

HEALTH  
Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova

Viola Çopani, Desislava Atanasova, Iurie Guzgan

**CONTENTS:**

**1. DEFINITIONS (MEANINGS)..... 3**  
WHAT IS NOT HEALTH? (NEGATIVE PERCEPTION)..... 3  
WHAT IS HEALTH? (POSITIVE PERCEPTION) ..... 4  
MEANING OF HEALTH IN ALBANIA, BULGARIA, MOLDOVA ..... 5  
WHAT WE CAN DO WITH OUR HEALTH? ..... 6

**2. HEALTH AND TRADITIONS..... 7**  
2.1. HEALTH AND CUSTOMES ..... 7  
2.2. HEALTH AND COSTUMES ..... 8  
2.3. FOLK MEDICINE..... 10

**3. HEALTH AND SOCIETY ..... 11**  
3.1. HEALTH AND RELIGION ..... 11  
3.2. HEALTH AND FAMILY ..... 12  
3.3. HEALTH AND LIFE STYLE..... 12  
    3.3.1. *Health and diet*..... 12  
    3.3.2. *Health and smoking*..... 13  
    3.3.3. *Health and alcohol drinking* ..... 14  
    3.3.4. *Physical activities*..... 15

**4. HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS..... 15**

**5. CONCLUSIONS ..... 17**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:..... 19**

# 1. Definitions (meanings)

Health has two common meanings in the everyday use based on the positive or negative definition.

## ***What is not health? (Negative perception)***

The negative definition of health is the absence of disease or illness. The first concepts of health are based mainly on that definition. If you ask somebody on the street what is health the most likely answer will be the absence of disease. This is also the dominant professional view of health adopted by most of the health workers in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova. In this sense, health is a negative term, defined more by what it is not than by what it is.

Of course health is not being ill, nor have a disease but what else? It is not a negative sense of purpose and disbelief in one's own worth, e. g. feeling bad, feeling unable to cope with your problems. Health is not also living in fear of illness, constantly worried about your health or the health of those closest to you, afraid to lose your job.

Financial health can have very strong influence on the family health. Low incomes can make it hard to afford to keep your house warm, buy food that is cheap and healthy, live in safe place, protected yourself and family from fire and accidents in the home, such as buying smoke detected alarms or replacing faulty wiring. For some people, who live in Bulgaria, Moldova or Albania is even hard to find means to buy the prescribed medicines or to visit their doctor.

If health is the only thing you have, then you won't be healthy for long. The expression of that thoughts can be summarised by the Bulgarian proverb – 'Health alone is a mere disease'. What you need is not just a physical, mental or social health but opportunities to sustain health.

1. So, health is not [6]:

***Disease***, disorders of structure or function in an animal or plant of such a degree as to produce detectable illness or disorder.

***Morbidity***: the number of sick people or number of case of disease in a given population at a given time.

***Deficiency***: alteration of an anatomical (physical deficiency), physiological (mental deficiency) structure or function. It may be a temporary or permanent state by reference to a bio-medical standard.

***Incapacity***: partial or total reduction of the capacity to carry out an activity in a way that is considered normal for a human being.

***Handicap***: social disadvantage conferred by incapacity and deficiency, and also by a defective environment: for an individual, the handicap is a function of the alternations of the state of health, personal resource or personal or collective environment.

***Dependence***: the term dependence is used when elementary acts of daily life (feeding oneself, dressing oneself, moving around, etc) require assistance from a third part. In a totally different context, we speak of dependence (addiction) on toxic products (tobacco, alcohol, and drugs).

## What is health? (Positive perception)

The positive perception of health is state of well being, interpreted by the World Health Organisation as 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO 1946) [18].

The same definition of health is usually cited in the official documents, concerning health in Bulgaria.

Today health is considered as 'a resource for everyday life, not an objective of living'. (WHO, 1984) [19].

]. The last revised definition presents health also as 'the extend to which an individual or (group of individuals) is able, on one hand to realise aspirations and satisfy needs, and on the other hand to change or cope with the environment' [19].

That concept defines health as an ideal state. The most popular definition of health of WHO is criticised by many authors. It is considered as:

⊗ Utopian and unrealistic

Health is hard to be achieved by all people – it is impossible at the same time all the people to be in state of complete physical, mental and social well being.

⊗ Inappropriate for working definition

Health is hard to be measured, as far as well being is a relative notion- different people understand well being in different way.

Health is a 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being of individual, family and society', according to Art.2 of the Bulgarian Draft Law of Public Health [2].

Health is also 'the state of optimal capacity of an individual for the effective performance of the roles and tasks for which she/he has been socialised' (Parsons, 1972) [1]. The lack of mental or physical fitness restricts people to participate effectively in the mainstream of society. Health is a base for successful living.

It can not only be considered as state of being but as process of adaptation to the changing environment (Dubos, 1960) [9]. You can not have a healthy life if you can not have the ability to adapt and cope with the changing demands of living.

