, in building hospitals, active in the Bulgarian Red Cross, in training young Bulgarian nurses, helping and supporting the poor and those affected by wars (Shalafov & Taseva 2007). The names of Tsar Boris III and Tsarina Ioanna are also associated with the feat of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III, who resisted German pressure and refused to deport over 50,000 Bulgarian Jews and many foreign Jews who went into hiding in Bulgaria during the war<sup>1</sup>.

### **Historical records from the 20th century about the presence of Bulgarian cultural figures in Italy**

Bulgaria shared some of its most gifted opera singers with the Italian stage in the 20th century. Among them are Boris Hristov, Nikola Gyuzelev, Nikolay Giaurov, the great Gena Dimitrova, and the magnificent Raina Kabaivanska.

Boris Hristov studied opera singing with Riccardo Stracciari in Rome. Then, he went to Salzburg, where he continued his vocal studies with Muratti. In 1946, he made his professional debut on the “Reggio di Calabria” stage, in the role of Colin from “La bohème”. In 1947, Boris Hristov performed the role of Pimen from the opera “Boris Godunov” in Rome and at the Teatro alla Scala - Milano. In 1948, he first performed the role of Boris on the stage of the Cagliari, and in 1949, he portrayed the same role at Covent Garden. Twenty-five years later, at the same theatre, the Bulgarian bass was crowned with a golden copy of Godunov’s original crown in the highest recognition of his services to present this masterpiece of Russian classics (Kasabova 2013; Bozhkov 1994). In the world-famous British Museum, in a special hall, was arranged an exhibition of the stage costumes of Boris Hristov, Maria Callas and Laurence Olivier, and in 1986 in Rome was opened the “Bulgarian Academy of Art and Culture – Boris Hristov”, which since 1 October 2006 is now the Bulgarian Cultural Institute – Rome.

The institute’s cultural policy today focuses not only on the annual opera class at the Academy of Opera Singing “Boris Hristov” but also on presenting the best of Bulgarian cinema in the traditional annual “Festival of Bulgarian Cinema” and, from 2021, also on presenting Bulgarian art in the salons of the institute’s gallery located in the heart of the eternal city at Monte Brianzo 60 str.

On the “stage” of fine art climbed the well-known to Italians Assen Peikov, the sculptor of twentieth-century celebrities, and his brother Ilia Peikov, the pioneer of space painting.

Assen Peikov is undoubtedly one of the serious creators of Bulgaria’s legacy in art outside the borders of our homeland. The famous 54 Marguta Street, a hotspot of cultural life in Rome in the 20th century, is still home to Assen Peykov’s studio, where the artist sculpted figures such as Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, Ava Gardner, Kennedy, and others. The studio is part of the cultural history of the Eternal City. Undoubtedly, the most famous and award-winning work of Assen Peikov is the statue of Leonardo da Vinci at Rome’s Fiumicino Airport, built after Assen Peikov won a competition to create it in 1965. His well-known works include the sculpture of Minerva at the University of Aldo Moro in Bari, the works “Dream” and “Pomona” located in the courtyard of the Bulgarian Embassy, “St. John the Baptist, located behind the central headquarters of the Batistine nuns in Rome, the Fishermen in Ostia, the statue of the actress Ava Gardner, with which the film *The Barefoot Countess* begins and ends, and the seven-metre sculpture *The Goddess of the Sea*, which to this day Sophia Loren likes to say is her image.

Assen Peikov died in 1973 in his beloved Rome. After his death, a street located next to where the artist lived, near the Colosseum, received his name – “Largo Assen Peikov”. According to an online publication, under the project of the BNU “Assen and Ilia Peikov” Rome “Schools as part of the past, present and future of their capitals”, funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, Rome, 2016 – 2018, later, in 2007, the name of Assen Peikov was given to another street, near the world-famous Cinecittà film studio in Rome.

