



VRATSA REGION (Bulgaria)

GENERAL DATA FOR VRATSA DISTRICT

Geographical situation: North West part of Bulgaria is 3,55% from the total territory.

Climate: Temperate-continental with cold winter and warm summer.

Relief: Mainly flat landscape. Most of the territory is occupied by the Danube Valley. To the South and South West it gradually turns into mountains and in Stara Planina (mountain range). Three quarters of the territory lie at an altitude of 150-300 m and the highest point is the mount Beglichka mogila – 1482 m situated in the Vratsa Balkan range.

Territory: total sq.km – 3619,8

Agricultural territory: 2996,1 sq.km

Forests: 584,2 sq.km

Water territory: 71,4 sq.km

Soils: Mainly black earth in the valley, gray forest at the foot of the mountain, mountain pastures and brown forest in the mountainous regions and alluvial in the middle and the lower parts of the rivers and near the Danube.

Waters: The river of Ogosta and its feeders river Skat and river Botunya. The river Iskar runs through the southern parts of the District. The Danube River forms a natural border with Romania to the north.

The number of the population in Vratsa District till 31.12.2001 is 244.881 citizens. In administrative relation it includes 10 municipalities and its district centre is the city of Vratsa.

The city of Vratsa is the biggest administrative centre in North Western Bulgaria. It has developed through the years and has been an important social, market and cultural center in different historical epochs. Evidence for its way of life and culture of the Thracians, Romans and Slavic are found in the district. The District of Vratsa has played an important role for the cultural heritage of Bulgaria. Its memory is kept in museums and museum collections and galleries.

ECONOMY

In economical terms it could be assumed theoretically that southern part of the territory is more industrialized one as the qualities of the cultivation land is as good as the first class agricultural land of the northern part and the means of living of the population should be connected to the industry. The most industrial enterprises are located in the region of the District center - the city of Vratsa. They are specialized mainly in metal processing, textile industry, furniture production, food and beverage, machine building, construction works.

In the end of the year 2000 there are 6484 companies registered in the District of Vratsa, of which 5,57% are in the public sector and 94,43% are in the private sector. According to the number of employees the biggest number of companies have a staff under 10 persons - 5814; 542 have between 11 and 100 employees, the rest exceed 100 persons personnel. Apart from these, 420 companies are involved in agricultural production. SMEs in the region are predominantly in the field of services and small-scale manufacturing.

Primary role in the business environment should be allocated to the Nuclear Power Plant Kozloduy, which is located on the territory of Vratsa District. The other main businesses are related to light industry - the District has age-long traditions in the textile, especially sewing, production of foodstuff and beverage, furniture manufacturing, chemical industry, cement production. At present, the biggest investors come from Switzerland and Italy, and the Municipal and District administrations have set as a priority activities to attract new foreign investments in the region.

TRANSPORT NETWORK AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The road system in Vratsa District is 1277 km roads from the republican road system including asphalt covering – 1172km and without asphalt covering 105 km. Transportation scheme for the bus lines provides convenient connections with all the major towns in Northern Bulgaria – Sofia, Plevna, Russe, Svishtov, Lovech, Gabrovo, Vidin and others.

Gas-main passes through the territory of the District and Chiren gas-condensed field is found.

On the territory of the Region Vratsa is located port Oriahovo and ship ferry terminal, connecting Bulgaria with Romania. In the town Mezdra is the most important railway junction for South Western Bulgaria with links to all the country.

TOURISM

The District features a splendid landscape which varies from plain relief to a magnificent mountain range. Quite interesting is the area of the Vratsata canyon, where there exist excellent conditions for mountaineering. There are good opportunities for the establishment of a mountaineering centre of international interest there. There is a great number of protected natural sights and historical monuments on the territory of Vratsa State Forestry. The mountain offers wonderful opportunities for skiing.

In the northern part of Vratsa District there are good conditions to promote tourism by fishing and exciting boating along the river. The newly created ECO-path attracts numerous tourists with its breath-taking views and sites.