Health is also the basis for developing of the personal potential (Seedhouse 1986) [11]. It is energy and vitality, social relationships, ability to think and make judgements, good physical environment, acceptance and ability to achieve a satisfactory expression of one's sexuality etc. Thus certain common conditions need to be met – basic needs, access to information, skills and confidence development – and alongside these, individuals will have own particular needs.

The growth of modern medicine suggests the perception of health as a commodity. It can be bought or supplied (e.g. through preventive medical services; hotels for recreation tourism, fitness), given (e.g. through drugs and surgery) and lost (through accident or disease). That concept suggests that health is removed from the person and is a technical matter.

Good health is the backbone of a good life. In Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova people use the proverb 'Health is the biggest wealth'. Our own health and the health of our families and friends underpin our ability to enjoy life to the full. When we are well we are able to make the most of the opportunity that life has to offer and to play a full part in the family, society and

**Commentaire :** Art. 2 (1)  
Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being of individual, family and society.  
Draft Law of Public Health (authors' translation)  
Чл. 2. (1) Здравето е състояние на пълно физическо, психическо и социално благополучие на индивида, семейството и обществото.  
Закон за общественото здраве

working life. No matter what goes wrong in life – money, work or relationship problems – good health helps sustain us.

### **Meaning of health in Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova**

The Bulgarian word for health 'здраве' [zdrave] has many different meanings. If you look at the Bulgarian Terminology Dictionary the word 'здраве' is explained as 'normal state and good development of alive organism'.

We start the day saying 'здравей' [zdravey] to our colleagues and friends, which has the meaning of 'hello' or 'hi'. The same meaning has the word "salut" in Moldova and "pëshendetje" in Albania. The three words are derived from the word health in the respective languages. Bulgarians can say good bye, wishing good health to somebody by the words 'много здраве' [mnogo zdrave]. Usually it happens when we would like to give our regards to a third person. This has the meaning of the English wishing good luck or good speed.

The Moldavian (Romanian) word "sanatate" means "health". The same word is used as "Good bye" - "mergi sanatos". When Moldavians meet each other they use to say "salut"- "Hello", "Hi". The root of this word is Latin and comes from "salus" – "health". The toasts are accompanied by the wishes "fii sanatos" – "be healthy".

Albanian used the word "health" when they want to say good bye to somebody. The root word it is also used to wish somebody when he/she cuts the hair, or wears something new, "me shëndet" that in English means "with health". When Albanians try the fruits for the first time of the season they use the same expression and it is related with the wish to have more and more welfare during the season.

Health is also a word that Bulgarian as Moldavian and Albanian use to propose a toast. We usually say 'на здраве' [na zdave], which is the equivalent of 'to your health'. It is not only a good toast but it could be also a wish for good health when somebody sneezes. In such cases 'na zdrave' (Bulgaria), 'shëndet' (Albania), 'fii sanatos' (Moldova) is equal to the English 'God bless you'.

The Albanian word for health is 'shëndet'. It means 'a good physiological status of the organs (body) when all organs with vital importance function well and they are not touched from (by) any kind of illness; it is the state when the body (organism) has its whole capacities' (authors' translation) [5].

The adjective 'здрав' [zdrav] has not just the meaning of healthy, robust, strong or hale. According to the Bulgarian Terminological Dictionary there are six different explanations (authors' translation):

1. Somebody who is in a good health and does not have any disease, injury, etc. The opposite of ill. Healthy child. Sound heard. Strong eyes. Tough nerves. A sound mind in a sound body.
2. To be inherent to that man. Manifestation of health. Look healthy.
3. Good for health. Salubrious part of town. Wholesome food.
4. To be in good condition, without damages. Engine in good working order. Hardwearing fabric. Good socks. (without stitches)
5. Reliable, dependable. Who doesn't go to extremes. Strong power in society. Strong sense. Common sense.
6. Strong, stable, firm, stalwart. Sound bridge. Headstrong.

The word 'здрав' could also be used with the meaning of hard (for currency rate), ruddy (for the color of the face), free from breakage (for goods), unimpaired (for digestion, fruits and vegetables), sane, seaworthy (for ship). It can be used to express a large degree or something that is at a high level (highly excited, highly alarmed). The adjective 'здрав' could be even used in collocations with negative meaning, i.e. 'здрав бой' [zdrav boy]= a sound thrashing. Other example is the phrase 'имаш много здраве' [imasch mnogo zdrave]= you have been sent wish for health, which is used when you want to express your disagreement and that somebody is not right.



Source: 1 [theseedsite.co.uk/weeds4.html](http://theseedsite.co.uk/weeds4.html)  
2 [www.apl-385.demon.co.uk/rnhs/detail1.htm](http://www.apl-385.demon.co.uk/rnhs/detail1.htm)

The origin of the Bulgarian word 'здравец' [zdravetz] is also connected with the word for health. 'Здравец' is the name of the plant wild geranium (crane's bill). It's called this way, because it manages to survive even during the winter when the temperatures are low. Bulgarian believe that geranium has the strengths to resist the unfavourable and severe environmental conditions. This is one of the reasons this plant to present in different costumes in Bulgaria and to has the symbolic meaning of giving health to those who receive it. Usually the leaves of that plant are gathered in a small bunch and are given other people to be healthy. Geranium also presence in Bulgarian folk songs and in various costumes (Lazaruvane, Koleduvane, etc.). It is also an element of rituals i.e. wedding, farewell. The leaves of that plant are used in folk medicine and cosmetic.