Ilia Peikov, the younger brother of Assen Peikov, is known as the pioneer of space painting. He created his first paintings in his brother’s studio on Via Margutta and later opened his studio on Via Pignà, near the Pantheon. It was at this time that he discovered his passion for space. He received the nickname “pioneer of space painting” for his paintings, described as photographs of space. According to some, they are so realistic that Yuri Gagarin himself is rumored to have been awestruck when he saw them. Today, Ilya Peikov’s paintings are part of private collections worldwide. One of them belongs to the Vatican – personally presented by him, for which he then received a letter of thanks from Pope John Paul II.

Today, the Bulgarian Sunday School in Rome is named after the brothers Asen and Ilija Peikov.

#### **4. Sociological study of the motives for migration of Bulgarians to Italy in the 21st century**

According to a study by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 6% of all Bulgarian emigrants in the 21st century chose Italy as their country of residence (National Statistical Institute, 2001). According to the official statistics, Bulgarians living in Italy in 2007 numbered 33,477. According to unofficial data, the number of Bulgarians in Italy is around 70,000, with 50,000 living in northern Italy. Most Bulgarians live in Milan, Bologna, Turin, Rome and Florence. In 2009 (according to the Bulgarian Embassy), 120,000 Bulgarians were living in Italy, 88% of whom live in the central and northern part of the country (Hristova 2009).

In 2022, we conducted a survey to find out why 6% of all modern Bulgarians choose Italy as their second home, how they feel in Italy, how they feel as immigrants and what keeps them in Italy for years.

The study involved 85 Bulgarian emigrants living today in different parts of Italy, Bulgarians of various social and economic status, of different ages and with different reasons that took them away from home.

The sample is accidental. A short questionnaire was sent to online groups of Bulgarian emigrants, and 85 people filled it in. Mostly, the sample consisted of women – 76 people or 89% of the total number of persons surveyed. The age distribution was uneven with the largest number of respondents between 50 and 60 years and the smallest number of respondents between 20 and 29 years. Most respondents have been living in Italy for 16 to 20 years – 40%, followed by

32% – between 11 and 15 years of residence in Italy. Regarding marital status, the highest relative proportion of married persons was found among those who were married, representing 56% of all persons surveyed. This is followed by the unmarried and divorced, who represent 14% each, and finally the widowed/widower, who represent 9% of all 37 persons surveyed. Those unwilling to share their marital status accounted for 6% of the participants. Also, from the responses of the persons surveyed, it is clear that 69 of them, equating to 81% of the total, have one or more children, 16% have none, and 2% are unwilling to share.

**Why do modern Bulgarian emigrants choose Italy as their second home?**

When asked – Why did you choose Italy among all other countries as a country to continue your life, 24% of the Bulgarian emigrants said that this choice was random. Their answers ranged from simply: “By chance” or “By coincidence”, to “By coincidence at the right time and place!”. “In my case, the choice of Italy was pure chance and necessity at that moment in my life as a single mother in Bulgaria”, “It was a coincidence, but I felt almost at home in Italy”, “It was a coincidence that I had friends in Italy who helped me to start working”, “It was a coincidence! I had acquaintances who pointed out to me the opportunity to work in Italy”, “I fell into it by chance 20 years ago”, “I chose abroad. Italy is an accidental destination”, “Non ho scelto, è stata la conseguenza di un ‘ondata migratoria degli anni 90’ – “I didn’t choose, it was a consequence of a migrant wave in the 90s”, “I tossed a coin”, “Fate chose”.

Nineteen percent of the respondents said that they chose Italy among all other countries because of how they feel there. Here are some of their answers. “I chose Italy because I also like it because of the melodious language”; “I was in love with Italian history, culture, music, architecture, cuisine, etc.”, “I fell in love with Italy, with the history, with the masterpieces of art, with the melody of the language!”, “I chose Italy 30 years ago. Italy was a heaven then”; “It seemed to me one of the most wonderful countries at the time”; “I visited Italy in 2006 and already knew I wanted to live here”; “I followed my heart”.

The choice of 14% of the Bulgarian emigrants is related to love, partnership, marriage and the family they created in Italy. For half of these 14%, love is the only answer to the question “Why did you choose Italy?”. Some add that they had no interest in living away from their homeland, but love changed everything. The other half of the Bulgarian emigrants say they followed their relatives on the road to Italy. Although they never considered living away from Bulgaria, their need to be with the people they love outweighed everything.

