

SUMMARY OF SCIENTIFIC WORKS

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I. Monograph

1. *Azis, H. Local policies in the new reality – strategic elements and approaches of municipalities* – monograph. Publishing complex – UNWE, Sofia, 2022, ISBN 978-619-232-634-0, Number of pages - 323.

Relevance and importance of the topic: By its very nature, the municipality and the municipal administration are created precisely to be closest to the citizens, so that the problems of the city and the local society can be solved in a timely

manner. Contrary to popular perception, practice so far shows that it is the municipality that occupies a key place in the processes of defining and managing the citizens' agenda - from the infrastructure for the delivery of public utilities, through transport, education and institutional infrastructure. Bulgarian municipalities are trying to implement their policies in the face of scarce resources – administrative, financial and logistical. The problem intensifies in municipalities that are in more depopulated areas in the country, or the mayor is from a different political party to the ruling party. The political competition that has been going on in the country for the last 20 years has also affected the mayors – with the naked eye one can see the municipalities that are generously supported by the state and those that are left on their own because of differences in the political views of the local and national authorities.

More than 75% of Europe's population, including Bulgaria, lives in cities, which raises a number of issues related to garbage collection, children's education, road surfaces, transport, etc. In addition to this, statistics show that Europe's population is ageing massively, which confronts municipalities with the need to provide the necessary social services, to be adequate to people's needs, but also with problems with their own declining tax revenue budgets. This again puts obstacles in the way of real decentralisation of municipalities, which remains only on paper.

With the establishment of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMB), whose main objective is to strengthen the dialogue between local and national authorities, a number of fundamental legal changes have been introduced, originally enshrined in the Constitution, but requiring the creation of a wide range of by-laws. They enable municipalities to develop an environment of relative financial autonomy in setting local taxes and fees that are appropriate to the population and to the condition of individual cities. For years the Association has been working for the final adoption of legislation in the field of local self-government, which will be the basis for the real decentralisation of Bulgarian municipalities. Although the autonomy of municipalities has been talked about since 2006, it is currently only an imaginary fact. Practice shows that under the current legislation real financial autonomy of municipalities is impossible. This can also be interpreted as a positive fact, as the lack of state funds causes the local administration to look for ways of funding under various European programs to achieve the much-needed improvement of the environment, to provide adequate social services and to meet the needs of the citizens. However, the lack of trained staff to create, submit and follow up on

projects, as well as inactive mayors, are a serious cause for this alternative financing method to face serious challenges.

In recent years, Bulgarian municipalities have been working in conditions of centralisation and strong dependence on the state and the executive power. These dependencies are both financial and political, but also administrative. Without the necessary national reform in citizen services, which would also be reflected in local government, municipalities remain inextricably linked to the state.

The present paper examines decentralisation as a major path for the European development of municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The stalled decentralisation process must be continued with concrete steps and actions to ensure the secure, successful and autonomous development of regions, local leaders and administrations for the benefit of citizens and the public environment. At the insistence of the leadership of the NAMRB, the work of the Decentralisation Council has been launched, and the adopted program and strategy for decentralisation in the period 2016-2025 should meet the expectations of local authorities. This poses new challenges for municipalities, which have to catch up from centralised local governance to the average European standards of municipal autonomy.

Objective and tasks

The main objective of this monograph is to analyse the process of decentralisation, leadership style and social climate in Bulgarian municipalities through an empirical and applied research in 39 municipalities in Bulgaria.

To trace the planning of local self-government in the new realities and the implementation of the decentralisation process based on the principles of subsidiarity, effectiveness and proportionality.

Tasks of the study

1. To develop a critical analysis and assessment of decentralisation and regionalisation in the expectations of municipal administration, municipal councilors and mayors and the opportunities for strengthening the capacity of local government bodies through improved leadership management style and social climate in the workplace.

2. To outline the planning opportunities in the "new reality" of Bulgarian municipalities –limitations and advantages of the Plan 2021-2027
3. To formulate measures to improve coordination between local authorities and the central government.
4. To justify approaches for real decentralisation of local self-government.

This paper also aims to explore and present best practices in human capital training and its specificity for livelihood and local economy development, as well as practical, not just theoretical options for promoting small and medium-sized businesses in municipalities. Human capital is also responsible for building an excellent environment for a decent life, especially in regions with mixed Bulgarian and ethnic populations, where good practices of coexistence should serve as a benchmark for excellent European regional development in line with the highest European values of respect for the faith, religion and ethnicity of the neighbour. The monograph consists of seven chapters as follows:

CHAPTER ONE - Europe, Bulgarian municipalities and the process of decentralisation – The chapter deals with the topic of financial independence, which is defined as the main condition for the development of municipalities in the transition to a market economy. The allocation of services provided by public authorities, as well as the powers and resources associated with them, are based on the principle of subsidiarity. This means that, with equal efficiency indicators, services are provided by an institution that is close to the people. Despite the establishment of municipalities as autonomous social communities, the process is hampered by a number of difficulties arising from the fact that the country has not completely left its central planning. In the context of the general direction of changes in the public sector, measures for reforms within the central and local government should include the transfer of managerial and financial powers from the state to the municipality as well as strengthening the political forms of decentralization by increasing the participation of the population in local decisions and partial control over the activities of the municipality. Society needs quality public services, real guarantees for the broad participation of its citizens in the formulation of public policy and provision of equal access to public goods and services. According to the OECD report, Bulgaria remains centralised. The only decentralised level in Bulgaria (the municipal level) accounts for a relatively small share of public spending, and fiscal decentralisation is the weakest dimension in the process. Low fiscal autonomy and strict fiscal rules prevent

municipalities from fully delivering services, investing and developing. Municipal spending is largely managed by central government (earmarked transfers, additional conditions established by regulation, etc.). Municipal administrative and strategic capacity for administrative decentralisation is still weak. While political decentralisation provides democratic legitimacy and accountability to municipalities, local democracy needs to be strengthened within municipalities. The Decentralisation Index is described, which monitors the administrative, political and fiscal parts of decentralisation at both local and regional levels. In addition, this interactive tool provides a comparison between EU Member States.