The derivation of some of Bulgarian names, like Здравка [Zdravka], Здравко [Zdravko], is related to the word 'zdrave'.

Definitions of health can be find not only in the dictionaries but also in many documents and books, which are dedicated to health and medicine.

### ***What we can do with our health?***

Health is something that you can damage, experience, sustain, promote, improve, or share with other people.

To damage health

There are different factors that can damage your health. Exposure to tuberculosis bacillus, cholera bacillus, HIV, streptococcus, air and water pollution, natural calamity, smoking, unhealthy diet etc. can seriously harm our health. People suffering cholera, pulmonary tuberculosis, cardiovascular diseases, AIDS, cancer, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, etc can not be considered as healthy. Diseases and disability that lead to the impossibility of the people to play full part in their family, work life and social environment cause poor health.

If people are too ill to work or to participate in their everyday social life, they can become socially excluded. If they are isolated from the society's mainstream by illness or disability,

they are more likely to damage their health. Usually these people start or increase the intensity of smoking, or seek illegal drug taking, or become alcohol addicted and so damage their health. Of course, there are still many other causes for poor health that we don't know.

#### To experience health

Our health has not only an objective dimension, but it is also about our personal assessment of health. The subjective element of our health is most commonly investigated by different opinion polls. The level of health we assessed is our personal experience of health. The measurement of blood pressure, the laboratory test results, the physical examinations are all ways of data collecting concerning the objective dimension of health. Here is the power and the field of activity of the medical doctors and laboratory assistants. Although the precise methods of examination and measurement of some parameters of health often the doctors are confused to determine the health problem of the patient, relying only on that results. Sometimes the patient feels sick but examinations show no abnormalities. So the objective and subjective dimensions of health are closely connected each other.

Can we consider the smokers as healthy people? If you ask a smoker without any visible symptoms of a disease or infirmity about his/her health, in most cases the answer will be - I am healthy. But if you ask medical professionals about the health of the smokers, they will probably tell you that smokers suffer different diseases or at least will start to explain you all the disease that can be related to their habit. Does it mean that smokers overestimate their health? The possibility to be found abnormalities during the examination of a smoker is higher than of non-smoker, but not all smokers have lung cancer or cardiovascular disease. So, even with a disease on its first or second stage, people can feel healthy. What is more important how you experience your health or the result from the physical examination? If we try to apply the WHO definition of health, the lack of complete physical well being can be considered as sufficient criteria for lack of health. Are the disabled people, who manage to play their part in their family, community and working life, considered as people with poor health?

#### To sustain health

Having in mind that health is not a fixed state of our body and soul we have to develop our abilities to sustain it. What we can do? Of course health is not an absolute concept but a relative one.

## 2. Health and traditions

### 2.1. Health and customs

In the three countries health exists in many rituals and holidays. Some of the ritual items are usually ascribed with an important role in some healing and magical practices.

In Bulgaria in contrast to the other two countries are used so-called votives. They are thin cast plates, usually silver, cut in different forms: human figures, hand, foot, eye, figures of domestic animals (sheep, cow, horse, oxen). The votive usually has the shape of the organ that is ill. Following an ancient believe, worshippers used to put their votives on church icons whit the wish should the sick part of the body to be healed, should there be prosperity in the farm and good health for adults and children in the family.



Source: 1 [www.culture-forum.com/.../Untitled-4.jpg](http://www.culture-forum.com/.../Untitled-4.jpg)  
2 [www.culture-forum.com/.../Untitled-6.jpg](http://www.culture-forum.com/.../Untitled-6.jpg)

The custom, its historical persistence and the design of these objects suggests a prehistoric tradition inherited by the population of the Bulgarian lands. [8]



In Bulgaria and Moldova in contrast to Albania exist a special custom related to health during the Christmas. It's performed by groups of young men who enter the houses singing ritual songs concerning health and well being. Other custom that is common for the aforementioned countries is called 'сурвакане' [survakane] in Bulgaria and "uratori" in Moldova. It is celebrated on the next day after New Year in Bulgaria or before New Year in Moldova. The ritual items used in the two countries are different but the ritual has the same meaning. The sourvacnitsa (decorated cornel twig) used in Bulgaria is decorated with coloured woollen yarns, red peppers, popcorns, bread rings, etc. The tough cornel twig is symbolic itself – it brings good health and long life. The sourvacnitsa is used for tapping the backs of neighbours and relatives while saying all the blessings for health and good luck, thus increasing its magical effect.

