

ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА МЕЖДУ СТРАНАМИ ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ В РАМКАХ ЧЕРНОМОРСКОГО ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА И ГУАМ

Поскольку наибольшую протяженность общих границ Украина имеет с Россией, двух существующих еврорегионов недостаточно для поддержки трансграничного сотрудничества между странами, особенно учитывая общность экономических интересов и наличие многих общих проблем. Поэтому уже сейчас происходит активизация трансграничного сотрудничества на украинско-российской границе, обусловленная процессами глобализации и регионализации, и изменениями в стратегии региональной политики Украины. О некоторых итогах этого процесса можно судить по содержанию табл. 4.

Вхождение в еврорегион является добровольным. Наибольшие ожидания связаны с получением экономической выгоды и созданием благоприятных условий жизнедеятельности.

Таким образом, украинская рыночная экономика, начав развиваться значительно позже мировой, не может оставаться в стороне от мировых экономических процессов, происходящих под влиянием глобализации и регионализации, затрагивающих все сферы общественной жизни, поскольку они уже совершились и являются объективным процессом. Эффективность такого развития зависит от того, насколько умело украинская экономика сумеет приспособиться к объективным и субъективным международным рыночным условиям и правилам.

Таблица 4.

Проект создания еврорегионов с участием Украины*

№ п/п	Название еврорегиона	Территориально-административные единицы стран-участниц		
		Украины	России	Европы
1.	Донбасс	Луганская обл.	Ростовская обл.	-
2.	Ярославна	Сумская обл.	Курская обл.	-
3.	Азов-Меотида	Донецкая обл.	Ростовская обл.	-
4.	Днестр	Винницкая обл.	-	6 районов Молдовы
5.	Сян	Львовская обл.	-	Прикарпатское воеводство Польши
6.	Черное море	семь областей (больше всех стран по числу областей)	участвуют	Болгарии, Армении, Греции, Грузии (1), Молдовы, Румынии (1), Турции (6 городов)

*табл. 4 составлена автором на основании: [5. – с.38-39]

В условиях разных интересов субъектов мирового хозяйства Украине необходимо разработать концепцию развития и размещения производительных сил с учетом действия глобализации и регионализации, преобразования их в производительную силу в национальных интересах, определив стратегию партнерства в разных отраслях экономики.

Базовым определяющим элементом новой национальной стратегии включения в мировую глобальную гуманитарную экономику должна стать формула «трех И» - инновации, инвестиции, информационные технологии.

В современных условиях единым правильным стратегическим выбором для Украины должна стать не догоняющая, не опережающая модель развития, а стратегия включения страны в глобальную геоэкономику.

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РЕЗЮМЕ:

Розглядається зміст процесів глобалізації та регіоналізації світового господарства, досліджується стан національної економіки України, аналізуються практичні «кроки» України по глобалізації та регіоналізації економіки на сучасному етапі розвитку.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, економічна глобалізація, регіоналізація, глобалізація регіонів, єврорегиони.

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SUMMARY:

This article examines the content of globalization and regionalization processes of the world's economy, the state of the national economy of Ukraine. Practical Ukrainian "steps" on its way to globalization and regionalization of the economy at the present stage of development are analyzed.

Key words: globalization, economic globalization, regionalization, globalization, regional, European region.

PERSPECTIVES OF GEORGIA-EUROPEAN UNION TRADE RELATIONS

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Integration in the European Union is one of the main priorities of Georgia's foreign policy. At the beginning of the XXI century, the European Union is the most developed and integrated region throughout the world, with its trade-economic and political potential. Georgia's strivings to the European integration are preconditioned by both its national and trade-economic interests. In conditions of globalization of the international business, future strengthening of the trade-economic and financial-technical relations with the European Union has an essential strategic importance for Georgia. Attraction of the foreign investments from the western countries is also very important, since it may form a stable fundament for social-

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and-economic development, increasing the volumes of export and integration in the world economy. Therefore, the main direction of Georgia's foreign activities should become the deepening of the trade-economic relations with the EU Member States and attraction of the investments from them.

