

## Consumers` Attitude Towards Traditional Bulgarian Food

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**Abstract.** Traditional Bulgarian foods dates back to ancient times. Traditional products represent an important element of culture, identity, and heritage and are characterized by both historical and geographical dimensions. Bulgaria and other countries from EU have appropriated and implemented the European Union (EU) food quality schemes in order to protect its traditional food products. Some traditional food products are protected by the European Union (EC Regulation 1151/2012) and for them special EU logos are used and printed on the packages of these products: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and those prepared or produced by traditional way: food with Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG). The purpose of this research is to highlight the specific terms associated with traditional foods, to present the achievements in the area of protected traditional foods and to examine consumer attitude towards: protected traditional Bulgaria food with specific name and EU signs/logos of protection. The necessary information for the study is gathered through the survey method using a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. The objective of the survey is to examine consumer attitude towards protected traditional Bulgaria food with specific name and EU signs/logos of protection. The results of the survey demonstrate the need to raise consumer awareness of the European Union (EU) food quality schemes, and the focus should be on the different EU signs/logos of protection; quality of protected food; necessity of separate stands for protected traditional Bulgarian foods in supermarkets.

**Key words:** traditional foods, EU food quality schemes, EU signs/logos of protection

### 1. Introduction

Traditional Bulgarian foods date back from ancient times, and have consistently evolved, expanded and enriched over the years. Traditional products represent an important element of culture, identity, and heritage and are characterized by both historical and geographical dimensions. They are influenced by the traditions of food production in the neighbouring Balkan countries (Galli, 2018).

In order to preserve our country-specific foods it is necessary to protect them. There is a specific procedure for entering foods as protected products in the European Commission's register (Hristov, 2017). Foods of plant or animal origin have a specific composition that determines their properties (Ribarova, 2007, Danesi et al., 2013).

Walch et al. (2019) found in their research that the consumers preferred and believed that traditional foods were healthier than store-bought foods. Traditional food intake was low. That's why it is necessary to examine and to consider the effect of enhancing social networks and implementing policies that support traditional food intake.

Bulgaria and other countries have appropriated and implemented the European Union (EU) food quality schemes in order to protect its traditional food products. The EU quality labels are used to compensate the lack of national quality schemes for traditional food products. The traditional products are considered as national property and are used as tools for marketing small, post-socialist countries among member states within the union. The EU food quality schemes are used also to transform the traditional foods into certified and standardized European products (Bardone, Spalvėna, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to highlight the specific terms associated with the traditional food, to present the achievements in the area of protected traditional foods (scientific papers and the existing legal framework) and, as well as to present the protected traditional Bulgarian products. The objective of the survey was to examine consumer attitude towards: traditional Bulgarian foods; protected traditional Bulgaria food with specific name and EU signs/logos of protection.

## 2. Literature review

There are several specific terms associated with traditional presented in the literature: Traditional raw materials are the materials used in the past and presently alone or combined as components of identified geographical origin that have properties and composition that meet the requirements of the European Union (Alliance) and the national legislation (Ribarova, 2007). The ingredients in their composition must meet the requirements of quality, safety (chemical, microbiological and physical) and comply with the hygienic rates and rules of processing and production (Boyadzhiev, Markova, 1987).; Traditional recipe give detailed description of the ingredients and the way they are processed, arranged in order of their use and passed down from generation to generation over the years (Ribarova et. al., 2005).; Method of production must fully correspond to those used in the past, without the inclusion of modern processing techniques (Hristov, 2017).; Traditional specific foods are: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); Protected Geographical Indications (PGI); Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG). They are currently regulated by Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 (repealing Council Regulations (EC) No. 509/2006 and 510/2006) (Ribarova et. al., 2005). All of them are mechanisms to protect specific products from different region or country and are also successively extended to wines (Di Vita et al., 2014).

In the European Commission's Traditional Food Register, very few products, are classified under the name of TSG, and most of the food is registered under the PGI and PDO brand (Ribarova, 2007, Hristov, 2017). The latest regulations (Council Regulations (EEC) No. 2081/92 and No. 2082/92) introduced both additional information in terms of application procedure, labelling, enforcement activities and control of compliance, and a key element of enlargement of the quality scheme to third-country producers and new geographical origins (Carcea, Melini, 2013).