Source: [www.culture-forum.com/.../BGParznici1/Zimni.htm](http://www.culture-forum.com/.../BGParznici1/Zimni.htm)



Other custom related to health that has similar meaning among the three countries is celebrated during March. At the beginning of this month children and adults put special kind of amulets to prevent diseases – 'martenitsa' (Bulgaria), "martsishor" (Moldova), 'verore' (Albania). Usually these amulets are made from twisted and tasselled red and white threads. The red colour, according to the folk beliefs, has the power of sun and can gives life to every living creature.

In Albania this custom is celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March and is not so wide spread as in Bulgaria and Moldova. The name of the 'verore' is derived from the word 'vere', which means summer. Wearing of this kind of amulet has the meaning of protection against the sunrays.

Customs related to health have more similarities between Bulgaria and Moldova than Bulgaria and Albania or Moldova and Albania.

## 2.2. Health and costumes

Some elements of the traditional folk costumes in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova demonstrate the importance of the cloths in the prevention of some diseases.

Hand made woollen stockings have an important role in prevention of rheumatic diseases or cold among the children and adults. Wearing of the woollen stocking is wide spread in Moldova where the soft and sometimes wet climate is risk factor for rheumatic arthritis. The elderly women usually knit them during the evenings when mostly elderly people used to get together. This kind of meetings has a pronounced social character. They are called 'shezatorile' (Moldova) or седянки [sedianki] (Bulgaria) and are wide spread in rural areas.



During work when back muscles are intensively involved, people wear wide leather belts for prevention of back pain. In rural areas in Moldova it is even an element of the traditional man vestment. In Bulgaria and Albania element of the folk man costume is a red woollen belt that is put on the waist to prevent cold. It is usually hand

made and is also part of the Moldavian man vestment. [9]

Source: [www.costumes.ro/Moldova%20costume%202.jpg](http://www.costumes.ro/Moldova%20costume%202.jpg)

Sheepskin hat is typical for Bulgarian and Moldavian men. Parents in Moldova used to advise their children to wear a hat in order to protect them against meningitis, otitis and sinusitis.

Part of the woman folk costume in Bulgaria is weave apron. In some of the regions there could be two aprons. One of them is put at the backside and the other in front. This element of the traditional folk costumes is considered to play a preventive role for some inflammations of the female reproductive system.

### BULGARIAN FOLK COSTUMES



Man's folk costume from the Region of Dobroudja

Woman's costume from Gotse Delchev region.

Source: [www.angelfire.com/folk/balkan/bgfolkcostumes.html](http://www.angelfire.com/folk/balkan/bgfolkcostumes.html)

### MOLDOVIAN FOLK COSTUMES



Man costume



Woman costume

Source: [www.costumes.ro/Moldova%20costume%202.jpg](http://www.costumes.ro/Moldova%20costume%202.jpg)

## ALBANIAN FOLK COSTUMES



Man costume



Woman costume

Source: [www.shqiperia.com](http://www.shqiperia.com), last date April 2004

### 2.3. Folk medicine

Folk medicine comprises methods of healing by using objects, herbs, or animal parts, ceremony; conjuring, magic, or witchcraft. It uses other means apart from the formalised practice of medical science. In nearly all-ancient and preliterate societies disease and death were and are attributed to the workings of malevolent beings, spirits, or forces. Complex rituals and medicinal applications were devised to heal these ills. Many such cures coincide with what modern research has proved effective. Moldavians and Bulgarians perform purification ceremonies and organise seances for cleansing and to ward the evil eyes. Healers, credited with magical powers generally massage, draw liquid off by suction, or blow upon the injured area. They recite ancient formulas and incantations to cure or banish illness, both physical and mental. In all cultures most medicinal lore is handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

Folk doctors used a great number of medical herbs to prepare different infusions, pomades, and yell. In Albania folk medicine culminated in the surgery practised by "healers" who transmitted their knowledge generation after generation and their children were considered able to do this only when they showed their capability in front of the other people. They operated tonsillitis, cataract eye, broken legs, urinary bladder, etc. And there were some thoughts of famous people at that time about them (healers): (authors` translator) [7].

'They perform surgical operations without knowing anatomy, with great success and abilities that they astonished even most great surgeons. Or "these healers do not cause more victims than most of professors graduated in Paris'. (Dionisis Piros, 1848).

After the political changes in 90's the number of healers in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova, who announced them selves as sorcerers, extra senses, fortune-teller increased. One of the reasons for that is that the socio-economic and political changes resulted in the distrust of the people and collapsing of the health systems in the counties in transition. The increasing corruption among the medical professionals and the decreasing of physician reputation in society reflected in the increased interest of the patients to alternative medicine and the 'new' healers.

Visiting of extra senses, foreseeers and sorcerers became a fashion. They usually don't have medical background and misuse the lack of medical knowledge of their patients. The newly appeared healers started to use different kind of talismans and herbs, they had heard from elderly people. Meanwhile they used to go in hospitals when they had problems with their own health. The lack of regulations concerning the performance of alternative medical approaches is precondition for the increased number of charlatan healers. Nowadays people are more aware about the possible negative consequences of being patients of unauthorised healer. In order to avoid such problems in the future in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova should be implemented special kind of regulations, which should put the alternative medicine performers under the regime of authorisation and control. Other part of efforts should be oriented to strengthening the position of the medical professionals in the society.