Ten percent of the Bulgarian migrants say they chose Italy because of the job opportunities it offers, because of the higher salaries compared to those in Bulgaria, because of the feeling of stability the country gives them, and because



of the feeling that it is in Italy that they have more opportunities. Here are some of their answers: ,I chose Italy because of the finances, the stability and the greater number of opportunities‘; ,In 2002 it was easy to come and find work‘; ,I chose Italy because I had a work contract that also provided me with a place to stay and it was close to Bulgaria‘; ,I chose Italy because I had friends here who found me work‘.

Nine percent of Bulgarian expats say they initially chose Italy as a place to study or pursue a career, with no intention of staying permanently. Here are some of their answers: “I graduated from an Italian language high school and decided to continue my higher education in Italy”, “I chose it because of the university and stayed after because I like the lifestyle”, “I am studying design and since I was little I love the Italian Renaissance”, “I studied in Italy and decided to stay because it feels close to me, because my profession in Italy is seen with respect (I am an artist).”

During their studies, some of the future Bulgarian emigrants met a person with whom they decided to continue their lives and later formed a family. Italy was not their first choice of country to continue their lives, but it was the country where they met love and chose to stay because of their partner. Here are some of their answers: ‘I graduated in Italy and got married in Italy’; ‘That’s how things happened. I spent a semester on Erasmus. Then, I returned as an ai pair (in-living nanny) and met my current husband. I returned for a second Erasmus during my master’s, which I spent with my husband. Later, I went back to look for work again, but I got pregnant and we started a family’; “First to study and then to work”.

Nine percent of the Bulgarian emigrants say that “the outstretched hand of a friend or colleague” is the basis of their emigration to Italy: “I just had someone to go to...”, “Because I had friends in Italy”, “In Italy I had friends to go to”, “I had Italian colleagues and friends who helped us in the beginning”, “A friend helped me”, “There was someone here to give me a hand, and I don’t regret my choice”, “A friend recommended me for a job”.

Those who say they came to Italy because of parents, family or relatives are 6, which is 7% of those who completed the questionnaire. Here can be read answers such as “I did not choose myself. My parents did it”, “At the age of 15 before 26 I followed my father with my mother”, “Parenti” – “relatives”, “Because of family”, “Because in Italy lives and my sister”, and “Natural choice, I don’t remember a moment of my life without Italy, I’ve been there since I was 3 years old”.

Six other answers were given that could not be placed in any of the above categories. These 7% include “I work and live in Italy,” “I prefer France, but I didn’t find anyone to help me,” “I had no choice,” “Out of necessity,” “By mistake,” and “By medical problems.”

Why did you choose Italy among all other countries as a country to continue your life?	
By coincidence	24%
Because of the way I feel here in Italy	19%
For love	14%
Better job opportunities	10%
Education	9%
Friends who helped me come here	9%
Family and relatives	7%
Other / Uncategorized	8%

### **How do contemporary Bulgarian emigrants decide to emigrate to Italy – alone or with a partner?**

When asked whether the choice to emigrate to Italy was independent or influenced and taken together with someone else, 68% of Bulgarian emigrants said that the choice was “individual”, with some even specifying “completely individual”; “I found my partner there”, “My partner came later. Back then I was single” and others add “Because of a partner who is in Italy” (but the choice was individual); “Individual, so to speak, my father was here. After a while he came back and I stayed”; “I made my decision absolutely alone.”, “Alone, supposedly for 2 months, and what happened? 13 years!”

Those who had decided to start a new life with a partner in Italy accounted for 21% of all and said that the choice was most often made “with a partner” or “as a family”, with some specifying that their choice had been made by their partner, but that they had gone along with it.

Five percent of the Bulgarian emigrants who participated in the survey said that the choice was made by their parents.

Failing to find their place in the groups with answers above are the following: One respondent indicated that the choice “was not mine”, another “because of my Italian partner”, two others said that “I didn’t emigrate” and “I am not an emigrant”, and a third adds “a coincidence of circumstances. I never felt like an emigrant”.