With its diversified, unique and beautiful natural surroundings the District of Vratsa has a significant potential for tourism - cognitive, ecological, country and rural, hunting, skiing, cave tourism, alpinism and mountaineering. A number of monasteries in the vicinities have a special share in the feeling of relaxation, peace and harmony.

AGRICULTURE

Vratsa District has traditions in agriculture preconditioned by the favorable natural and climatic conditions and also the deep relations of the population with the countryside and the land.

Most of the fields are sown with wheat, maize for seeds, sunflower, barley, rye and less of alfalfa and vegetables. The orchards and vineyards have also a share in the cultivated land.

Prerequisites for anticipated successful results in agriculture are: the large fields of fertile cultivation land, traditions of the population, favorable climatic conditions, availability of adroit workers, potential for development of areas under irrigation, conditions for the development of specific forms of stock-breeding – silk-worm breeding, bee-keeping, ecological plant-growing and stock-breeding.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Regional Museum of History in Vratsa with an Art Gallery accommodates 165 vessels which are part of the silver-golden Thracian treasure from the village of Rogozen. The golden wreath of a Thracian princess and a silver knee piece of a Thracian warrior from the Mogilan mound in Vratsa can be seen there. As a part of the Museum of History there is also an Ethnographic museum, which has kept the memory of the traditional skills and crafts of Bulgaria. Being a Center of rich ancient culture in North Western Bulgaria, Vratsa District is of great value as an ethnographic district. It includes part of the Danube valley, semi-mountainous and mountainous regions and this is the reason for its richness and variety of traditional material and spiritual culture of its population. In the town of Vratsa you can visit the Meshchii towers and Kurtpashovi towers, built in XVII century as residential and defending towers. The towers are of great historical and architectural importance and they are renowned for being cultural monuments with national importance.

There is a History Museum and an Ethnographic House in the town of Oryahovo (on the Danube riverbank). There is the House-museum of Diko Iliev, the genius folk musician and composer – author of the “Danube horo”.

The National Museum “Radetski Ship” – Kozloduy – keeps the memory of the Botev’s detachment.

There are Museum collections and Town Art Galleries in the towns of Mezdra and Krivodol.

The territory of the District is crossed by the historic road of the Botev’s detachment, whose steps are followed each year by mountaineers from all over the country who march from Danube riverbank to the Okolchitsa peak to honor the feat and the immortality of the heroes.

On the first of June in the town of Vratsa there is a festive meeting – tattoo, which commemorates Botev and all who died in the name of the liberation of Bulgaria.

Educational centers

The District has numerous elementary, primary and secondary schools. A High School of Foreign Languages and a High School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences offer a first-class education to young people in the District. There are also professional and technical schools in the areas of: economics, mechanical-electrical engineering, nuclear energy, chemical and textile industries, clothing industry, construction, stone cultivation, agriculture, transport.

The Pedagogic and Medical Colleges in Vratsa have traditions of many years and they train qualified pedagogical personnel.

There are faculties of four big universities in the town of Vratsa which are in the economics, nature and humanitarian areas.

Cultural institutions

Today, not only in the administrative center, but also on the territory of the whole Vratsa District there are state, municipal and departmental cultural institutions.

The Regional History museum with the Art Gallery, Drama-puppet theatre and Vratsa Philharmonic Orchestra are housed by the Palace of Culture in the town of Vratsa.

The State Philharmonic Orchestra – Vratsa was founded in 1973. It has performed at concerts in Vratsa and the country, as well as abroad.

There are 92 community centers, which have kept the traditions and the uniqueness of the Bulgarian spirit, on the territory of the District.

AGRO-FOOD

The District of Vratsa supplies 5,97% of the total agricultural output of Bulgaria, more than 1500 sq. km is tilted by cooperatives and another 1500 sq. km - by private companies. Most commonly they are seeded with maize, wheat, sunflowers, barley, grains. Traditionally, vineyards, tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables are produced in the district. Stock-breeding is represented by growing cattle, small farm animals, sheep and goats, poultry, bees. Typical for the region is silkworms growing.