A special compartment represents herbal or plant folk medicine. An example for that are the old recipes for treatment of severe diseases.

Ivan Raev - famous Bulgarian folk healer known as 'kara bulgara' discovers the Bulgarian healing of encephalitic Parkinson disease. It is based on the alkaloids extracted by the roots of atropa belladonna. The extract is prepared with white wine, which provide very good assimilation of the alkaloids.

### 3. Health and society

Health concept can also be related to the culture, which differs from one country to another. Each of us understands and experiences the illness in different ways, because each one suffers by him and feels it through his body. And that is why different worldviews are derived. Some people look at the illness as an unavoidable situation from which they can not escape. Other feels it as a punishment; or accepts it as a reality to which they all have to obey. For Africans to be healthy means to live in a complete harmony with the nature, meanwhile the Chinese's add to this concept the spiritual aspects.

#### 3.1. Health and religion

There is an expression in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova " Let God gives you health". This is an old saying and people still use it nowadays.

About 97% of the Albanian population is ethnic Albanian. Islam is the religion of 70% of the population, while 20% are Orthodox Christian and 10% Roman Catholic [17]. These figures reflect "the religion of origin", since religion has not been an important identifying element in Albanian society. However, with the return of religious freedom, many mosques and churches that were closed in 1967 have now reopened. For the Muslim Albanians is typical to look for medical help from an imam. The sick children were sent to this person to do a reading on them. The imam usually wraps some text written in Arabic (presumably from the Koran) on a cloth with a triangular shape and got the children to wear it around their chests. They had to wear it all the time. When the child felt better or at certain time, they could throw it in the river and that would take the evil spirits far away never to return. The cloth is called 'hajmali' - (talisman).

Also in one of Albania cities, there is a place named Sarisalltic. It is a cave within a mountain and it is related to Muslims religion. People go there to pray and to take some water from a never failing source and with that they sprinkle their houses to keep away bad things and illness.

On 13 of June is the day of Saint Nando (Shen Nanaoi) and people go in the mountain (a difficult way to go there) to pray for their health and for the health of their relatives. People who respect this custom usually have some problems regarding health and disabilities and hope to be cured and to forget about their disease forever.

Most of Moldavians and Bulgarians are of East Orthodox religion (more than 80%). In Christian religion are also described some physical and mental aspects of health [3].

„And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I [am] the LORD that healeth thee.” Exod 15:26. [9]

Christians in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova have a common religious celebration. On 20<sup>th</sup> of January is celebrated the Christening of Jesus. On that day the priest throw the cross into the cold waters of the nearest river, lake or see. It is believed that those who managed to jump and bring back to the priest the cross will be healthy through the whole year. It also exists the superstition that if the thrown cross is frozen the year will be healthy and fertile. At the place where the cross was thrown the ill people have to take a bath or to be sprinkled with that water in order to be cured.

On that day are performed a lot of other rituals with holy water. This water usually contains silver ions, and is used for sick people, as well as for the wells. Christians used to drink, to wash their face and hands for health.

In the church getting the sacrament is usually accompanied by drinking of red wine. It is associated with 'sharing of the Jesus blood'. Red wine plays a protective role against heavy metals and radioactive elements. A lot of publications prove that moderate drinking of red wine has a preventive effect on the cardiovascular system [15].

### **3.2. Health and family**

Family plays an important role in culture of the three countries. Nevertheless that the law gives both parents equal opportunities to take decisions within the family, usually the mother is the one responsible for all decisions regarding health. She is the first who identifies the symptoms of the possible disease, tries to give first help to the sick member of the family or to arrange a meeting with the doctor. She tries to take care for all the members of the family, for children, husband and elderly people. Sometimes she has to sacrifice her job, her activities to take care of the ill person, to help with the treatment. Mother is the first person in the family who gives advise what have to be done, what kind of medicine have to be taken, how it has to be taken. She is the one who relying on her intuition calls the doctor. The mother also assumes the responsibility for taking care of the elderly people in the family.

Family is the first environment, which influences the formation of children habits concerning health - the first 'school' of improving health education.

### **3.3. Health and life style**

#### **3.3.1. Health and diet**

Eating well is a long-term investment in good health. Eating in the home has been affected by changes in lifestyle in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova. Working hours and cooking

methods, which are time consuming, have tended to replace few and formal meals by diets which draw more on 'short order' meals and snacks.