How do contemporary Bulgarian emigrants decide to emigrate to Italy - alone or with a partner?	
Individually	68%
The choice was made by the partner	21%

The choice was made by the parents	5%
Other / Uncategorized	6%

### **How do Bulgarian immigrants in Italy choose the city in which to settle?**

When asked how you chose the city in Italy and why did you choose it, one third of the expats said it was not their choice. It was determined by the fact that they emigrated because of relatives, friends, relatives or a partner already living in a certain area of the country. Their desire to be with them takes them to the place where they already are. Here are some of the answers of Bulgarian emigrants who have followed their relatives and loved ones. "I had relatives here", "My relatives were here", "It was my relatives in Rome who helped me settle in this city"; "Just when I was 12 years old they brought me here and I got used to it", "I came here because of family"; "Relatives working in the city brought me here"; "I was first in Northern Italy because I had a cousin who helped me. Now I live in Southern Italy, Soverato, because I live with an Italian who is from here"; "I had relatives"; "Bologna – my father works here"; "I came here because of my father"; "Parenti" – "relatives". Here are the answers of Bulgarian expats who settled in the place where their partner is from: "I followed my husband", "My husband lives here", "Rome .... I had a friend and he invited me", "I lived in a city where I had friends, then I met my husband and moved here, a beautiful and peaceful city Cesena", "My husband is from this city", "I got married", "For love", "I had chosen another city. But then I met the man I am here for". In the third group are the Bulgarian emigrants who followed their friends. Here are some of their answers. She gave me a hand", "I came here with the help of a friend", "I had friends who live and work here", "I have a friend who lived there and then I fell in love with this city too", "On the advice of Italian friends", "Bologna. I had fellow citizens here, friends", "Because of people I knew", "Through friends who live in the same city", "Again for this reason, I had acquaintances there".

The second most important reason for choosing a residence among Bulgarian emigrants is work. Work determined the choice of 24% of the surveyed persons. One part of them chose the city where they work. Here are some of their answers: "I found a job here", "I found a secure job here", "I chose it because of the job, and I stayed because the city is quite peaceful", "The city is Milan and I came here because they gave me a work contract, documents and I get three times more than I used to get in Napoli", "I like the city, there is more opportunity for work", "I chose a job and it was in this city", "I was offered a job here", "Because I was offered a job here and eventually I liked living here". Another part of the Bulgarian migrants ended up in the city because they found or were offered a job here. Here are some of their answers "It was not a choice. They found me a job here", "The job contract was here", "My employment agency chose it, not me", "The first city I had

no choice, I went where there were jobs. After I learned the language I moved to the central part”, “Work brought me to this city”, “Work took me to Napoli, then to Milan”, “I didn’t choose it. The job I was looking for and was hired for was there. It’s been like that for 10 years”, “It pays well here”, “There were jobs there”, “I’ve changed a lot of cities. I’m in Pavia now because of a momentary job”, “The job brought me here!”.

Fourteen percent of the Bulgarian expats chose the city in Italy because of certain qualities it has. “Florence is the most beautiful city for me in Italy, rich in culture and history. The climate affects me well, the humidity is not great. ,I chose Milan because, apart from everything to do with the design and beauty of the city, it is the most prominent on the European economic scene of Italy’s major cities’, ,Ancient and beautiful seaside Catania, a beloved, unforgettable city’, ,Because it’s Rome; I like huge cities, and Rome is just that, a centuries-old madhouse’, ,Rome is more than Italy’, ,Rome is the most beautiful city in Italy’, ,I chose the city by feeling. I just like it and I feel good in it”, “I chose to live in the countryside in the mountains and I feel great”; “The nature here is clean and beautiful“.

Nine percent of the Bulgarian emigrants said that they did not choose the city, but they came to it by chance, but later they were convinced that they wanted to stay in it. “I ended up in Tuscany, where I left my heart”, “I ended up in Rome by chance, but now I would not replace Rome with any other city”.

The fourth place in the reasons for choosing a city in Italy for Bulgarian emigrants is occupied by the university. As the main choice, the city in which the university is located also becomes the place where the Bulgarian emigrants have eventually stayed. Here are some of their answers. “I spent a semester on Erasmus, then I came back as a pair (in-living nanny), I met my current husband”.