Labelling rules make it easier for consumers to identify quality food produced by a particular technology. A comprehensive Quality Policy - Protected Designations including Protected Designations of Origin, Protected Geographical Indications and Traditional Specific Foods has been developed in the EU. EU quality policy aims at protecting the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how. Product names can be granted with a geographical indication (GI) if they have a specific link to the place where they are made. The GI recognition enables consumers to trust and distinguish quality products, and also helping producers to market their products better. Other EU quality schemes emphasise the traditional production process or products made in difficult natural areas such as mountains or islands (European Commission, 2019). They are important tools that protect the names of regional foods, such as wines, cheeses, hams, sausages and olives, so that only foods that genuinely originate in a particular region are allowed to be identified as such (Guardia, Illueca, 2013).

Nowadays increased the interest of consumers towards high quality food products with a certain geographical origin. The quality of the products is defined by using combination of analytical methods. It was found, that the most promising approach to establish the geographical origin, was to analyse different types of food compounds (Luykx, Ruth, 2008).



**Figure 1.** Special EU logos, designations of the quality scheme

Source: COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 668/2014 of 13 June 2014 laying down rules for the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on agricultural product quality schemes. Published L OB. No. 179 of 19 June 2014.;

[https://www.google.com/search?q=Special+EU+logos,+designations+of+the+quality+scheme&client=opera&hs=fpG&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiS972owdLIAhW7QUEAHWT8CYMQ\\_AUIESgB&biw=1195&bih=590#imgrc=09KTZQuG0dNzxM](https://www.google.com/search?q=Special+EU+logos,+designations+of+the+quality+scheme&client=opera&hs=fpG&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiS972owdLIAhW7QUEAHWT8CYMQ_AUIESgB&biw=1195&bih=590#imgrc=09KTZQuG0dNzxM)

There are three European quality schemes. Some traditional food products are protected by the European Union (EC Regulation 1151/2012) and for them a special EU logos (Figure 1) are used and printed on the packages of these products from a given geographical origin: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected

Geographical Indication (PGI), and those prepared or produced by traditional way: food with Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG). Traditional Specific Food (TSG) describes a specific food that: (a) results from a method of production, processing or composition that conforms to traditional practice for that product or foodstuff, or (b) is manufactured from raw materials or ingredients which are traditionally used for it (Caputo, et. al., 2018). Traditional specific foods have no connection with the geographical area. Traditional means proven use in the domestic market for a period that allows transmission from generation to generation. This period is at least 30 years. Specificity means characteristic features of production which clearly distinguish the product from other similar products of the same category. Verification of Products of Designated Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) will help to protect the specific regional foods in the certain country in the EU (Negrini, et. al., 2008).

Traditional food for consumers is very old (Guerrero, et. al., 2009), tasty, produced in specific region of a certain country in the world. The three EU types of food quality labels (PDO, PGI and TSG) are primarily intended to protect producers of food with special qualities and to aid consumers in their decision-making (Grunert, Aachmann, 2016).

The optional quality term mountain product is used only to describe the products intended for human consumption listed in Annex I to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) for which: (a) both raw materials and feed for farmed animals originate mainly from mountain areas; (b) in the case of processed products, processing is also carried out in mountain areas. The horticultural product may be of animal origin, vegetable origin or beekeeping product. The EU Organic Farming logo can be placed on all pre-packaged organic food products produced in the EU, ensuring that they comply with EU organic production standards.

At the beginning of 2020, 1460 products were registered in the EU, such as PDO, PGI or TSG. This is an instrument created by the European Union in order to protect Geographical Indications (Melini, Melini, 2020). Protected products can be considered as a strategy of marketing and competitiveness for producers. It encourages the producers to strengthen and expand the quality range of its production (Scozzafavan, et. al., 2018).

It is found that the southern European countries in the European Union (EU) produce the greatest number of products, certified at the Food European Register as a quality product. Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Greece account for 70% of these products (Spain, Italy and France represent 68.9% of the total PDO products registered in the EU) (Pérez-Elortondo, et. al., 2018). First place in the Union, in spite of the registered number of products took Italy - a total of 293 (for local cheese, and for fruits and vegetables), next is France with 242 certificates, Spain with 194, Portugal with 138 and Greece with 104.

The European protection procedure is free of charge, but it takes about two years and can only be started by a producer association. The initiators apply first to the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture, enclosing relevant documents regarding the product's relationship with the region or evidence of traditional food composition or technology of its production. Following are inspections by experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and a deadline for objections by interested persons in the country. The request shall then be sent to the European Commission, published in the Official Journal of the Community and shall be given the opportunity of each Country Member to object. After six months, if no objection is raised, the product is entered in the relevant European register (Georgieva, 2018).