Nevertheless the origin of the religion, fastening plays an important role in describing the relation between health and diet. Both Christians and Muslims used to keep the fast during some definite periods of the year. The periods of fast keep people more active and prevent many cardiovascular and gastrointestinal diseases. In the dietary regime respected in the two different religions exist some differences based on the frequency of food intake and the contents of the diet. Muslims in Albania are not restricted on the origin of the food (except pork meat) that they can eat during the Ramadan. They have only to respect the proper hours during the day when they can not eat, drink, smoke. The restrictions are only based on the frequency of the food intake and some behavioural patterns. In contrast to this way of fastening, among Christians in Bulgaria and Moldova the restrictions concerned only the origin of the food allowed to be consumed. Christians who keep the fast eat only vegetable dishes mainly from beans, cabbage (sauerkraut), and carrots. The diet completely excluded any kind of food of animal origin (meat, eggs, fish, milk, butter, etc). Recent studies prove that lack of vegetables that are usually consumed during the Christian fasten could increase the risk of intestinal (bowel) cancer and intestinal disorders. The diet rich in fibres is considered also as a preventive factor for breast cancer.

A large percentage of the food in Moldova (70-80%) does not conform to microbiological standards [16]. Besides the problems with food contamination, the deficiency of proteins and of certain microelements in food (e.g. iodine) is judged to be of health concern. The diet that Moldavians used to keep was rich in meat, cereals, fruits and vegetables, walnut, seeds and legumes. Now they as many people in Bulgaria and Albania prefer "fast food" which is rich in calories and contains insufficient minerals and vitamins. Promoting healthy dietary regime could be a good solution of changing this unfavourable tendency.

### 3.3.2. Health and smoking

Smoking is one very important factor, causing a variety of diseases and having a negative effect on the economic situation of the family. Smoking contributes more than any other identifiable factor to the gap in healthy life expectancy.

Smoking is the leading cause of premature death in Europe. There are still many countries in which exist limited information on its patterns and determinants. Albania is one such country. The prevalence of smoking in Albania is comparable with other Western societies. Smoking is most common among those aged 25-34 years. High rates of smoking among young men and women suggest that tobacco will make an increasingly large contribution to premature morbidity and mortality in the future. [12]

There are no reliable data on smoking prevalence in Moldova. According to available estimates, smoking rates are around 50% in adult males and 15% in adult females. Similar rates are observed among Moldavian physicians and are reported even higher among young people. In Albania tobacco use is about 60 % in adult males and 20 % in adult females [14].

In 1995, tobacco is estimated to have caused about 4,000 deaths in Moldova (11% of all deaths). One in three male deaths in middle age (35-69 years) are attributable to tobacco use, and about 40% of cancer deaths among men are due to it.

Nevertheless the existence of regulations concerning tobacco use, in the three countries these are not enough effective measures to control the observation of these regulations. Despite the prohibition of advertising of local brands, there are no restrictions on advertising

of imported ones in Moldova. Smuggling of tobacco products is bigger problem for Albania and Moldova than Bulgaria.

Protection for non-smokers seems to be only on paper not in practice in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova. Even the existence of prohibition of smoking at public places, such as cinemas, theatres, public transport, etc. smoking at the workplace is still widespread.

Yet there are no national tobacco control programmes in Moldova and Albania. In contrary Bulgaria has elaborated a National Anti-Smoking Strategy and has different projects on smoking cessation, e. g. "Stop and win". The problems dealing with tobacco use in Albania and Moldova should be prioritised in the national health policies.

### 3.3.3. Health and alcohol drinking

Bulgaria, Poland and Moldova are among the countries with high level of alcohol consumption, especially of strong alcohol beverages (rakia, vodka, etc). Drinking has strong cultural roots in Bulgaria and Moldova. In Albania the immoderate drinking of alcohol is not such serious problem as the three above mentioned countries. Nowadays the percentage of Albanian alcoholics is increasing.

Bulgaria and Moldova are wine producing countries which used to export their products mainly in the Central and Eastern Europe. The pollution of environment and the political changes after 1998 cause the reduction of the exported alcohol beverages.

The indiscriminate use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides has led to dangerously high levels of soil toxicity. Uncontrolled using of chemicals in agriculture caused an increasing of the metal containing in grapes. Many people in Moldova suffered from myocardiopathy, intoxication and other diseases partially because of the soil pollution.

Alcohol has traditionally played an important role in Moldavian and Bulgarian culture and the majority of rural families make wine at home. Alcohol is additionally believed to possess medicinal qualities. Therefore, the cultural acceptance of alcohol and belief in its restorative powers, in conjunction with a lack of information about alcohol abuse, likely leads to a decreased recognition, and therefore reporting, of alcoholism and alcohol related violence. The alcohol related violence is also becoming more serious problem in the rural areas in Albania, where the families used to produce mainly rakia. Alcohol abuse is exacerbated when people attempt to escape from the confronting problems of the worsening social and economic situation within the countries.

There are many examples in the folklore and in the literature of Bulgaria and Moldova, where you can find some relations between the wine and rakia (strong alcohol drink) on one hand and health and treatment on the other hand.

At the weddings or other parties in Moldova the song: "Let us drink, let us drink, To my health..." is often interpreted. During these parties friends used to propose toasts. In some cases the immoderate wine consumption becomes a habit, which increased the incidence of alcohol hepatitis and cirrhosis.

Our forbears observed the influence of wine in prevention of catching cold. Moldavians used to drink hot wine with honey (or sugar) and spices, called "izvar". One glass is enough to prevent any complications. Similar mixture is prepared in Bulgaria with red wine or rakia and some spices such as black pepper and laurel leaves.