The main foodstuff produced here are: sunflower oil, flour, dairy products - more than 50 companies produce various kinds of cheese (feta), butter, milk, yogurt; meat and meat products - more than 35 companies; bread, bread products, confectionery - more than 200 companies. There are a number of canning companies which preserve mainly tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, pickles, beans. Close to the District administrative center, in the town of Mezdra, is one of the largest breweries in the country, which produces very good local beer "Ledenika" under Belgian license and its exports part of its production to Belgium and other EU countries. Recently, there is an increase in the production in this sector by 0,15%.

TEXTILE

Textile represents a major sector in the region. Its contribution to the regional economic development during the last few years is significant. The textile companies are one of the main employers. A huge part of the production capacity is not fully used due to the shrunk internal market - a consequence of the reduced buying power of the local population and the increased amount of imported goods. However, high quality of the products, low salary costs, wide experience and the traditions of the sector are an excellent fundament for its future development. Incessant increase of the volume of the commodities produced during the last few years, the steady macroeconomic framework, low inflation rate and the augmentation of the foreign investments in the sector are a good perspective for its expansion on the domestic as well as on the international market.

The textile companies in the region are predominantly small and medium-sized. Most of them work with client's materials and export their production to Greece, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, others. There is one company located in the city of Vratsa which produces designs for prêt-a-porter. The only enterprise producing flags in Bulgaria is also established here. There are small companies producing men's, ladies', and children's clothes, uniforms (for hotels, medical institutions, etc.), hunting and fishing outfit, working and protection garments, sportswear, household linen, table cloths, etc. Apart from pure sewing, you can also find processes like spinning, dressing/finishing, printing weaving. Some companies are dealing with woolen textile, and one small company produces hand-made typically Bulgarian products like floor and wall mats, carpets, floorings, pillows, decorative items.

FURNITURE

More than 40 companies are active in the field of furniture production on the territory of Vratsa District. They produce home furniture in various styles, designs and materials. They sell mainly on the domestic market and a few of the them have markets abroad. Part of the enterprises have their own collections and most of them are in a position to work by client's order and request. Recently, as the market demands are growing, several companies offer also designing of lay-out of house interiors.

The company "Dab" is famous with its exquisitely oak-made furniture, which is ordered by quite a lot of Embassies in Bulgaria.

Sub-sectors cover also aluminum works and production of office furniture.

IT SECTOR

The sector is not very well developed in the District of Vratsa. There are however some small companies which deal with software development. They are usually small ones with a few people staff and they subcontract from larger enterprises.

About 10 companies are dealing with PCs and office equipment (printer, fax, copying machines, CD-Writers, etc.). An innovative Internet provider is the local TV operator who is providing Internet and TV through optical connection. Several companies offer Internet through different means - satellite, modem, radio-modem, cable.

TRANSPORT

The sector is represented by some ten companies. Most of them offer also forwarding/shipping services to clients. A representation office of Miltzer & Muen is located in the city of Vratsa. Companies dispose of fleets of various in kind trucks in very good repair. Their major destinations are Germany, Switzerland, Near East, Italy. There is one company in particular which is specialized in the transportation of textile products.

Some agents offer full logistic service in relation to transportation and export: preparations of custom documents, custom clearance, forwarding, customs stores, etc.)

USEFUL LINKS ABOUT VRATSA REGION, BULGARIA:

1. <http://oblast.vratsa.bg/> (Bulgarian)
2. <http://www.visit.vratza.com/> (Bulgarian / English/ German / Italian)
3. <http://cci-eic-vratsa.bitex.com> (Bulgarian / English)
4. <http://extreme.rtsonline.net/climbing/area.html> (English)
5. <http://portal.vratza.net/> (Bulgarian)