Georgia and the EU established the first contacts in 1991, when the EU started implementation of its TACIS programs in Georgia. The main legal basis for trade-and-economic relations between the Parties is the "Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation". On November 14, 2006, the Parties signed the "European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan" (ENP AP). Implementation of the AP will enable Georgia to increase the level of its trade-and-economic partnership with the European Union.

The European Union was supporting Georgia's way to the market economy and the democratic development from the very first days of gaining independence by the country. On March 22, 1992, the European Union recognized Georgia's independence and, the Parties started development of political, trade, and economic relations. Soon after gaining the independence, the "young" State of Georgian faced with very serious local and external problems. In that times the role and the position of the international community were essential. The EU always acts as a strong supporter of Georgia, with demonstrating its position both through its declarations and activities.

Trade relations between Georgia and the EU, take a key place in the trade-and-economic relations of the Parties. In 2008, the foreign trade turnover of Georgia with the EU States exceeded 2 milliard USD, with 335,2 MIO USD as the share of exports and 1665,3 MIO USD as the share of imports, i.e. the volume of imports was 5 times higher to compare with the volume of exports. As to the Year 2009, the foreign trade turnover of Georgia with 27 EU States made 1546,9 MIO USD, i.e. by 26% lower to compare with the relevant indicator of the previous year. Of which, 237,6 MIO USD is the exports share and 1309,2 MIO USD is the imports share. A total share of the EU States in Georgia's foreign trade turnover makes 28,1%, of which 20,9% comes on exports, 29,9% on imports, and 33,0% - on the trade deficit.

It should be noted that a mirror-like comparison of the data provided by the "Department for Statistics of Georgia" and the "Eurostat", gives considerably wider picture of cooperation between the Parties, especially where the exports from Georgia is involved. According to the data of "Eurostat", Georgia takes 77th position among the EU exporter countries, 90th position among the EU importer countries, and 89th position - by the trade turnover.

Georgia has a big potential for developing the export of its agrarian products, however, the great attempts are to be made to this direction. A list of the perspective agrarian products which may be introduced on the EU market, covers: wine, mineral waters, nut, honey, etc.

Georgia has a sufficient potential that has not been still used duly in the trade-and-economic relations with the European Union (and other countries). Indeed, Georgia's geographic location is one of the most important determinant for the country's successful integration in the international community. In conditions of liberalization of Georgia's foreign trade policy, it becomes possible to deepening even more the trade-and-economic relations with the European Union.

Georgia has a good potential for manufacturing the qualitative and ecologically clean agrarian products and exporting the same. On the one hand, the ecologically clean agrarian products are in a great demand on the EU (and not only) market, but, on the other hand, the Georgian businessmen often find themselves face-to-face with certain difficulties and problems in their attempts to have an access to the EU market and take a due position thereon.

The problems existing in the trade-and-economic, financial, technical and other types of relations between Georgia and the European Union, may be divided into several groups:

First - A problem of competitiveness of the Georgian products on the EU market;

Second - A problem of overcoming the EU-established various non-tariff barriers, by the Georgian businessmen;

Third - A certain part of the Georgian businessmen is not well-aware of the requirements and peculiarities of the EU market;

Fourth - Problems of fulfillment of the obligations taken by Georgia within the frameworks of the European Neighborhood Policy;

Fifth - Problems related to execution of the Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Georgia, etc.

Future development and perfection of the insurance system seems desirable, also, especially in view of the crediting the exports. To this end, it is important to share the experience gained in this field by the EU Member States. In order to increase the volumes of export to the EU market, a certain financial assistance by the EU will be required. Namely, the system of crediting and insurance of the export operations and production of the export goods, should be developed.

For improving the competitive abilities of Georgian products of the foreign markets, a number of measures must be taken, that is impossible without foreign investments. To go ahead on this way, the number of branches and representations of the European companies, European-Georgian joint ventures, as well as the volumes of import of the advanced technologies should be increased.

The State should pay a special attention to development and support of the small- and medium-size businesses. Here, we think it desirable to share the EU experience. For instance, a role and an importance of the small- and medium-size businesses in German economy, is well-known.