CHAPTER TWO – Development of local authorities in Bulgaria through regionalisation - One of the long-term goals of regionalism is to strengthen and consolidate the role of regions both in terms of local territorial impact and in addressing issues of a more global nature. With the establishment of the Committee of the Regions in 1994, regionalisation has become particularly important as a real and necessary tool for the formation and implementation of European policies in different countries.

CHAPTER THREE - Local self-government in regional development and state regional policy - Decentralization is one of the most important manifestations of the transition, seen as a preferred alternative with a strong demand for better governance of localities. The Command-administrative management style and the methods adopted were transformed into new institutions, closer to the population, and in this sense with a greater opportunity to effectively meet its needs by providing better public goods and services. It is this model that has been adopted by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as part of the democratisation process. In this way, the local population is given the opportunity to engage in the processes of settlement management, to take part in solving certain problems and access to power.

CHAPTER FOUR - Decentralisation: models for reform through the eyes of the NAMRB - An assessment of the financial effects is made, presented in terms of changes in key indicators for local budgets and for the degree of decentralisation, such as growth in the percentage of tax, own and general revenues. Conducting the reform towards decentralisation – scenarios - Municipalities have their own revenues, which are not earmarked, and their purpose is to cover expenditure. Both the autonomy of their budgets and the independent powers to manage their own revenues are constitutionally established. The topic of the role of the state

occupies a central place in the discussion on decentralization, and more precisely the limits and strength of its influence in the sequence of state – local self-government and state – private sector;

CHAPTER FIVE - Strategic Planning of Bulgarian Municipalities

in the new reality - This chapter examines the place of Bulgarian municipalities on the map of the European Union. As an integral part of the common European policy, Bulgarian municipalities directly interact and depend on the European Structural Funds, on projects for the development of settlements, for the improvement of the social environment, for the facilitation of social services, for the creation of intercultural links within the municipality itself, as well as in interaction with those in Europe. Of the 265 independent municipalities in Bulgaria, nearly 60 percent have debts. Each year, the budget of the municipalities is formed by the revenue and expenditure

of municipal administrations, but at the end of the financial period it turns out that they spend more money than their revenues. Revenues in municipal budgets are generated through state subsidies and local taxes and fees, but in fact municipal finances depend mainly on the state and on EU funds and least on the decisions of local authorities. The policy of the state is implemented by municipalities administratively, economically and socially. Strategic plans from local to global – environment, climate, growth and well-being – are being implemented. Planning in today's environment is increasingly difficult and complex given the multiplicity of activities involved: municipal finances, community development, health, education and culture, public works, social welfare, etc. But the opportunities for municipalities are not great – they are developing in conditions of competition and decentralisation in governance is increasingly required – i.e powers to be transferred from central to local government with active participation of citizens and transparent and optimal allocation of resources. Strategic planning defines the long-term goals of the municipality and focuses on communication between central and local government.

CHAPTER SIX - Decentralisation and its impact on leadership style

of governance in municipalities - The relevance of the problem is related to the need for a deeper understanding of the relations of local and executive power in the context of the completion of the decentralisation process in Bulgaria. Aspects of this process are the improvement of relations and awareness in the teams, as

well as the organizational development of the public dialogue system and its actors. Knowledge in the field of organisational psychology, especially in the aspect of structural relationships, hierarchy and the exercise of power, is the focus of analysis and understanding of local government problems. Leadership styles are as old as human civilization. In public management, leadership guides the organization to a higher level of performance and better results for the benefit of society. The leadership approach, identified in the surveyed mayors and municipal councillors, reflects the balance between task-orientation and people-orientation, which stimulates cooperation and motivation among municipal officials. Leadership is essential in municipal administration because it directly influences insights and elicits action in subordinates at different levels.

CHAPTER SEVEN - Identifying political affiliation and forming a municipal mandate - The study of the identification of mayors, municipal councillors and municipal administration with a political party showed that it develops during group interaction, in turn forming a dynamic course of events during elections. Initially, the level of identification is registered in the elective offices – mayor and municipal councillors, which we take as the first phase in our study. Hierarchical changes in the group status of the municipal administration are then observed, illustrating subsequent levels of identification with a given political force. In the post-survey analysis conducted, concurrently across three groups of respondents in 2017 and 2020, the solidarity to group membership and perspectives of high and low identifiers and the assessment of the surveyed groups' commitment to the political party that endorsed the municipality's elected leaders stand out. During phase 2, it is shown how low and high identifiers respond to real changes in the political conjuncture and what influence they have on individuals' self-identification with a party and on their social identity. It is confirmed that social identification does not simply reflect existing similarities within the group, but when external pressures arise, it provides them with a common purpose and focus for group action.

The aim of the monographic work is to identify the surrounding factors and their degree of influence in decision-making to promote the real process of decentralisation and to analyse the potential capacities of Bulgarian municipalities to plan in the new reality. The process of decentralisation is considered as the only possible path for the development of municipalities, and the present work and the scientific value of the results obtained are conditioned by the choice of purpose, relevance and significance of the research.

Arguments for decentralisation often take the form of sweeping, inter-ministerial claims about the effects of administrative measures on the quality and effectiveness of both central and local government and civil society.

The economic and political sides of decentralization are shown on the curve and examine whether it increases or decreases the social welfare and efficiency of municipalities. The monograph reviews the more important motivations for decentralisation to date, examines its theoretical underpinnings, and describes the elements of a new theory of financial decentralization that can guide us towards understanding and implementing the actual process of decentralization, as well as its effectiveness and successful outcomes for Bulgarian municipalities. The transfer of resources and powers to local governments from the executive would increase the efficiency of public sector resource allocation, and would lead to greater stability in patterns of cross-sectoral public policies and investments. Real financial and administrative decentralisation will lead to oriented governance at local level and increase the cost-effectiveness of the public sector.

The present work makes a scientific contribution to the process of decentralization in the country, as the discussed issues, cases and their solutions go beyond the timeframe of the present, but outline a clear and solid basis for further scientific studies on the topic, build a specific perspective for future real actions in the process of creating and consolidating the autonomy of municipalities, give clear guidelines to mayors, municipal councils and district administration for action in specific cases, and trace European practices, opportunities, solutions and experiences.

The aims and tasks of this paper are to explore and present the best practices in the management of municipal and local authorities, to provide guidelines for better management of the municipal administration, to show the great importance of human capital training and its specificity for the development of the local economy, as well as practical, not only theoretical, opportunities for promoting small and medium-sized businesses in municipalities. The study presents the importance of human capital, which is responsible for building a quality environment for a decent life, especially in regions with mixed Bulgarian and ethnic populations. Good practices for coexistence are presented, which should serve as a benchmark for the European development of regions in line with the highest European values of respect for religion and ethnicity.

The features and solutions to local government problems of a day-to-day nature described in this paper provide an excellent basis for further action in the scientific, practical and policy spheres of decentralisation. The in-depth concrete findings can serve educational institutions, current and future city leaders, local administration and municipal councils.

The extensive analysis of the structure of local authorities in the monograph presents the opportunities for joint activities between regional local authorities, the legislative and the executive, as timely, adequate and active communication is the basis for subsequent legislative changes in favor of building a better living environment for the population. The comparison made regarding the responsibilities of national and local authorities and the activities of the different structures that interact with local authorities (Committee of the Regions, EU, NAMRB, etc.) can be the basis for a huge step on the road to financial and political decentralisation of municipalities. The development of local authorities through regionalisation, which in the years after the transition in Bulgaria has been particularly prominent and has led to large-scale development of some regions at the expense of depopulation of others, has a particular importance in this monograph. The problem has been studied in depth through economic and political analyses, and the conclusions require a rethinking of the adopted normative and strategic documents, concepts and sectoral policies, with the aim of overcoming the disparities between the Bulgarian regions in order to catch up with the comparable European regions.

The analysis of the decentralisation process in the context of Bulgaria's membership in the European Union, the regional policy of the state in the light of the decentralisation process, the reform models that have been developed and can be implemented through the NAMRB, the impact of municipal autonomy on the leadership style of local government, as well as the political affiliation and the formation of the municipal mandate, are a solid basis for the development of new plans and strategies for the actual implementation of financial and political decentralisation of municipalities. Strategic planning, practical

experience in solving specific cases and the existence of civic issues determine the long-term goals of municipalities, and this gives the specific focus on communication with central and local government.

2. *Institutional capacity, satisfaction and social climate in Bulgarian municipalities*. Publishing Complex – UNWE, ISBN 978-619-232-642-5, Sofia 2022

This monograph is oriented to the study of social climate and satisfaction levels in work environment from the perspective of municipal administration, municipal councilors and mayors in local government. Their opinion is compared with the actual data of the same indicators in 39 Bulgarian municipalities with similar groups of participants in two periods: September - December 2017 and October - December 2020.

Relevance and importance of the topic: job satisfaction is one of the important factors that attract the attention of the municipality as well as researchers. In view of the increasing competition resulting from globalisation, management attaches great importance to job satisfaction and the social climate in which work is conducted on a daily basis. This is due to research findings that job satisfaction is an important factor in organisational commitment of any employee. It is safe to say that satisfied employees will make an extra effort and contribute positively to the effectiveness and efficiency of their respective municipality. The main objective was to examine the social climate and job satisfaction levels of mayors, councillors and municipal administration and dominant leadership style in 2017 and 2020. The argument of the monographic work is that a good social climate in the workplace will increase the satisfaction rate, which in turn will lead to better performance of the municipal administration, municipal councillors and respectively the managers – mayors. Nowadays, the competition is very high and municipalities are facing many challenges, for example: the implementation of a favourable urban environment, ensuring the municipality's finances, a high level of administration, adequate positions in the implementation of European policies for 2014-2020 and for the programming period 2021-2027.