### **How do contemporary Bulgarian immigrants in Italy perceive Italy?**

When asked how do you perceive Italy, 44% of the Bulgarian emigrants answered that they perceive it as their second home and homeland, as their family. Some of them specify: “my” home, “new” home, “only home”, “La mia casa” or simply “Casa”. One respondent says: “I feel its absence when I am away for a long time”. Eleven percent of the respondents describe Italy as the place they have chosen to live, work and start a family. For them, Italy is the place they have chosen to live their lives, to realise their work, the place to start a family. Here are the answers of the respondents: ,Italy is the country where I have been living for the last 15 years‘; ,Homeland where I live with my family‘; ,For 17 years it has been a way of life and work! But also knowledge and touching the achievements of human genius!”, “The place where I chose to live.”; “Beautiful country where I work now.”, “The country where I live for 20 years and where I work.”, “The country where I live now.”, “The country where I live and raise my child.”, “The country where I live but not my homeland.”.

Twenty-five percent of those surveyed described Italy as: „the country that took me and my family in‘, „an elegant hostess who waits with a table set for me to return to her and share her story, her day, her charm with me‘, „kindness, courtesy, the best food in the world, wonderful cities and history. The summer months, Italy is partying until the morning. The most delicious gelato, pizza, pastries...”. This group of respondents felt warm feelings towards Italy and described it as a wonderful, beloved and “sunny country”. One of the respondents wrote: „Italy is a fairytale for me. Here are a few more responses: „Italy is love, beauty and peace, freedom, poetry, sun, history, and work, an amazing country with good cuisine, a cradle of the Renaissance, a country with extraordinary architectural, cultural, historical, creative richness; Italy is a “museum of antique-minded people”, Italy is a country with smiling people, despite the problems; my present and future, the place where people have achieved their successes and to which they feel gratitude. Italy is “the best place to live” and “il più bel paese”. Several Bulgarian emigrants add that Italy provides them with a better life and better opportunities than they have received in Bulgaria.

For only 10% of Bulgarian emigrants Italy is the country they have chosen only to work and to secure a better income than the one they have managed to secure in Bulgaria. For them, Italy is the country providing them with opportunities for a “normal life”, a way out of the difficulties they experienced in Bulgaria, the possibility of securing more money and a higher salary.

When asked “How do you think Italians perceive Bulgarians in Italy?”, 44% of the Bulgarian emigrants said that Italians have positive attitudes towards Bulgarians, but their attitudes are determined not only by the fact that they are Bulgarians, but also by many other things. According to one part of the Bulgarian emigrants, the attitude of Italians towards Bulgarians is determined by the Bulgarians they have met and their experience with them. They say, “it depends on the person” or “it depends on the Bulgarian”. According to some of the Bulgarian emigrants, Italians do not know much about Bulgaria, but over the years, they get to know the Bulgarians and “Sono molto ben disposti”. Most Bulgarian emigrants agree that the Italians’ attitude towards Bulgarians is mainly determined by the way Bulgarians have presented themselves to them. Here are some of their answers. And now we are one of them!”, “We are lucky that we are intelligent and work responsibly.”, “They see us as hardworking and responsible people”, ‘Almost as equals’, “Respectfully”, “In a large percentage positively” and they accept them “As they present themselves. I personally am accepted as one of them”. They are also of the opinion that “For an honest person, there is no problem where you will be”, “It is normal if you are honest and work intelligently” and ‘It is normal, I have many friends and colleagues and we have a great time, I have not sensed any obvious racism’.

According to another part of the Bulgarian emigrants, the attitude towards Bulgarian emigrants depends on the experience, knowledge and qualities of the Italians. Here is one of these answers: 'I have never felt "different" from the Italians themselves, I have not been discriminated against, but I also attribute it to my luck to meet people along the way for whom it does not matter where you come from, but what kind of person you are'. Some immigrants link the Italians' attitude towards them to age. According to them, "young Italians don't mind", but older people have a different attitude.