It is also desirable to support to introduction in the Georgian enterprises the quality control systems such as ISO9001 or ISO2000, that will be positively reflected on the Georgia-EU trade relations.

One more important thing is promotion of establishment of the analytical center/centers for the EU market studies and, an informational provision of Georgian businessmen by the perspective markets of the European Union, European standards and regulations. If required, a free training should be arranged for the small and medium-size businessmen.

In cooperation between the Parties, a special attention should be paid to increasing the exports to the EU Market, as well as to attraction of the investments from the EU States, increasing of the number of the small- and medium-size joint ventures, that will accelerate the social-economic development of Georgia.

Cooperation between Georgia and the EU and between Georgia and the EU Member States should also be expanded in the field of statistics, that will help us in clarifying the realistic ranges of the trade-economic relations between the Parties. The Department for Statistics of Georgia used to be the subordinated institution of the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia, that has limited considerably a degree of independence of the official statistical data. Proceeding from the significance and principles of the statistical information, the Department for Statistics must be an independent organ. To this end, sharing the successful experience of the EU Member States seems to be useful.

The volumes of exports from Georgia lag considerably behind the volumes of import to the country. At the same time, a structure of the groups of imported and exported goods differ diametrically from each other. An unsatisfactory trade structure of the Georgian export is considered as one of the problems in the Georgia-EU trade-and-economic relations. In the exported goods the raw materials and products have a considerably higher share, while in the imported goods the investment resources, technologies, machines and equipment are introduced with considerably lower share.

We think that execution of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" between the European Union and Georgia will significantly contribute to deepening the trade-economic, financial-credit and other relations of the Parties. A diversification of export is very important for Georgia. To this end the EU market should be considered as the main priority. A realization of the export potentials of Georgia, among them - on the EU market, seems to be one of determining factors for social and economic development of the country and, may serve as a basis for ensuring the high rates of the country's economic progress.

It should be noted also that "GSP+" is not a "permanent gift" to Georgia and, for preserving the said scheme, Georgia should meet a number of requirements established by the European Union. For a full-range use of preferences offered by the European Union, it is necessary to ensure a conformity of the Georgian legislation with the European standards. Namely, at present, operation of several articles of the Law of Georgia "On Food safety and Quality" is terminated. On the other hand, without the said law, it is absolutely impossible to increase the export of Georgian food products and beverages on the EU market.

Execution of the Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the EU is in the strategic interests of Georgia, despite the fact that the said Agreement will not increase Georgia's export on the EU market within a short period.

An insignificant share of the Georgian exports on the EU market cannot create any threat to the local markets of its Member States.

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Taking into consideration the embargo put on trade by Russia, a future widening of the trade relations with the EU and execution of the Free Trade Agreement therewith, are the priority tasks for ensuring the foreign economic safety of Georgia.

Opening of the economic borders from both sides, will contribute to diversification of the Georgia's market of export and decrease a rate of dependence of the country on separate markets.

Admission of Georgia to the trade-and-economic space of the Europe will promote to development of competitive abilities of different branches of the agriculture and the industry on the European and the international markets.

Execution of the Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the European Union will contribute considerably to attraction of the direct foreign investments from the EU (and not only).

Free Trade between Georgia and the European Union will have a positive influence on the social-economic development of Georgia, creation of the new job places, strengthening the middle stratum of the country's population, that, in its turn, is one of the preconditions for the development of the democratic society and the state.

Execution of the aforementioned agreement will also promote to increasing the exports of the up-now taxable goods (that is not envisaged under the currently applied GSP+ regime), including the wines, on the EU market.

Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the European Union will help us to introduce the European norms in the economic and legislative fields of Georgia. The comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the EU will assist us in regulating the problems related to standard- and other non-tariff barriers. Execution of the above mentioned agreement will favor the deepening of the trade-and-economic relations with other countries of the region. At the same time, it will become an important stimulus in the view of reforms and democratic development.