Drug book since the mid of the 19th century:

Cough medicine for loud cough without wheeze: laurel-leaves boiled in old wine.

In Albania in contrast to Bulgaria and Moldova, drinking of cognac and tea is more spread during the cold season to prevent influence.

Bulgarians used to take alcohol more often as “oral medicine” than for external use (compress, massages). This is probably one of the reasons, the alcoholism to be considered as the major vice of the men in Bulgaria [20].

It could be strange, but in Bulgaria you can even read an advertisement of vodka with vitamin C, in which the doctor can advise you to drink every day a small amount of that alcohol, in order the daily Vitamin C intake to be provided.

Drinking of alcohol doesn't mean you are sick, but alcohol addicted people can not be considered as healthy. Alcohol consumption as smoking is not enough criteria to define someone's health as good or poor, but a criteria for the lifestyle that affect directly health.

### 3.3.4. Physical activities

Benefits from physical activity include a good emotional feeling and the faith and trust in one's self, a good physical appearance and a considerable decrease of premature deaths, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes.

Today the number of people who used to lead a sedentary life style in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova is increasing, especially in the urban areas. In a study made recently in Albania, the likelihood of leisure-time sedentarily increased with age in both genders but it did not vary significantly with education level or income [13].

In our countries that have undergone a rapid transition from the low mechanised society, characterised inevitably by high levels of exercise, the generalised high prevalence of low physical activity level during leisure time gives cause for concern regarding future health trends.

## 4. Healthcare systems

Current health care systems in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova include elements of the Bismarck model. All three countries have in the past systems based on the Semashko model. During this period they experience more or less similar difficulties. Main weaknesses of that kind of health care system were:

- Low motivation of the medical professionals;
- Lack of incentives for performing better quality of the services provided;
- Under-table payment;
- Prevalence of the in-patient care rather than out-patient care;
- Unsatisfied patients;
- Low quality of the health services;
- Ineffective utilisation of the limited resources;

On other hand there were also some strengths:

- Patients were accustomed to use the services provided within the health care system;
- Free access to different levels of health system;
- Free of charge health services;

- Well-developed network of institutions responsible for prophylactic and rehabilitation activities;

After 90's in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova were established systems that introduced some of the principals of health insurance. Among the three countries that kind of changes started first in Albania. Health Insurance Institute was established in 1995, but it provides only limited package of services within the primary care and some essential pharmaceuticals for Albanians. In contrast to that in Moldova and Bulgaria the package covers more services at the three levels of care. In Moldova health insurance was introduced recently and the drugs reimbursed by the Health Insurance Fund are mainly for children under one year old and the pharmaceutical treatment in the hospitals. Bulgaria as the other two countries introduced health insurance system that is based on one National Health Insurance Fund. The reasons to give preferences to more centralised model of insurance system are:

- Limited resources;
- Less administrative costs;
- Smooth transition from the previous centralised national health care system based on Semashko model;
- Small territory and small number of inhabitants (especially for Albania and Moldova);

In contrast to Bulgaria and Moldova, in Albania the elements of Beverage model are still playing more important influence on the provision of health services within the system.

The narrow view of health, which is often used to refer to no disease or no illness, is common for the physicians in the three countries. The changes concerning health care systems have faced some resistance from the people and the medical professionals. During the Semashko system people have used to go to their doctor every time when they want no matter the occasion. It is a behaviour inherited by the previous health care system, when the patient has had unlimited access to every health care level. Elderly patients, especially lonely isolated people, used to visit their doctor not only when they have medical problems, but problems in the family or just to find someone to listen to their complains. Those people have associated the policlinics and visits to the doctor not only with diagnostic procedures and treatment but also with a place for social communication.

The implementation of co-payment mechanism in the health insurance system in Bulgaria aims to restrict unnecessary visits to the physicians. Since the patients has to pay a fee for the visit to the GPs or specialists, the unrestricted access to health care providers for the elderly people with low pensions is under consideration. Usually the doctor only prescribes the medicines and has no time to give advises for healthy lifestyle or to give hearing to the personal problems of the patient.

The implementation of health insurance system in Moldova induces more visits to the physicians than before. The reason for that is the possibility of wider access to services that are free of charge.

Nevertheless the similarities in the principals on which are based the health care systems in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova, the health outcomes could be related to the different amount of health expenditures, as well as the specific geographical, social, political and cultural characteristics.

Table 1. Country Profile (Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova)

Country	Territory	Population	Government	GDP per capita*
Albania	28,748 sq. km.	3.4 million	Multi-party democracy	Int. \$ 4,092
Bulgaria	110,994 sq. km.	7,8 millions	Multi-party democracy	Int. \$ 6,299
Moldova	33,843 sq. km	4.28 million.	Multi-party democracy	Int. \$ 1,958

Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>  
 \*<http://www.who.int/country>

Table 2. Health Indicators (Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova) - 2001

Countries	Health Expenditure of GDP (%)	Infant mortality (per 1000)		Healthy life expectancy at birth (years)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Albania	3.7	27	23	59.5	63.3
Bulgaria	4.8	18	16	62.5	66.8
Moldova	5.1	31	23	57.2	62.4

Source: <http://www.who.int/country>

## 5. Conclusions

The investigation of the concepts of health in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova reveals some similarities and differences among the three countries.

1. Despite the different socio-economic and geographic particularities, as well as the uniqueness of the traditions, religion, language, health care systems, there are a lot of common issues, regarding health and its perception. Similarities are more than the differences.
2. Between Bulgaria and Moldova exist more similarities in the concepts of health and traditions than between Bulgaria and Albania or Moldova and Albania.
3. There are significant similarities in the meaning of the notion 'health' and its utilisation in different context (toast, greetings, wishes, etc.).
4. Existences of similarities in the historical background of the health care systems in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova. Common weaknesses and strengths have been experienced in the previous health systems that influenced the health of the whole population.
5. Albanians, Bulgarians and Moldavians are more interested in the new approaches of the alternative medicine. The distrust of the patients to the medical professionals and the lack of regulations about the performers of alternative medicine are major reasons for the spread of holistic doctors, clairvoyants, bioenergotherapists, etc.

6. The population in the three countries is not satisfied with the current health systems.
7. Different stages of development of health care systems in the three countries. Moldova has introduced the National Health Insurance Company (1st of January 2004) last from the aforementioned countries. Nevertheless that Albania has the longest experience in the implementation of some principals of health insurance (May 1995); the package of the provided services is very limited due to restricted resources and the political and economic instability.
8. The similarities related to health in Albania, Bulgaria and Moldova could be considered as a precondition for future international collaboration on common issues regarding health. It is also a good opportunity for facilitation of the European integration.

## Bibliography:

1. AGGLETON P. *Health*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990. 9 p.
2. *Bulgarian Draft Law of Public Health* [on line]. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://garantpest.dir.bg/downloads/ZakonOZ.doc> >
3. Encyclopaedia [on line]. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Moldova> >
4. Exodus 15:26 : King James Version (KJV). Available on the Internet:  
<<http://bible.gospelcom.net/cgi-bin/bible?language=english&passage=exodus+15%3A26&version=KJV> >
5. Fjalor i gjuhës së sotme shqipe (Albanian Dictionary), 1982.
6. FREUND R. The reference concepts: health, public health, determinants, indicators, health systems. CD ROM, TU 1., Health, Public Health and the New Public Health approach [material distributed during TUs at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine, 2004.
7. Historia e Mjekesise Shqiptare [on line]. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://members.fortunecity.com/mantho1932/albmedpages/id6.html> >
8. KOSTADONOVA-KOVACHEVA V., et al. Traditional Bulgarian Costumes and Folk Arts. Sofia, 1994. 29 p.
9. NAIDOO J., WILLS J. *Health promotion: foundation for practice*. 2nd edition. London : Baillière Tindall. 2000. 15 p.
10. Romanian Traditional Folk Costumes from various villages or traditional areas [on line.] Available on the Internet:  
< [www.costumes.ro](http://www.costumes.ro) >
11. SEEDHOUSE D. *Health: the foundations for achievement*. Chichester, Wiley Whitehead M. & Dahlgren G. 1986.
12. SHAPO L., et al. Prevalence and determinants of smoking in Tirana city, Albania: a population-based survey. *Public Health*, July 2003, vol. (4). pp. 228-36.
13. SHAPO L., et al. *Public Health*. 2004. 32(1):60-7.
14. Study of Public Health Institute. Albania, 2000.
15. TUFTS UNIVERSITY. Regular Alcohol Intake Cuts the Heart Attack Risk February. 14 2003. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://www.healthandage.com/Home/gid2=2290> >
16. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environmental performance review Moldova Chapter 11: Environmental pollution and human health. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://www.unece.org/env/epr/studies/moldova/chapter11.pdf> >
17. UNDP. Albanian human development report. Tirana, 1996.
18. WHO. *Constitution of the World Health Organisation* [on line]. Geneva : WHO, 1946. Available on the Internet:  
<[http://policy.who.int/cgi-bin/om\\_isapi.dll?infobase=Basicdoc&softpage=Browse\\_Frame\\_Pg42](http://policy.who.int/cgi-bin/om_isapi.dll?infobase=Basicdoc&softpage=Browse_Frame_Pg42) >
19. WHO. *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* [on line]. Ottawa : WHO, 21 November 1986. Available on the Internet:  
< [http://www.euro.who.int/AboutWHO/Policy/20010827\\_2](http://www.euro.who.int/AboutWHO/Policy/20010827_2) >
20. Новините от България. *Инвестиция за здраве (Investment on health)* [on line]. Sofia : Център за превантивна медицина и семейно здраве (Center for preventive medicine and family health, 15 October 2000. Available on the Internet:  
< <http://www.svetigeorgi.com/investicia/bul/archive/iz151000.htm> >