Thirty-two percent of those surveyed believe that Italians perceive Bulgarians rather negatively. The dominant belief is that Bulgarians are perceived as labour and even „cheap labour“ from a poor country, "service staff" and nothing more. According to them, "Bulgarians will always remain foreign". Others add: "Not knowing our country, they happen to underestimate us", "They look at us with contempt and arrogance", "They look at us as if we grew up in the jungle", they behave "not very well", "duplicitously" or downright "badly". Others say, "I think they don't know much about us! Unfortunately, the people I interact with don't have great expectations and interests!", "They treat you well as long as they need you. Then they forget you", "They think Bulgarians are not at their level and treat them "like foreigners", "Few are those who are open to foreigners from poor countries. To be a foreigner from England and from Bulgaria is very different". According to some Bulgarian expats, Italians are nice to them in their relations, but in reality they do not feel comfortable with the presence of expats.

Some of the respondents think that the attitude towards Bulgarian emigrants is determined by the positive contributions they have made to the development of the community, the city and the state. Here is one such answer: 'Here in Trento they know us very well because three Bulgarians played in the basketball team. And the coach is Bulgarian. With him we have won 5 national medals and 2 world titles'.

For two people, or 2% of Bulgarians questioned, Italy is a country, which is able to provide a better life and opportunities than those in Bulgaria, but at a high price. They say that Italy gives "a better life, but with a lot of work, without many friends, relatives", and that it is "a country that has helped me a lot but lately takes too much".

For one person, Italy is "a museum with antique-minded people," and the answers of another five, or 6% of the persons surveyed, could not be categorised into any of the previous categories. Here Italy is called a 'way of life', just a 'country', a 'second home but not warm and welcoming as a homeland,' the name "Lucia Milchova Dimova," and "un genitore additive", which translates as "an additional parent".



How do contemporary Bulgarian immigrants in Italy perceive Italy?	
As their second home	44%
As the place I choose to live, work and start a family	11%
An amazing country which accepted and fascinated me	25%
The country that will provide me with a better job and income	10%
A country that gives but also takes	2%
Other / Uncategorized	8%

### **How do contemporary Bulgarian emigrants in Italy perceive their homeland?**

When asked – What is Bulgaria to you?, 67% of Bulgarians in Italy say that Bulgaria is: “my homeland, which is always in my heart”, “my dear homeland”, “my homeland where the stone will always weigh”, “my wonderful homeland”, “my homeland and family”, “my wonderful homeland”. Others write – Bulgaria is “my homeland, where I always return with pleasure”, “a homeland with many beautiful places and nature”, “my homeland, where I was born”, “a homeland and a place where my childhood passed with my grandparents”, “my homeland, my roots and my sense of self”, “my only homeland as well as “la mia patria”, “a cozy first home, a place where I feel happy being myself”, “Many good memories”, “Bulgaria is love for me.”

Twelve percent of Bulgarian expats say they associate Bulgaria with feelings of sadness, fond memories of the past, but also with a sense of insecurity, rudeness and even cynicism. They talk about “grandma’s house”, “an old mother sitting on the doorstep waiting for her child with unwavering faith”, “love and sorrow”, “Un ricordo dolce e nostalgico a volte”, “pain and tears”. One of the Bulgarian emigrants says: “With each passing year I personify Bulgaria with a cherished image of the homeland from the works of the poets Ivan Vazov, Slaveykov, Hristo Botev, etc.”. “For me Bulgaria is a homeland.... but a sad one”. Another adds, “Something no one can take away from me. We carry it in us wherever we are”. One Bulgarian expatriate describes Bulgaria as his birthplace, where his relatives and loved ones live, but at the same time a place that disappoints him with rudeness and cynicism, high prices, a polluted sea and “neglected restaurants” and the resignation of the Bulgarian people to all this.

Another 8% or so of the respondents carry in their mind memories of Bulgaria as a place of poverty, misery, corruption and lawlessness, a place where it was impossible for them to stay and live.

Five people, or 6% of respondents, gave as their answer that they accept Bulgaria as the country where they were born and grew up, without adding any other sentiment to their answer.

There are also responses that could not be added to the above categories, some of them are “Something that no one can take away from me. We carry it with us wherever we are” and “Home, sadness, beauty, uncertainty, hope...”.