Thus, the Free Trade agreement between Georgia and the European Union will contribute considerably to increasing of the scopes of Georgia-EU economic cooperation, effective inclusion of Georgia in the integrated economic space of the Europe, that, in its turn, will have positive effect on increasing the competitiveness of the exports, attraction of the foreign investments, development of the small- and medium-size businesses in the country, strengthening the middle stratum of the country's population, creation of the new job places, increasing the budgetary revenues, etc.

The European Union is considered as one of the priority markets for exporting the Georgian wines (and not only). The EU owns a considerable share in the international wine business. It is the largest wine producer, importer and exporter throughout the world. It should be noted that the largest wine importers among the EU Member States are: Germany, UK, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden. Remarkable, that in 2008, the volume of exports of the Georgian wines on the EU market increased 8 times, to compare with the same indicator of 2000 (0,9 MIO USD and 7,1MIO USD, respectively) and made 19,5% of the total exports of the Georgian wines. The main factors creating obstacles to export of the Georgian wines on the EU market are not the tariff- or non-tariff barriers or conformity of the costs with the concrete procedures, but the factors, which determine the level of competitiveness on the global markets.

In the course of trade relations with the EU, the third countries have to overcome certain non-tariff or tariff-related barriers. Under the term "the third country" we mean the countries which are not the EU members, as well as those having special trade and economic relations with the European Union. In most cases, the non-tariff barriers are more difficult to overcome than the tariff-related ones, for the entrepreneurs.

It should be underlined that for entering the integrated EU market some strong requirements are to be met. A complexity of such requirements are conditioned by desire of the EU Member States to protect to the maximal possible extent a health of their citizens, on one hand, and to create the favorable conditions for a fair competition on the local markets of the EU, on the other hand, i.e. not to permit an access of such goods and technologies on their markets, which fail to meet the EU standards, have a low production cost and respectively, can receive a certain advantage on the market.

Among the serious factors creating barriers to the developing countries in importing their goods to the local markets of the European Union, are the following: technical standards of the goods, the certification-related requirements, quality control, observance of the sanitary and phytosanitary norms, goods origin, protection of customers, etc. All these factors together, decrease considerably the exporting possibilities of the developing (but not only) countries on the EU market.

A prevailing part of the small and medium-size Georgian companies is not well-aware of the requirements and peculiarities of the EU market, the tariff- and non-tariff related problems, issues of taxation of the exports on the EU market.

One of the basic rights of the consumers in any country, is the right of a physical safety from the goods purchased and/or the services provided. No products/services should create a threat to the health of a consumer. Therefore, in most of the countries, for guaranteeing the consumers rights related to the safety of products, a manufacturer is obliged to produce and introduce on the market only the "healthy" products, while the relevant governmental agencies are obliged to ensure through the appropriate mechanisms that only the safe products will be introduced on the markets and offered to the consumers.

For commencement and successful completion of the negotiations within the frameworks of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" with the EU, it seems desirable to ensure an approach of the Georgian legislation to the EU legal norms, that, in its turn, will contribute considerably to the trade-economic integration of Georgia in the EU space.

As revealed by the "Purposefulness Study" carried out under the EU funding, execution of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" will bring only positive results to the both Parties. The mission implementing the Study has tabled conclusions and recommendations, most of which should be foreseen before starting negotiations on the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement", since performance of some of the said conclusions and recommendations creates certain preconditions for starting the negotiations, while the remainder ones should be taken into consideration just in the course of the negotiations. Based upon the above recommendations, the EU has singled out five priority topics: Procedures and Institutional Mechanisms; Food Safety; Technical Barriers in the Trade; Competition Laws; and Intellectual Property.

A subject matter to be negotiated with the European Union is not the Customs Tariffs, but rooting out a large number of the non-tariff barriers in the trade relations. The above mentioned agreement covers such important problems, as technical barriers, standards, technical procedures, food safety problems, protection of the intellectual property rights, customs legislation, laws on competition, labor code, etc.