The mayor is a directly elected position, representing and managing the municipality, directing municipal units in the implementation of tasks and long-term programs. He coordinates and supervises the activities of his subordinates and ensures quality service to the citizens. The main object of this study is the representatives of the local authorities in Bulgaria. The monograph also analyses the leadership position of the mayor and the municipal councillors. An effective leader must communicate his or her vision and information while organizing, directing, and managing local self-government processes. The mayor as leader

deals directly with the people, and this allows him or her to respond quickly to current life issues, actively manage and disseminate advanced ideas to the team, respond quickly to events, consider the many interests of citizens, analyse issues, and explain state policy at the local level. Each mayor has their own individual characteristics that influence the work, management, communication and guidance they give. It is his/her duty to find the right solution to each problem, to provoke the team to actively participate in the process; to arrange and grade the duties; to give them an appropriate verbal form. Moreover, the task of the leader in local government is to win over both the administration and the citizens; to lay out the substance of the issues he wants to get on the public agenda; to find the right tone for dialogue with the central government. Two questionnaires measuring job satisfaction and social climate in the workplace and leadership style were used for the study.

The job satisfaction questionnaire contains fifty-five statements structured into ten dimensions: job and development opportunity, work organization, information provision, job control, pay and evaluation, work-family balance, safety and working conditions, management style, administration performance, and workplace relationships. Each statement is rated on a 4-point scale where 1 is "completely dissatisfied" and 4 is "completely satisfied". A higher score means a higher level of satisfaction.

The questionnaire measuring social climate at work consists of 90 statements divided into ten dimensions: inclusiveness, group cohesiveness, alignment with management, autonomy, task orientation, job pressure, clarity of job duties, managerial control, innovation, and physical comfort. Statements are rated on a 4-point scale, where 1 is "disagree" and 4 is "agree." A higher score means a more favourable social climate at work.

The dominant leadership style questionnaire contains eighteen statements structured along two dimensions: people orientation and task orientation. Each statement is rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 is "very rarely" and 5 - "very often." In view of the research objectives, the following mathematical and statistical analyses were applied: frequency distribution, descriptive analysis, T-test comparing independent samples, univariate analysis of variance. The data were processed with SPSS 25 statistical analysis software.

Good governance in local self-government and in the wider public sector is about citizen-centred priorities, about achieving objectives, integrity and acting in the

public interest and in ways that are consistent with legal, regulatory and governmental principles. Within local government, this involves a range of relationships between the mayor, councillors, management, administrative and expert staff and wider stakeholders. Good governance helps in setting priorities, deploying resources, delivering quality services, managing risks and uncertainties, and ensuring that the public is well served. Ongoing training sessions for municipal administration provide the mayor, municipal leadership, councillors, mayors and staff with the basic information needed to understand their duties, roles and responsibilities for governance.

Quality performance of job duties within the Local Government sector helps to restore and improve public trust and understanding. Trained staff contribute to good governance and implementation, stakeholder engagement and good results. They are measured by the effectiveness and efficiency of local self-government.

Matching with the actual data of the same indicators in 39 Bulgarian municipalities with similar groups of participants in two periods – in 2017 and in 2020, led to the general conclusion that with each passing year the requirements and expectations of employees in municipal administrations towards the management change very dynamically. Due to the accelerated development of information and communication technologies, globalization and because of the progress of public administration approaches and citizen-oriented management, Bulgarian municipalities and especially local authorities are today obliged to provide citizens with services that satisfy people according to their requirements and wishes. This obligation, rather than behaviour, of municipalities forces their leaders to become more and more flexible in winning the respect, support and appreciation of citizens, while at the same time forcing the administration to become more and more relevant, expert and adequate.

II. Textbook

1. Azis, H. Fundamentals of Local Self-Government - PH – UNWE,
ISBN 978-619-232-391-2

The lecture course is organized in the following chapters:

- CONCEPT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT;

- LEGAL REGULATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION IN BULGARIA. FUNCTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ORGANISATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN BULGARIA. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION;
- MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, MAYOR, MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION: STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, ACTIVITY, FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, POWERS, RESPONSIBILITIES, COMPETENCES, RESOURCES REGIONAL GOVERNOR AND REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION: STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, ACTIVITY, FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS; POWERS, RESPONSIBILITIES, COMPETENCES, RESOURCES;
- EUROPEAN CHARTER OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT (ECLSG). CONTENT AND BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ECLSG;
- BASIC PRINCIPLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT. FORMS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT;
- LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL POLICY OF THE STATE. ADMINISTRATIVE TERRITORIAL UNITS IN THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIA;
- REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL POLICY. PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT;
- DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN BULGARIA THROUGH REGIONALISATION;
- THE CONCEPT OF "GOOD GOVERNANCE" AND ITS APPLICATION AT LOCAL LEVEL;
- ELECTIONS - NATURE AND FUNCTIONS. ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

III. Book related to a defended dissertation

1. *Decentralization as a factor for the development of local self-government*, UNWE, ISBN 978-619-232-364-6, Sofia, 2020

The dynamic changes in the systems of central and local government taking place today in many countries, including Bulgaria, represent a macro-change that needs effective management. The reform of the public sector for decentralization of services, activities and powers started in 2003 with the transfer of powers and resources from the central government to the municipalities, primarily affecting the financial area. Financial independence is defined as the main condition for the development of municipalities in the transition to a market economy. The allocation of services provided by public authorities, as well as the powers and resources associated with them, are based on the principle of subsidiarity. This means that, with equal efficiency indicators, services are provided by an institution that is close to the people. Despite the establishment of municipalities as autonomous social communities, this process is hampered by a number of

difficulties arising from the fact that the country has not completely left its central planning. In the context of the general direction of changes in the public sector, measures for reforms within the central and local government should include the transfer of managerial and financial powers from the state to the municipalities and strengthening the political forms of decentralization by increasing the participation of the population in local decisions and partial control over the activities of the municipalities.

Society needs quality public services, real guarantees for the broad participation of its citizens in the formulation of public policy and provision of equal access to public goods and services. In the conditions of our European membership, the decentralization of governance is set before the state and municipal bodies as an urgent task. The limited number of developments and published materials in the specialized literature, which discuss the completion of the decentralization process, implementation of the decentralization strategy, improvement of public services and specification of powers in political, fiscal, functional, territorial and financial decentralization, as well as technology for selection of strategy for change management in Bulgarian conditions has been hampering local self-government for years.

This raises the need to develop methodologies tailored to the specifics and dynamics of the environment. This will create an opportunity for professional management of change, will reduce the risks arising from incorrect understanding and implementation of the decentralization strategy, will create criteria for comparing different types of local government and their positioning in relation to the European Union and advanced countries outside European Union.

Relevance and significance of the topic: the problems related to decentralisation, central and local government and the need for their detailed analysis, research and creation of working models for their solution in practice are the basis for the development of this dissertation. The ability to successfully define the characteristics and achievements of decentralization in three different types of countries - candidate member of the European Union – Turkey, member of the European Union – Bulgaria, and longtime member of the European Union – Greece, becomes a key need for different types of structures and participants in this process as well as to achieve the strategic goal of EU membership – cohesion.

As a candidate for EU membership, Turkey is achieving some results through legislative and administrative reforms to decentralize regional and local

development. It implies the need to cover key indicators of an acceptable degree of decentralization commensurate with the Member States.

As a new member of the EU, Bulgaria reports development in the decentralization process through reforms in the legislative and administrative area. Bulgaria needs to develop a second level of regional governance /provinces/ to effectively implement the decentralization process to the next level.

As a long-term member of the EU, Greece has a good achievement in implementing the process of decentralization at local and regional level of self-government. Greece needs to improve the indicators for implementing the principles of decentralization at different levels of government.

In order to achieve Europe's strategic goal of cohesion, it is necessary to optimize and integrate the achievements of the established models of decentralization in the three countries, which will contribute to the reduction of regional disparities and nonconformities.

The relevance of the study is supported by the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which regulates "... the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population"(Article 3, item 1) in the context of the law of local self-government bodies "... within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers." (Article 9, item 1).

On the basis of the above formulated relevance and problematic, the main research hypothesis of this dissertation is formulated as follows: the development of the decentralization process is an essential factor for effective local self-government, relevant to the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the degree of effectiveness of which differs at national and municipal level, ascertainable through empirical and applied research in three selected countries, located in three different periods of the EU membership process - Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, located in three different periods of their EU membership process, and having nationally specific responsibilities at levels of governance and corresponding opportunities for improvement.

In proving the thesis, the following working micro-theses are developed:

Micro-theses 1: Decentralization is a process that redefines nationally inherited and hierarchically subordinated rights and responsibilities in the state structure and governance into adaptable models that meet the expectations of citizens, sustainable development of local self-government capacity and support for specific policies as a function of representative democracy.

Micro-theses 2: The development of the decentralisation process based on the principles of the European charter of local self-government in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey creates prerequisites for a sustainable evolution of administrative capacity at different levels of government and self-government.

Micro-theses 3: The construction of a cross-border integrated model of decentralization, based on the principles of subsidiarity, efficiency and proportionality, is a function of identified through a representative international survey of empirically established civil attitudes, administrative capabilities and availabilities for improvement.

Micro-theses 4: Empirically established international differences and inconsistencies in the decentralization for benchmark municipalities in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey are the basis for improving the process itself by applying two main approaches to interaction: 1. Vertical – between central, regional and local level for the processes of regional and local development. 2. Horizontal – between the bodies for implementation of sectoral policies, as well as NGOs, economic and social partners, etc.

Objective and tasks

The main objective of this dissertation is that through an empirical and applied study in benchmark municipalities in three selected countries, located in three different periods of the EU membership process – Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, a cross-border integrated model of local governance and decentralization can be constructed, based on the principles of subsidiarity, efficiency, proportionality and surveyed citizen attitudes and administrative capabilities, thereby accelerating the achievement of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Tasks of the study

1. To develop a critical analysis and evaluation of decentralization as a process evolving in line with citizens' expectations, opportunities for

strengthening the capacity of local self-government and specific national policies as a function of representative democracy.

2. To examine the effect of the application of the principles of the ECLSG in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey as an environment for sustainable development of administrative capacity at different levels of governance and self-government.

3. Through a representative survey in benchmark municipalities to establish the interrelationships and dependencies between the structures of the different levels of government in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey with a focus on citizens' attitudes and the capabilities of the administration.

4. To justify two approaches for interaction – vertical and horizontal, through which the empirically identified cross-national differences and inconsistencies in decentralization for benchmark municipalities in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey can be transformed into arguments and opportunities for improving the process itself.

Object, subject and limitation of the study

The object of study in the dissertation is the effectiveness of local self-government in three different neighboring countries in terms of their membership in the European Union – Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.

The subject of the dissertation are the opportunities for improvement of local self-government through a vertical and horizontal approach for supporting decentralization, established through cross-border research of citizens' attitudes and administrative capacities in benchmark municipalities in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.

Time parameters of the study are the period 2006-2016.

Limitations of the study: the dissertation does not cover all aspects of the research problem and is mainly focused on the possibilities for improving the decentralization process in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. The present study is constrained by three limitations:

The first of these stems from the focused research interest in the level of development of the decentralization process in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.

The second limitation is territorial and administrative at the LAU1 level, and the survey was conducted in three benchmark municipalities in the three countries studied. For Bulgaria the study is in the municipality of Kardzhali, for the Republic of Turkey the study is in the municipality of Edirne and for Greece the study is in the municipality of Komotini. The municipalities were selected according to the following criteria: border area, comparable territorial coverage, relative population to the country concerned, administrative centre in NUTS3 terms, participation in EU programmes with the same type of EU funding.

The third limitation relates to the possibilities for improving the decentralization process by studying respondents from the three selected (benchmark) municipalities in the three countries in three target groups: representatives of local government, representatives of central government and citizens.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the present study is a combined approach between quantitative and qualitative methods: content analysis, situational analysis, SWOT analysis, statistical methods and statistical processing and analysis of data with SPSS, sociological method – a survey conducted at the level of civil society and local and state administration in Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece, graphical method, induction - deduction method, synthesis method, comparative analysis and other econometric methods of analysis will be used.

The present work is based on the analysis of Bulgarian and foreign literature, including books, articles, publications, legal documents, devoted to the problem of decentralization, as well as on the data from the survey conducted in the municipalities of Kardzhali, Komotini and Edirne. The data sources are national (NSI, Council of Ministers, Decentralization Strategies), international (Eurostat), regional (regional governments) and municipal.

IV. Studies:

1. *Azis, H. Cross-Border Decentralization and Integrated Governance – Trends and Interlinkages on the Example of the Municipalities of Adrianople, Komotini and Kardzhali.* Electronic journal Scientific Atlas, 2021, Issue 2, ISSN 2738 - 7518, pp.1-26

Decentralization as a form of governance is a subject of scientific interest in various fields of socio-economic activities. This study focuses on examining the interrelationships between integrated governance in public administration and the extent of so-called cross-border decentralization in three municipalities – Edirne, Komotini and Kardzhali. As a result of the study, it is possible to draw significant recommendations common to all three municipalities for improving the work of the state and municipal administration. Some of the recommendations are in terms of encouraging local authorities to provide opportunities for more training and qualification courses, to incentivise state and municipal administration to achieve better

personal competences; to increase the capacity and responsibility of local authorities to formulate and implement municipal policies; to increase the capacity and responsibility of the regional administration to implement regional policy and ensure coherence between national and local interests; to increase the efficiency in the allocation of resources and the delegation of relevant powers on the basis of equal dialogue between central and local authorities.

2. *Azis, H. Decentralization: models for reform through the eyes of the NAMRB*. Electronic journal Scientific Atlas, 2022, issue 5, ISSN 2738-7518, pages 1-43

Ensuring diverse and developable revenue sources in municipal budgets is key to the development of local self-government and democracy in the country. Empowering citizens, through their elected bodies, to decide on the distribution of the money raised from their taxes is a fundamental principle of modern governance in Europe.

V. Articles

1. *Azis, H. Assessment and analysis of the development of regional and local self-government in Europe since the emergence of the concept of Europe of the Regions*. Electronic journal Scientific Atlas, 2020, Issue 1, ISSN 2738-7518, pp. 1-14

Achieving real autonomy of local self-government is directly dependent on sufficient financial security for the implementation of the delegated powers and responsibilities of local authorities delegated from the state. In the context of regional development, the connection between policies and strategies lies in the impact they have on space. The effect of their implementation is applied by assessing the impact of their implementation. In order to achieve Europe's strategic goal of cohesion, it is necessary to optimize and integrate the achievements of the established models of decentralization in the EU States, which will contribute to the reduction of regional disparities and nonconformities.

2. ***Azis, H. Identifying political affiliation and forming a municipal mandate.*** Electronic journal Scientific Atlas, issue 4, 2021, ISSN 2738-7518, pages 1-9

Political parties are a fundamental aspect of Bulgarian democracy. The study also examines the moderating effects of local government identity and party affiliation. It also looks in depth at the ways in which a party can further enhance its positive influence on the electorate through the policies pursued by elected mayors, and councillors.

3. ***Azis, H. Local self-government in Greece and Turkey – a comparative analysis of the development and implementation of decentralization -*** Legal Digest, BFU, Volume XXVII, 2020 ISSN 1311-3771, pp.59-79

The article focuses on local self-government in Greece and Turkey, with a brief comparative analysis of the situation to date. The process of decentralisation in the two countries is monitored, the extent of its implementation and whether the principle of subsidiarity is respected. In the modern state, a strong and functional local self-government, with its inherent characteristics, reveals the democratic character of the political system and the constitutional structure and is an indicator of modern development and a strong civil society. Among the aspects examined are: an analysis of local self-government reforms in Greece and Turkey; an assessment of decentralization, through a comparative analysis of the process in the two countries through the lens of local self-government; and democracy. The conclusions highlight the positive aspects of the changes taking place over the last 20 years and the difficulties in implementing decentralization.

4. *Azis, H. Improving regional development and local self-government by strengthening the decentralization process and the provision of services to citizens in the border municipalities of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.* VFU e-Journal, Issue 14, 2021, ISSN 1313-7514, pp. 1-17

The article is dedicated to improving local government and enhancing the decentralization process by providing new, quality and fast services to citizens. The study was conducted in three border municipalities of Kardzhali, Edirne and Komotini. The focus is on the level of decentralization to date and the introduction of new services including e-government as part of the decentralization process in the three countries. Among the aspects considered are: quality of services provided, frequency of use of administrative services by the municipality, assessment of interaction between central, regional and local government. The findings highlight the positive aspects of change and the difficulties in the decentralization process in three municipalities from three different types of countries.

5. *Azis, H. Decentralization and its impact on leadership style in municipalities.* BFU e-Journal, Issue 17, 2022, ISSN 1313-7514, pp. 1-20

The article is focussed on the process of decentralization and its impact on the leadership style of governance in municipalities. A research was conducted in 40 municipalities and the groups of persons studied were three – mayors, municipal councillors and municipal administration. The focus is on the current level of decentralization and the social climate, satisfaction and leadership style of governance in local government. The conclusions outlined the positive aspects of the change and the difficulties in the process of decentralization in Bulgarian municipalities.

VI. Papers

1. **Azis, H. STUDY OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS - EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES BY SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY.** Abstracts & Proceedings of INTCESS 2021- 8th International Conference on Education and Education of Social Sciences, 18-19 January, 2021, ISBN: 978-605-06286-1-6, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51508/intcess.202139>, сtp. 628 – 635

In this paper are published results of a study conducted in the Republic of Turkey on the decentralization process in five sectors: Education, Social Activities, Culture, Security and Public Administration. A questionnaire has been prepared, which included issues related to the rating of the decentralisation in the Republic of Turkey and the attitudes of the administration towards the process. The opinion of 224 people from the administration and management sector was studied. Based on the results obtained, the degree of successful integration of the decentralization process is assessed as a form of local self-government with a clear expression of individual characteristics in the five sectors studied. Dependence of the success rate of the decentralisation process on the type of the particular sector was analytically determined. The results outline the difficulties in the decentralisation process in individual sectors and suggest ways to overcome them.

2. **Azis, H. THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY.** Abstracts & Proceedings of INTCESS 2021- 8th International Conference on Education and Education of Social Sciences, 18-19 January, 2021, ISBN: 978-605-06286-1-6, pp. 636-645

The present study aims to establish the attitude of the state and municipal administration and their assessment to the decentralization process in the Republic of Turkey. A questionnaire has been prepared, which included issues related to the rating of the decentralisation in the Republic of Turkey and the attitudes of the administration towards the integration process itself. A survey of the administration's competences and attitudes on decentralization has been carried out. Recommendations have been given regarding the degree of completion of decentralization and development of the qualifications of the state and municipal administration. 224 employees participated in the study. The results outlined difficulties in the decentralisation process, as well as proposed ways to overcome them.

3. Azis, H. *Satisfaction and attitudes of citizens regarding the administrative services provided by municipalities*. MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION, "Management, Marketing and Tourism". VOLUME 17 (2), 2021, ISSN 13126121, pp. 55-60

This paper aims to establish the citizen's satisfaction with the administrative services provided by the Municipality of Kardzhali and the public's awareness of the formulated policies, projects and measures in the field of administrative services. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the level of citizen satisfaction and attitudinal survey towards administrative services provided are taken into account. Participants in the study also indicated various demographic characteristics such as sex, age, education, ethnicity, employment. 580 people from the municipality of Kardzhali were asked in the survey, of which 232 were women and 348 men. Their ages ranged from 18 to 65, with an average age of 41. Citizen respondents were randomly selected from across the municipality, with no town or village predominating.

4. Azis, H. *The Legal Regulation of Local and Regional Development in Greece*, VTU, Official Note Ref. No. FD-13-20 of 08.06.2022, under printing

The paper offers an analysis of the Greek administrative system, which currently has many characteristics of a decentralized one. The regions function as local administrative units of state power. The prefectures began to act as the second level of local self-government in 1995, and in October 1998 the elections for the second term of their representatives were held – for the period 1999-2002. Two of the administrative reforms implemented in Greece fundamentally changed the structure and interaction of the elements of public administration, namely the reform of Ioannis Kapodistrias and the reform of Kallikratis.

VII. Courses included in e-learning platforms

1. *Basics of Local self-government* - <https://www.bfu.bg/bg/magistarski-programi/tsentar-po-yuridicheski-nauki/magistarska-programa-darzhavna-i-mestna-administratsiya>

The course "Basics of Local Self-Government" is designed for the training of students - specialists in and for state and local institutions and other areas of public administration, as well as for the needs of the private sector in the educational-qualification degree "Master" for the specialty "State and Local Administration". The main objectives are - to acquire an understanding, knowledge and skills of the basic concepts, characteristics of local self-government, functions, local authorities and local administration, as well as to acquire knowledge on the main issues of governance and self-government of Bulgarian and European municipalities. Skills will be learned to analyze municipal environments and solve administrative cases.

2. ***"Administrative Reform and Decentralization in Bulgaria"*** - <https://www.bfu.bg/bg/magistarski-programi/tsentar-po-yuridicheski-nauki/magistarska-programa-darzhavna-i-mestna-administratsiya>

The course "Administrative Reform and Decentralization" in Bulgaria is designed for the training of students - specialists in and for state and local institutions and other areas of public administration, as well as for the needs of the private sector in the degree "Master" for the specialty "State and Local Administration". The main objectives are - to gain insight, knowledge and skills on basic concepts, characteristics of the decentralization process, processes of state governance, administrative reform in Bulgaria, hierarchization of powers, also to gain knowledge on basic issues of executive and local government management and delegation of powers. Skills will be learned to analyze executive power and administration.

3. ***"Decentralization and local self-government"*** - http://departments.unwe.bg/Uploads/Department/management_1653d_%D0%9C%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%BE%20%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%83%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5.pdf

Enhancing the management competencies of managers at all levels of local self-government, local administration and publicly owned companies. Training in modern concepts, principles and international standards for the organization and management of local government structures and bodies Providing specific knowledge and skills for managers at different levels to conduct targeted analysis and management diagnostics of problem situations and to identify opportunities

for the development of local resources and communities. Supporting management and decision makers / municipal executives, municipal managers, municipal councillors, experts, public advisors, NGO members / in the implementation of modern management models and technologies, in the effective management of resources, as well as in the development and successful implementation of flexible and integrated strategies for local and regional development.

VIII. Participation in projects.

1. ***Project No. 2020-1-BG01-KA204-079166, entitled: "LIFELONG LEARNING – A BETTER GUARANTEE FOR A GOOD JOB MARKET REALISATION"***, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Activity 2 "Strategic Partnerships" - Researcher of a study on good practices in adult learning.

Activities - research, investigate and systematize good practices in adult education and their approbation; - develop, correct and approve the content of the "Methodology with analyses of the investigated good practices in adult education and the ways of their approbation in the partner countries" - Bulgaria, Romania and Greece; - review and approve the content and format of the developed Methodology with analyses of the investigated good practices in adult education and the ways of their approbation in the partner countries" as a printed publication as well as a digital one within the international platform of the project;

2. ***Project entitled: "Together in Support of Diversity" under contract No 2020-3-BG01-KA205-094760*** funded by Erasmus+, Key Activity 2 "Strategic Partnerships", Youth Sector.

Activities - Delivering lectures/consultations on pre-defined topics and modules provided to the lecturer for the two trainings for youth workers; - Preparing presentation materials/presentations, in English, on pre-defined topics and modules provided to the lecturer for the two trainings for youth workers.

In his capacity as Mayor of Kardzhali Municipality, Dr. Eng. Hasan Azis coordinates, monitors and controls the technical and financial implementation of the following projects:

3. **Project "Partnership for a better chance for young people" under the PHARE CBC Programme, Contract BG 2003/005-630.03.02-10,** January 2006 - November 2007.
4. **Project "Rehabilitation of road sections: (IV - 50078 Kardzhali - Opalchensko) - Dazhdino - Pepelishte - /I-5/ from km. 0+000 to km. 2+289,87(IV - 50069 Kardzhali - Zimzelen) - Povet - Panchevo from km. 0+000 to km. 3+791.88; (IV - 50074 Sevdalina) - Kostino - Varbentsi - Krushka - Golyama Bara from km. 4+500 to km. 13+500 and IV - 50718 /III-507/ Most - Krin - Zvinitza - border with Stambolovo municipality", Contract BG 161PO001/2.1-02/2007/005,** financed under the Operational Programme Regional Development 2007-2013, June 2008 - January 2010.
5. **Project "ZNAM – Knowledge, Hope, Alternative, Motivation", Contract BG 051PO001/07/4.1-01 - 44,** financed by the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2007-2013. October 2008 - September 2009;
6. **Project "Construction of Park "Arpezos - North" and Business Park - I and II stage of the city of Kardzhali", Contract BG161PO001/1.4-02/2008/006,** financed under Operational Programme "Regional Development" 2007-2013, October 2009 - May 2012;
7. **Project "Perperikon - Home of Gods and Men", Contract BG161PO001/3.1-03/2010/033,** financed under the Operational Programme "Regional Development" 2007-2013, February 2012- January 2015;
8. **Project "Integrated Water Project for Kardzhali: Construction of WWTP and feeder collector, extension and reconstruction of water supply and sewerage network", Contract No. DIR-51011116-79-163** financed under OP "Environment" 2007-2013, January 2013 - June 2015;
9. **Project "CARE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING", PBFP Contract BG05M9OP001-2.002-274,** funded under Human Resources Development OP 2014-2020, July 2016 - February 2018;
10. **Project "Social Enterprise "Public Laundry and Home Services", PBFP Contract BG05M9OP001-2.010-0348,** funded under Human Resources Development OP 2014-2020, June 2018 - December 2019;
11. **Project "Regional Information Centre in the town of Kardzhali - together with informed citizens", PBFP Contract BG05SFOP001-**

- 4.004-0008**, funded under OP "Good Governance" 2014-2020, January 2019 - December 2021;
12. **Project "Repair and reconstruction of educational facilities in the town of Kardzhali"**, **Contract for PBFP BG16RFOP001-1.021-0001-C01**, financed under Operational Programme "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020, September 2017-January 2020;
13. **Project "Ancient Rhodopes and Aegean – Cultural Corridor in Support of the Development of the Region"/ARA-CC/, PBPF Contract No. B2.6c.05 of 24.11.2017**, funded under the INTERREG V-A "Greece-Bulgaria Cooperation Programme 2014-2020", October 2018-present;
14. **Project "Repair and rehabilitation of streets and sidewalks in the town of Kardzhali"**, **PBFP Contract BG16RFOP001-1.021-0003-C01**, financed under OP "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020, October 2018- to date