Bulgaria has successfully registered 8 products: Protected Geographical Indication two products - Gomooryahovski Sudzhuk and Bulgarian Rose Oil. This signifies that the Sudzhuk can be produced only on the territory of the town Gopna Oryahovitsa and the Rose Oil can be produced only on the territory of Rose Valley, near the town of Kazanluk.; Traditional Specialty Guaranteed foods are registered File Elena, Lukanka Panagyurska, Role Trapezitsa, Kayserovan vrat Trakiya, Pastarma Govezhda.; Protected Designation Origin one product - Strandjanski manov med (honey)/Manov med (honey)of Strandja. Under the national procedure for registration as a traditional-specialty food are Troyanska Lukanka and Eastern Balkan Pig Meat, which apply for a protected designation of origin (PDO) (Stojcheva, 2017, DOOR database).

Due to the specificity of traditional foods, they are produced in smaller enterprises, in smaller quantities, using typical technologies. Therefore, it is difficult and impossible to be present in large quantities on foreign markets. But these foods can be used to promote the region and the state, to attract tourists and to bring local communities closer. A major advantage for producer companies is the higher cost of the product as well as the opportunity to participate in EU-funded promotional programs.

### 3. Survey of consumer attitudes towards protected traditional Bulgarian foods – methodology, results

#### 3.1. Materials and methods

The protected traditional Bulgarian foods are subject to review in this research. In order to achieve the research aim are studied and systematically analysed scientific papers and the existing legal framework in the area.

The objective of the survey is to explore the attitudes of consumers towards: choosing, buying and consuming traditional Bulgarian foods; protected traditional Bulgaria food with specific name and EU signs/logos of protection. The questionnaire is piloted with 20 randomly selected consumers and subsequently modified. The final survey is carried out between March and April 2020 in different regions of Bulgaria (city of Sofia, big towns, smaller towns and villages).

The respondents to the survey are chosen by the stochastic (random) selection method. With this method all elements of general population have an equal chance to be included in the study sample. Thus, the sample reflects with maximum accuracy the structure of the entire population. This ensures representativeness of the information obtained from the sample, within the margins of the stochastic error, which can be attributed to the entire whole population. The larger the absolute sample size, the greater the degree of representativeness of the data.

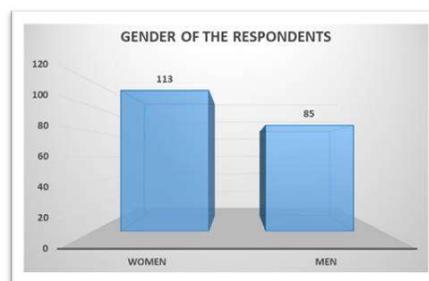
The necessary information for the study is gathered through the survey method using a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. The questionnaire also contained additional information for the portion of the consumers who have no knowledge of and come for the first time across terminology related to traditional Bulgaria food with specific name and signs of protection (Luykx, Ruth, 2008).

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: first, respondents reported their actual traditional Bulgarian foods buying habits (products purchased and retail outlets patronized) and whether they had consumed these products previously; second, respondents present their attitude towards the traditional foods (TF) and the changes which they recommend to be made in the way of offering the TF in the supermarkets; third, focused on demographic/socioeconomic questions – it is presented first in the analyses of the results (Gustavii, 2017).

The survey is conducted among consumers. The online questionnaire is made available to 198 respondents, 85 men and 113 women aged between 18 and 60+. In total, 198 individuals have fully completed the questionnaire. The majority of respondents, about 57%, were women and were young people aged between 18-30 – about 41%. We had consulted consumers, both in big cities and in smaller once. Approximately 59% of the respondents are from towns with more than 100,000 people and about 20% are from Sofia. The financial status of the participants is diverse: with the largest percentage (55%) are the respondents with a budget around the average for the country; next come (25% of them) with a budget higher than the national average; on the third place were those with a budget lower than the average for the country (13%) and 11% of them are with a budget much above the national average.

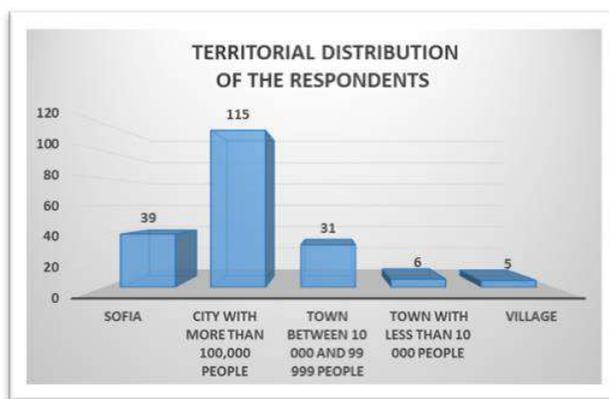
#### 3.2. Results and discussion

The survey included 198 respondents - 113 women and 85 men (Figure 2).



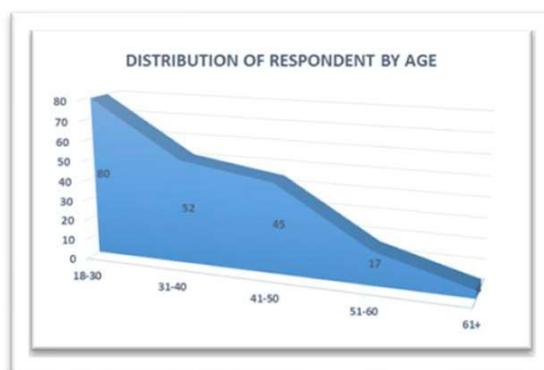
**Figure 2.** Gender of the respondents  
Source: Own calculations

The research was made among consumers, both in big cities and in smaller ones. The results show that there are predominantly larger settlements (over 100,000 people). They make up 74.5% of the respondents. This is due to the concentration of able-bodied people in larger economic centers that provide more opportunities. The larger cities in Bulgaria are also a center of attraction for young people who continue their education at the universities or started working (Figure 3).



**Figure. 3** Distribution of the respondents according to the population (city/town/village)  
Source: Own calculations

The distribution and concentration of young population in Sofia and bigger towns is also confirmed by the obtained results. The participants who take part in the survey are mainly from the most active part of the population between the ages of 18 and 50. They represent 89.4% of the respondents (Figure 4).



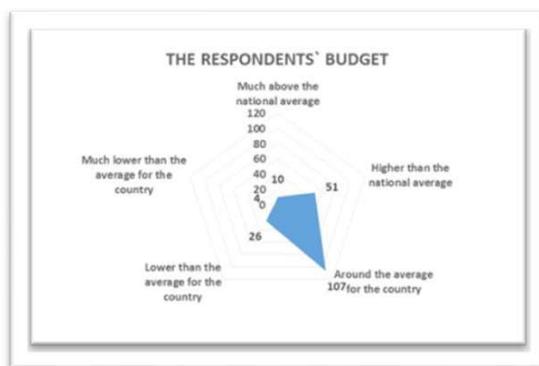
**Figure 4.** Distribution of the respondent by age  
Source: Own calculations

The consumer attitude survey on protected Bulgarian foods also goes through a survey of respondents about their disposable income. This is necessary because, depending on purchasing power, the consumer may or may not afford to purchase the desired products and food. When impossible, the choice is often made of goods of not good quality but at a lower price.

The disposable income of a family member is directly related to the net salary. A look up in the National Statistic Institute (NSI) database shows the following:

- Average gross salary for December 2019 according to NSI data in the public sector - BGN 1416;
- Average gross salary for December 2019 according to NSI data in the private sector - BGN 1327 (NSI, Household Income, Expenditure and Consumption, <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/3168/income-expenditure>) - and-consumption-of-households).

The results from the survey prove that most of the participants have a budget around the national average (Figure 5).



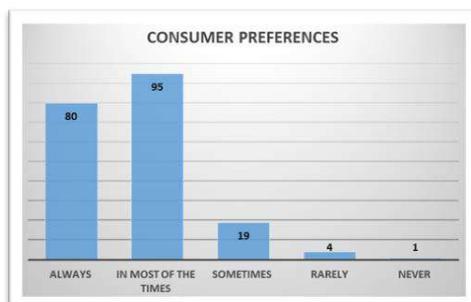
**Figure 5.** Distribution of the respondent according to their budget  
 Source: Own calculations

With the next group of questions, we aim to explore the extent to which consumers are familiar with traditional Bulgarian foods. In response, 98% of respondents declared that they had heard, and 97.5% were well aware of these products (Figure 6).



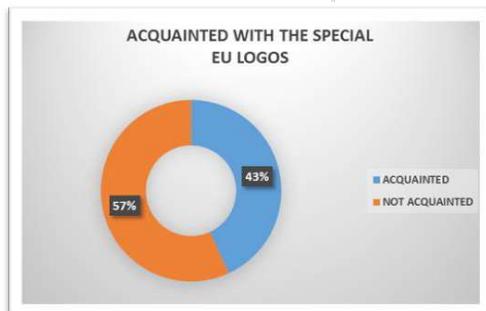
**Figure 6.** Respondents acquainted with the traditional products  
 Source: Own calculations

According to the respondents, traditional Bulgarian foods would be preferred and chosen by them when making a purchase decision. They will choose the traditional products over others, because their origin and quality are guaranteed. This is the choice of 97.5% of the respondents who sometimes, in most of the cases and always will prefer and buy a traditional Bulgarian product (Figure 7).



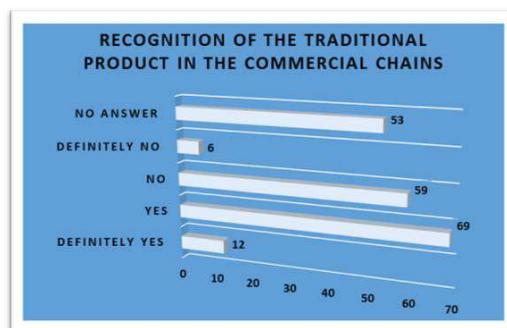
**Figure 7.** Respondents preferences/choice on choosing a traditional product (number of respondents)  
 Source: Own calculations

The results of the survey prove unfortunately that more than half of the respondents (57%) are not acquainted with the special EU logos/signs identifying traditional Bulgarian foods. Therefore, it is necessary to promote this information among consumers and, if necessary, to launch a campaign to introduce and acquaint consumers with the specific elements of the labelling of traditional, protected Bulgarian foods (Figure 8).



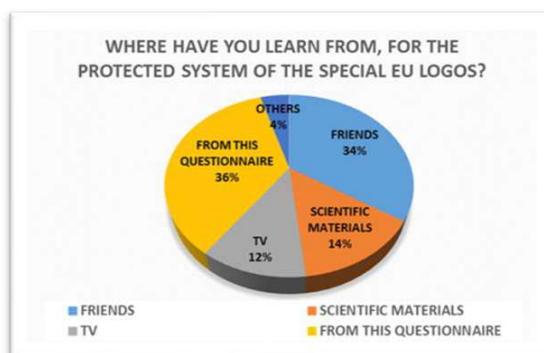
**Figure 8.** Respondents acquainted with the special EU logos  
Source: Own calculations

Regarding the recognition of this group of foods in the supermarkets, the respondents gave different answers. Only 40.7% of them gave a positive answer, and 32.6% of the respondents give a negative answer, which is a proof that consumers find it relatively difficult to find traditional Bulgarian food at the stands. Not a small group of people (26.6%) who participated in this survey did not give a definite answer. This enables us to list them as a group of consumers that difficult find traditional products in the market chains. In conclusion, it can be summarized that traditional Bulgarian foods are not easily accessible and prominent in the retail chains. This is probably one of the reasons why these products and their specific logos are not known from consumers (Figure 9).



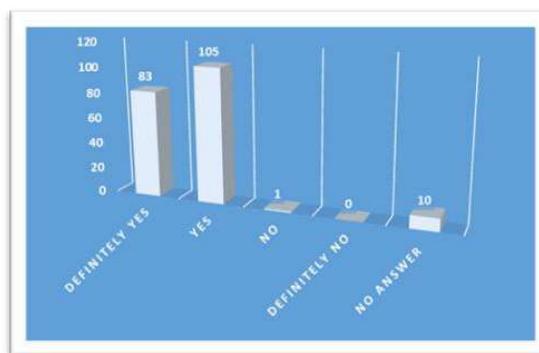
**Figure 9.** Recognition of the traditional foods by the respondents in the commercial chains  
Source: Own calculations

We received many different answers to one of the questions "How did you learn about the food protection scheme?". Over 1/3 of the respondents declared that they have learned about the protected food system from our questionnaire. Other respondents (14.1%) have learned about the system of protected foods from scientific materials/papers and only 11.6% from the media. The obtained summary results of the survey give us reason to offer the need for promotion, presentation and advertising among the consumers of the different types of protected Bulgarian foods. At the moment, this is very important for Bulgarian producers of traditional foods who will be protected and supported, and consumers will be informed about the types of foods that fall under the category 'protected foods' annually (Figure 10).



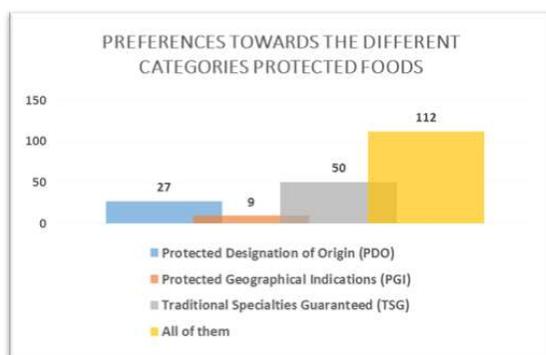
**Figure 10.** First source for the respondents connected with the special EU logos  
 Source: Own calculations

After we managed to get the respondents' attention with this questionnaire, we received a definite answer to the question whether they would change their preferences in the future in favor of protected Bulgarian foods. 94.5% of them gave a positive answer, only 1 participant gave a definitive negative answer, and 5% were hesitant weather to choose protected foods. These results make sense of the study and of the efforded work of the Bulgarian producers, who have to preserve the traditions in the production of some specific foods for our country (Figure 11).



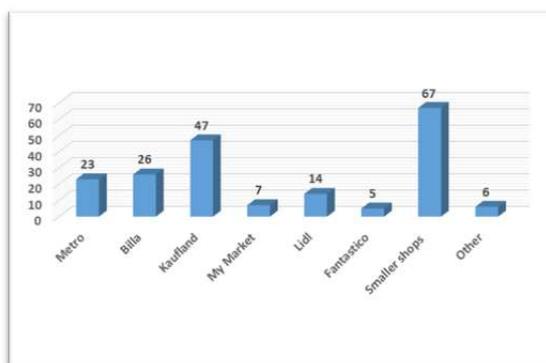
**Figure 11.** Respondents preferences towards consuming (buying) traditional Bulgarian food  
 Source: Own calculations

Another major and important point in the survey is respondents' preferences to one of the three categories of foods (PDO, PGI and TSG). The results of the survey are summarized as follows: the preferred foods for the respondents are foods with Protected Designation of Origin (13.6%); 4.5% of respondents noted foods with Protected Geographical Indication as their choices and preferences; foods with Traditional Specialties Guaranteed were preferred by 25.1% of respondents. Therefore, more than half of the respondents (56.3%) gave their preference to all three groups. The results prove that Bulgarian consumers are demonstrating their support towards the native producers of traditional protected foods (Figure. 12).



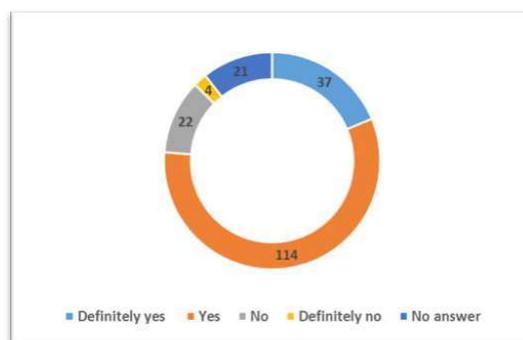
**Figure 12.** Respondents' preferences towards particular regulated categories of foods (PDO, PGI, TSG)  
 Source: Own calculations

Another very important point in the survey is the respondents' preferences towards the shopping/grocery chains which they most often shop from. The answers received are heterogeneous, from which we can receive the following necessary information. 56.3% of respondents prefer large supermarkets/retail chains, and 43.7% of consumers prefer smaller stores (Figure 13).



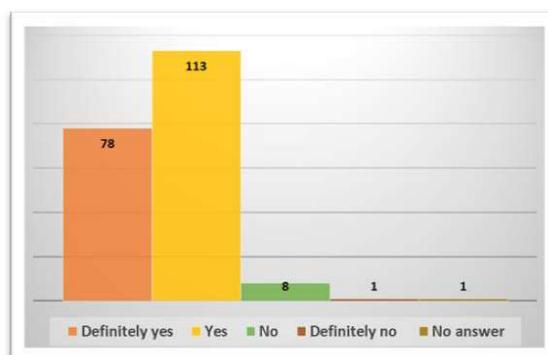
**Figure 13.** Preferred retail stores by the respondents  
 Source: Own calculations

After examining respondents' preferences for the supermarkets, they prefer to visit, the next step is to study whether they are willing to change their habits and start shopping at other stores in which are offered protected foods if they are not available in the store which they use to visit up to this moment. The survey results are summarized as follows: 76.3% of the respondents gave a positive answer; other 13.1% of the respondents strongly stated that they would not change their habits and would remain loyal to the traders who serve them now; 10.6% of the respondents are hesitated whether to change their preferred market by now (Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** Respondents' dispose to change preferred from them retail chain  
Source: Own calculations

Another very important point of the research was to study the opinion of the consumers about the need of separate stands for protected Bulgarian traditional foods in the commercial chains. The survey results show the same trend in the answers of the respondents as above: 95% of them prefer stands with traditional foods; 4.5% of them do not need such stands and division of foods in the markets. Only one respondent is not sure and hesitate how to answer (Figure 15).



**Figure 15.** Respondents' opinion for the necessity of stands for protected Bulgarian foods in the retail chains  
Source: Own calculations

Based on a survey of consumers' attitude towards protected traditional Bulgarian foods was found as follows:

- over 98% of respondents are acquainted with the traditional foods and 97.5% had a good knowledge of them (traditional products);
- over 90% of the respondents prefer these foods instead of imported ones;
- 76.3% of the respondents would change their shopping habits;
- 95% of the respondents would prefer to set up separate stands for protected traditional Bulgarian foods in supermarkets.

The obtained results from the carried-out survey of the consumer attitude towards the preference and use of protected Bulgarian foods prove the need to raise consumer awareness of the specific characters in the labelling of the three regulated categories of foods: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); Protected Geographical Indications (PGI); Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG). Another important moment on which should be emphasized is the promotion of protected traditional foods among consumers. It is also very important to set up zones or stands on which to be placed these products at retail chains. This can also be a part of a consumer information campaign, and will help them in their good food choice. Last but not least of importance, is the necessity of advertising the protected traditional Bulgarian foods on national/international media, etc., emphasizing that foods registered under the PDO/PGI/TSG scheme (instrument created by the European Union to protect Geographical Indications) and have the EU logos on the label of traditional products, which proof that they are with high quality and safe for consumers.

#### 4. Conclusion

Protection of traditional Bulgarian foods means for the consumers that traditional, specific foods are of good quality, with no additives and no authorized ingredients. This is guaranteed by the strict rules and control under which they are produced. The first of these states is that they can only be produced by companies that are members of a specially formed association that exercises internal control over manufacturers. The second requirement is strict adherence to the recipe, technology and manufacturing conditions described in the relevant documentation, with which is requesting protection in Brussels. Registration requires all companies to work according to the established traditional methods, with the same recipes and with the same technological parameters. The primary control over whether companies comply with this is delegated to external certified organizations. In addition, producers of traditional foods in Bulgaria are subject to be controlled by the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency.

Bulgaria has so far registered 8 products: Protected geographical indication (PGI) two products - Gornooryahovski sudzhuk and Bulgarian rose oil.; foods with Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) five products - File Elena, Lukanka Panagyurska, Role Trapezitsa, Kayserovan vrat Trakiya, Pastarma Govezhda.; Protected designation of origin (PDO) one product – Strandjanski manov med (honey) / Manov med (honey) from Strandja.

The results of this research can be summarised in the following conclusions:

- Consumers preferred traditional protected Bulgaria foods instead of foreign ones and 35% of the respondents find them easy in the supermarkets. Approximately 33% of the consumers can't easily find these products in the supermarkets. That's why in order to be well presented to the consumers it is very important to be organized/set up zones and put stands on which to be placed and arranged the protected products in the retail chains/supermarkets.;
- 57% of the consumers are not acquainted with the special EU logos (used and printed on the packages of the products) and 36% of them heard for the first time for them from this questionnaire: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and those prepared or produced by traditional way - food with Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG). These prove the need for training educational activities which will present the different special EU logos to the consumers. In this way the consumers will be familiar and acquainted with the special EU logos, printed on the label of foods and are proof that the products are traditional, Bulgarian, with high quality and of protected origin.

The focus of future work may be directed towards comparative analysis of the composition of traditional Bulgarian foods and similar foods produced in other European countries, in order to present the differences in the content and nutritional value of foods produced in different regions of the Union.

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