One of the main recommendations proposed by the European Union is to work-out a strategy through which the food safety laws and this sphere can be improved. On December 27, 2005, Georgia adopted the Law "On Food Safety and Quality", however, an operation of some important articles of this law is temporarily stopped now. The EU recommends to re-start these articles stage-by-stage. As a result of and taking into account the EU recommendations, the Georgian government made the decision to introduce stage-by-stage the food safety system in the country. The first stage envisages a registration of the food producing enterprises. The above mentioned recommendations regarding the food safety are planned to come fully into the force from January 01, 2017, i.e. 6 years later. We think that this term must be re-considered and, the stopped articles of the Law "On Food Safety and Quality" should be re-started in the shorter terms, that is in the Georgian Party's interests first of all and, will be assessed by the EU as a positive step, on the other hand.

For execution of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" with the European Union, like in case of the Agreement of Association, a number of the EU requirements have to be met. One of the major problem relates to the food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary measures - i.e. the problems belonging to the non-tariff barriers and implying impossibility of export of the food products (including the agrarian products) of the Georgian origin on the EU market, because of inexistence of the means of identification (check up system) of a full chain of the food production cycle in Georgia. In addition to the above, nonobservance of the food safety-related requirements creates a threat to the health state of the local population (and not only) and stimulates the unhealthy competition and business.

Execution of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" with the European Union and improvement of the trading potential of the country are possible in case of existence of the relevant legislation on the food safety.

At present, a process of preparation of negotiations with the EU on execution of the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" is in the course. Within the limits of the preparatory stage, a comprehensive draft strategy regarding the food safety has been developed, envisaging to re-start of the above mentioned "stopped" articles of the Law "On Food Safety and Quality" within the time-limits to be agreed with the EU.

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According to some experts, the EU non-tariff barriers are often used unfairly towards the goods importing from the third countries, with the main reason of protection of the local EU markets, health and safety of the consumers.

Stimulation of exports from the developing countries is an important comprising element of the foreign policy of the European Union. Therefore, reduction of the non-tariff and the tariff-related barriers to these countries, is an important issue for the European Union.

The European Union provides the third countries with the opportunities of access to its own market with considerable reduced tariffs and without quantitative limitations. However, this initiation of the EU relates to the industrial goods only, not to the food products. However, a certain part of the developing countries has a higher potential of exporting the agrarian goods. Therefore, we think that reduction of the non-tariff barriers between the EU and the developing countries will serve as one of the important factors for widening the scopes of trade relations between them.

For a full-range use of the GSP+ scheme proposed by the European Union, it is necessary to ensure a conformity of the Georgian legislation with the EU legal norms. At present, the operation of several articles of the Law of Georgia "On Food Safety and Quality" is terminated, that creates obstacles for increasing the export of the foods and beverages of Georgian origin to the EU market. The "GSP+" is indeed a supporting factor in the view of increase of the Georgian export on the EU market, but, at the same time, only the tariff discounts are envisaged by the said scheme. It should be noted that the European Union has never developed the trade discounts in connection with the non-tariff barriers, that, even in conditions of the low custom rates, limits considerably the possibilities of Georgia (and not only) in realization of its exporting potential on the EU market.

Admittance of Georgia to the EU Neighborhood Policy will support significantly to future deepening of the trade-economic relations between the country and the EU. However, to achieve at the planned objectives, it is necessary to perform the obligations specified in the Action Plan (AP), the Georgian legislation should be approached closely to the relevant laws of the European Union and, Georgia should meet the sanitary, industrial, phytosanitary, veterinary and other standards acknowledged by the European Union.

The agrarian and the food products of the Georgian origin have a big exporting potential on the EU market (and not only). Of the export trade groups of Georgia, the agrarian products are the only one having a positive balance with the EU. According to "Eurostat", the export of the agrarian products from Georgia to the EU made 12,1 MIO EUR, while in 2007 this indicator increased up to 89 MIO EUR (122 MIO USD). As to the import its volumes in the same period increased from 61 MIO EUR to 71 MIO EUR (97 MIO USD). Thus, a positive balance made 18 MIO EUR (24,7 MIO USD).