How do contemporary Bulgarian emigrants in Italy perceive their homeland?	
My homeland, that I will always come back to	67%
The homeland that I miss	12%
Poverty, misery, corruption and lawlessness	8%
Stating the fact of the homeland without adding any sentiment to the answer	6%
Other / Uncategorized	7%

### **How do contemporary Bulgarian emigrants feel in Italy?**

When asked “How do you feel in Italy?”, 73% of Bulgarian expats said that they felt good, that they felt “at home”, that over time they developed the feeling of being “at home”. Some add that they feel the lack of their relatives, they feel that others treat them as “second class people”, that “in every place there are pros and cons”, but in general they feel good in Italy. They feel that Italy is not their home, they feel “tired of nostalgia”, they feel themselves as “eternal foreigners”, as a “tree without roots”, “eternal emigrant”, “stranger”, “misunderstood”. Some of them add: “I am well integrated, I speak the language beautifully, my children were born here, but I find it difficult to put Italy on a pedestal in my heart. I will always be the foreigner here”. Others say, “It’s hard, but financially I solve my family’s problems by working here!”. There are those who share, “I feel sad, lonely, and now without health.”

Several Bulgarian migrants say they feel like “permanent tourists”, like people living somewhere temporarily. They add that they are trying to get used to it; that with time they settle down, but they do not feel happy. They prefer to be in Bulgaria (but love for relatives, family or partners makes them choose Italy). They don’t regret their choice but feel they will always feel that way. To overcome that they try to spend as much time as possible with their relatives in Bulgaria.

### **What keeps the modern Bulgarian emigrant in Italy?**

When asked – What keeps you in Italy, a quarter of the Bulgarian expats (25%) answered that it is family, partner, children, relatives or friends. Getting married to an Italian puts the family of the Bulgarian emigrant in front of the choice of which country to continue their life. One part of them answered that the partner was born in Italy and wants to stay in their country. Others say that their partner refuses to move to Bulgaria and this limits their possibilities to return to their country. Here

are some of their answers. Other Bulgarian emigrants say that their children born in Italy or born from their marriage to an Italian want to stay in Italy and this becomes the main reason for choosing life in Italy over that in Bulgaria. Here are some of their answers. "She is a student now. Once she graduates and settles somewhere, I think we will move back home. I hope she will want to come back too"; "My husband, children were born here."; "My children were born here and feel Italian. They need to be here. I am here because of them." For others, the friendships they have built become so important that they choose to live their lives where the people close to them are located over returning to their country.

In line with the results of Cela, Fokkema & Ambrosetti (2013), this study shows that Bulgarian women who are married to Italian man are better integrated in Italy, but this integration has a specific character. These Bulgarian women have a more developed motivation to adapt in the country in contrast to Bulgarian women who have a partner of Bulgarian origin. But this motivation is based on the women's tendency to accept their partners' choice to live in their country of origin. They perceive as legitimate their refusal to live in Bulgaria, where social and economic conditions are less favourable. They also accept their children's wish to live in Italy, because it is not only their country of origin but also the country they have known since birth. But contrary to the results of the Cela, Fokkema & Ambrosetti study, this does not lead to better integration of these women. It leads to a more reasoned acceptance of the valid reasons for living in a foreign culture. In the narratives of these women, we find a lot of longing for a connection to Bulgaria, a need to be in their country more often, and sometimes sadness that life has turned out this way. Like Cvajner's conclusions, these women see themselves as brave women who can bear anything for the well-being of their children (Cvajner 2012) and their husbands by staying in Italy. In contrast to the Russian women Cvajner writes about, Bulgarian women married in Italy live together with their husbands and children, but away from their mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters who usually live in Bulgaria. Their sacrifice does not consist in separation from the children and does not aim at securing their subsistence. Their sacrifice is a sacrifice of the need to be connected to their country and their parents, made for the sake of their spouses' need to live in their country and their children's need to grow up where they want to.

Confirming the results of Cela, Fokkema & Ambrosetti's research, the income Bulgarians receive from the jobs they have found that provide their desired standard of living positively influences their motivation to remain part of and integrate into Italian society (Cela, Fokkema & Ambrosetti 2013). This group includes also Bulgarian emigrants who believe that their job in Italy is better than the one they could find in Italy, that they receive better income for it than they would receive in Bulgaria, that it provides them with a more secure life than they would have in Bulgaria. Here are some of their answers: 'The more secure life in Italy is holding me back'; 'The home I have built is holding me back', 'I cannot find a job in Bulgaria. I am already old'.

According to the research, 18% of the Bulgarian emigrants are attracted by the culture, food, beauty of Italy and the security it provides. They highlight the many advantages they find in Italy over those they find in their own country, which become an important argument for their choice to continue their life here. This group of Bulgarian emigrants evaluates the Italian health care as better than the Bulgarian one, the Italian laws as better than the Bulgarian ones, the observance of the laws as probable than in Bulgaria. They feel more security in Italy than in Bulgaria, they like their life in Italy more than the one they had in Bulgaria. They have formed emotional bonds and friendships that have become so important to them that they have become legitimate reasons for choosing life in Italy over life in Bulgaria.

Those who said that their whole life was already settled in Italy are 9%. Some even say “Una vita costruita da 0”. Others agree “My life is 100% here. Friends, work, family life”, “Ho tutto qui, affetti più cari, la casa, lavoro, la vita...”; “My home, work, family and I like it here”. A third said “The country gave me what I didn’t have in Bulgaria. Then came the friends. Now I am married here”; “I like my job here, I like that my work and knowledge are appreciated”; “I feel relaxed. And I am engaged to an Italian. My life is organized and I like that”.

### **Conclusions**

This research shows that the motives of Bulgarians to choose Italy are not mainly related to the possibility to live in better economic conditions. In the past, the Bulgarians chose Italy to obtain protection and preserve their homeland; with tolerance and understanding for the Italian family that took them in, they settled the lands that were given to them, and with work and effort they repaid what was given to them. The study shows that the Bulgarians associated themselves precisely with Italy in order to strengthen the Orthodox Church, to consolidate the Slavic script and to develop the potential of Slavic culture. Bulgarians chose Italy for enlightenment, to educate Catholic priests and to provide for the needs of Catholics in their lands. Historical memories testify that the linking of the Bulgarian and Italian families was connected with the rescue of thousands of Jews in Bulgarian lands from death, the expansion of charity and care for the poor, sick and war victims. The research shows that to this day love brings together representatives of the Italian and Bulgarian families; that Bulgarians choose life in Italy because that is the choice of the person they love. The study shows that Bulgarians today still choose what is important to the person they love, despite the burden of nostalgia for home. They choose Italy out of love for their parents, out of a desire to follow them when they work abroad, out of an ability to accept their choice, despite the difficulties they will experience to adjust. The study shows that Bulgarians understand that international marriages provide a dual identity for their children; it shows that they choose to mourn their homeland in order to provide their children with the opportunity to grow up in their father’s homeland (when that is their choice). This research shows

that Bulgarians choose Italy to get a job when they have difficulty finding one in their home country. They choose Italy because they value the education, culture and art of the country; because they value the opportunities to experience, learn and develop, to develop and then give back their potential. This study shows that with their choice, Bulgarians give Italy their scientific potential, the “beauty” of the greatest basses born on Bulgarian soil; the poems of some of the most popular Bulgarian poets, the grandeur of magnificent sculptures.

The majority of Bulgarian emigrants perceive Italy as their second homeland. The most numerous are those Bulgarian migrants whose life was connected with Italy by chance, but who have subsequently chosen to remain part of it because of the fascination they have experienced from meeting it, from meeting love or the opportunities they have been given to work. In the choice of the city where they settled, most Bulgarian migrants followed the choice of their family, relatives, partners and friends. More than two thirds of the surveyed persons feel well in Italy, but the remaining third is overwhelmed by nostalgia for their homeland and their relatives in Bulgaria. Two thirds of Bulgarian migrants feel well accepted by Italians, but one third that they feel foreign, different and not wanted. The main reason for Bulgarians to stay in Italy is their families, the choice of their partner, their children and parents. Only after that come job opportunities and higher salaries than in their home country.

## NOTES

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