In conditions of the globalization, the agrarian sector of Georgia found itself face-to-face with many difficulties and challenges. A volume of total export lags 3-4 times behind the volumes of import. Production of the agrarian goods of the Georgian origin has an important potential to be exported to the EU market (and not only). In case of a due supporting of this sector, the new job places will be created and the considerable monetary resources (in foreign currencies) being currently directed for funding the import, will be saved. More than one third part – 44,5% of the total volume of exports of the Georgian agrarian products is directed to the EU market.

We think that in the visible perspective, it is possible to increase considerably the export of Georgian agrarian goods – nut, wine, mineral waters, etc., on the EU market, because: these products are in a demand on the EU market and, Georgia has certain perspectives of increasing the export thereof.

Georgia has a good chance to become the first Caucasian state who will start negotiations with the European Union concerning the Agreement on Association. For this purpose, Georgia must continue activity to this direction and fulfill the EU recommendations, in order to enable the EU Board to take decision on starting the negotiation for execution of the Association Agreement.

Besides, Georgia must also work actively for starting negotiations with the European Union on execution of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the Parties. For this, Georgia must fulfill successfully the relevant recommendations of the European Union and approach as closely as possible its legislation to the EU laws.

One more important thing is to sign in a nearest future the Georgia-EU bilateral agreement on mutual protection of the geographic markings of the agrarian goods and food products.

There exists no universal way for resolving the trade-and-economic problems between the countries. Each single country tries to settle these problems with taking into consideration and proceeding from the own national interests, experience of other nations, principles of the international law. In the course of the study we have revealed some other problems which are not considered herein, but it does not mean that at all that they are insignificant or have no direct/indirect effect on widening the scopes of the trade-and-economic relations between Georgia and the EU.

And finally, Georgia's trade-and-economic integration in the EU is unavoidable. On the current stage of development of the global economy, Georgia must not slip out of those processes of integration, which are being implementing successfully in the western countries. On this stage, widening of the scopes of trade-and-economic relations between Georgia and the European Union becomes more and more clear. The western orientation of Georgia, fulfillment of the EU recommendation, a stable course of building the democratic state, successful economic reforms and the concrete steps taken to these directions, form a true basis enabling Georgia to approach itself to the European Union. We think that Georgia should become the main partner of the European Union in the Caucasian region.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

В умовах глобалізації міжнародного бізнесу, подальше зміцнення торговельно-економічних і фінансово-технічних відносин з Євросоюзом набувають істотну стратегічну важливість для Грузії.

Ключові слова: Інтеграція в Євросоюз, зовнішня політика Грузії, глобалізація міжнародного бізнесу, залучення інвестицій

ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА МЕЖДУ СТРАНАМИ ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ В РАМКАХ ЧЕРНОМОРСКОГО ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА И ГУАМ

РЕЗЮМЕ

В условиях глобализации международного бизнеса, дальнейшее укрепление торгово-экономических и финансово-технических отношений с Евросоюзом приобретает существенную стратегическую важность для Грузии.

Ключевые слова: Интеграция в Евросоюз, внешняя политика Грузии, глобализация международного бизнеса, привлечение инвестиций

SUMMARY

In conditions of globalization of the international business, future strengthening of the trade-economic and financial-technical relations with the European Union has an essential strategic importance for Georgia.

Keywords: Integration into the European Union, Georgia's foreign policy, globalization, international business, investment

WEB-BASED TOURIST INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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The development of tourism and information society is a priority for the Bulgarian economy and, as such is included in its strategy. The tourist industry is very dynamic and it seeks new ways for promoting its products and services to the potential customers.

The modern user of tourist information wants not only to be acquainted with it, but to be able to actively take part in the formation of the rich information environment. The information and communication technology (ICT) penetration into the tourism area is a world trend, which Bulgaria follows, but still not enough actively and effectively. It is a matter of fact that most of the hotels and tourist agencies, are present at Internet, but in a way formally, with online sales still confined.

The main reasons for this are:

- Low degree of computers usage.
- Confined Internet access. As a whole Bulgaria takes 42nd place in the world rank for e-readiness. In fact only Turkey, Romania, Russia and Ukraine left behind us [1].

- E-payments being still not enough popular, due to the low rate of credit card usage and fraud threat risks.

One of the latest researches on the information-reservation systems application in the Bulgarian hotels and tourist firms shows that 58% of the hotels don't use ICT at all, another 42% apply them mainly in accounting, front desks and restaurants, and only 12% have adopted complete reservation systems [2]. Even more eloquent is the fact, that 85% of Bulgarian tour operators and 75% of the tourist agencies do not use any other tools, except phone and fax.

Presumably, **web-based information systems** refer to those *applications and services that are resident on a server, which is accessible from anywhere in the world via the Web*. Most of electronic commerce (e-commerce) applications run on the Internet using web based features, making them very suitable for the tourism industry and enabling the seamless conduction of business transactions for 24 hours a day and seven days a week and so on. The main advantage of the web-based information systems is that millions of people could reach them instantly from anywhere and at any time.

In general the **basic task** of the information system is to provide complete, timely and reliable information about the business processes and management functions of the tourist firm. Very important is the information about the business environment – suppliers, customers and business partners. Furthermore, it should offer statistical information for analytical and planning purposes, as for example planning the tourist stream of people, analyzing its diversification and behavior stereotypes. This information is the basic factor for the correct assessment of the tourist business, problems identification and taking effective management decisions for sustainable development and application of appropriate managerial strategies. It helps tourist managers prepare marketing analysis and improve tourist products and services in order to improve their competitive advantage, which will ultimately increase revenue.

The basic **features** of web-based tourist information systems could be presented as follows:

- **To be based on the Internet and the Web as a platform** that lets people collaborate and share information online in perceived new ways, such as social networks, blogs etc., providing gold opportunities for internet marketing and sales for the tourist firms;
- **Integration** of the data, which supposes data to be input once and to be used repeatedly;
- **Module structure**, which includes different components and abilities for upgrade and addition of new modules;
- **Balance** between centralised and distributed data processing;
- **Flexibility and adaptation** according to all changes inside and outside the tourist firm;
- **Maximum user coverage** combining all online tools to improve services, reduce costs and increase efficiency;
- **Supporting mobile communications** for buying and selling tourist products and services in a wireless environment – basically cellular telephones and personal digital assistants (PDAs).

The tourism is one of the three priority sectors in the Bulgarian economic development program, comprising about up to 10% of the GDP [3]. Therefore one of the expected trends in the tourism development is the considerable extension of the ICT role in the hotel and tour operator activities, in regard with demand, planning and selling the tours [4].

Web-based tourist information systems have to comply with European quality standards for the included information and to be open for integration with national and foreign tourist portals. Furthermore, they should give a chance to the not so popular tourist destinations to be presented at the electronic market and to be in touch with different clients and partners.

Creating a strategy for the development of web-based tourist information systems requires some potential **problems** to be envisaged. Let's mention some of them:

- Building a suitable **information infrastructure**, that will provide access to the telecommunication networks in global and national scale (Internet, Intranet, Extranet);
- Submission of **complete and variable information** about less utilized and underdeveloped tourist destinations, services and entertainments;
- **Professional computer literacy** of the staff at all management levels not only about computers' abilities, but specialized software;
- **Lack of financial resources** for ICT investments, creating and supporting of dynamic website for online reservations and payments;
- **Integration and compatibility** of all kind of tourist information systems (hotels, restaurants, airlines, trains, buses etc.);
- **Necessity of stimulating and law regulations** for encouraging modern ICT application in tourism accompanied with suitable financial tools.

The evolutionary processes towards internet economy impose new behavior models in the tourist business. Internet submits alternative ways for promotion, distribution, marketing and advertizing of tourist products and services, which in practice generate new electronic tourist market.

Unfortunately we haven't built yet national information reservation system in Bulgaria. This is due to lack of coordination of the activities of the responsible factors and combining the resources available in the tourism. This definitely jeopardizes the market positions of our country in the global tourist market. The introduction of integrated web-based information reservation system for Bulgarian tourist industry is an important prerequisite for the tourism sustainable development and will give the country an image of competitive world tourist destination.

The most important **challenges** of the web-based tourist information systems could be summarized in the next directions: