

REFORMS AND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA (1918-2018)

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Abstract

This paper chronologically presents the main reforms and agrarian policies in Romania, over the last hundred years, starting with the 1918 agrarian reform and up to today's Community policies. The 1921 agrarian reform was based on King Ferdinand's solemn promise in 1917 to give land to the peasants who were the main participants in the First World War. This reform, which lasted for 10 years, expropriated 6,127 thousand ha; 1,479 persons became the owners of 3,404 thousand ha in total. Commons and village hearts were built. In its turn, the 1945 agrarian reform had a much smaller scale, i.e. 1,444 thousand ha were expropriated and 1,058 thousand ha were distributed. In fact, the reform was only a bait, in order to attract the peasants to the side of the new communist power, for the 1946 elections. In 1949, it was decided to collectivize the agriculture, process that would end in 1962. The next reform was represented by Law 18/1991, enforced after the fall of communism. Initially, a maximum of 10 ha in arable equivalent land was returned. In parallel, the former state-owned enterprises turned into commercial companies and were privatized. After 1989, with the transition to the market economy, and after 1997, with the accession to the European Union, Romania's land policy has been subject to Community policies.

Key words: agrarian reforms, chronology, collectivization, Community policies

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, we celebrate 100 years since the unification of all the provinces inhabited by Romanians (1918), forming the "Great Romania". Thus, the authors of this paper consider to be the right moment and useful to review the main historical stages of the Romanian agriculture from the last century. The topic of this paper is pertinent and up-to-date for Romania. 100 years ago, our country was preeminently agrarian in terms of population (over 80%), and nowadays it is predominantly rural. Moreover, its agriculture still seeks structures and technological systems able to raise it to the performance worthy of its environmental potential and align it with the EU agriculture standards, 11 years after accession (i.e. 2007). Victorious in the coalition that defeated the Central Powers

in the First World War, Romania succeeded in uniting all the provinces inhabited by the Romanian people in a single national unitary state. At that time, its agriculture, and especially its rural population – the one that bore the war burden – was weakened; moreover, it had inherited ownership and operation structures incompatible with the European standards. In the period leading up to the Second World War, Romania's agriculture achieved some success in terms of land yield, but remained far from the level of Western European countries. In the Second World War, the agriculture made again the greatest economic and human sacrifices. After the war, Romania entered into the Soviet influence sphere and underwent radical changes. The private land ownership and the agricultural capital were confiscated; from owner and free entrepreneur, the peasant

became an employee, the entire agricultural system being adapted to the non-performing Soviet model. In these circumstances, under the obedient leaders of the so-called Marxist system, but especially of the Soviet system, Romania tried again to modernize and technologize; however, the results were far below expectations. In 1989, with the break-up of the communist bloc, Romania freed itself from the communist-totalitarian regime and chose the transition to a market economy, following a long transition. Lacking experience and standing in the hands of some extremely corrupt leaders, Romania's agriculture has continued its transition and integration processes into European structures. From our perspective, in this context, the description of the willful and forced experiences of the Romanian agriculture can be useful and pertinent.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials are of two types, i.e. historical and derived from the authors' own researches. The former are focused on information dating until the Second World War. For the last 40 years of socialist agriculture, the first author – an agrarian economist – has virtually monitored the entire course of the agriculture, being the author of numerous studies and researches in the managerial and economic sphere: operation structures, investments, workforce, economic efficiency. As far as the transition period to the market economy is concerned, the research belongs to all three authors, in different fields of agriculture: organization, investment, work, performance. The method used is also partly historical, but subject to the rules of economic research: collection and selection of data, data processing, synthesis and conclusions, proposals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The agrarian reform of 1921. Compared to the agrarian reforms in other European countries, the Romanian reform was the widest, both in scale and in its effects on the territory.

The expropriated land, with an area of 6,008,100 ha across the country, reduced the area of Romanian latifundia, from 8,109,000 ha in 1918 to 2,100,000 ha in 1930 [3].

Table 1. Areas expropriated by the Agrarian Reform

| Provinces | Latifundia area ha | Expropriated area ha | Expropriation rate % |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| The Old Kingdom | 3,397,851 | 2,776,401 | 81.7 |
| Basarabia | 1,844,549 | 1,491,920 | 76.9 |
| Transylvania | 2,751,457 | 1,663,809 | 61.2 |
| Bucovina | 115,000 | 75,967 | 66.1 |
| Romania | 8,108,857 | 6,008,097 | 74.1 |

Source: [3]

The data from the table above show that the expropriated area represented about 3/4 of the Romanian latifundia existing in 1918. This massive reduction of the latifundia led to the decrease of their share in the total area from 40.3% in 1918 to 10.4% in 1930.

From the entire expropriated area of over 6 million ha of agricultural land (of which 4 million ha represented arable land), 5,067,922 ha were allotted to 1,393,383 peasants (the average family area was 2.9 ha). The remaining area was allotted to state farms, schools and faculties, localities and churches, and to the state reserve.

As it results from the censuses of the time, the right to property under the four laws of the agrarian reform was granted to 2,005,477 persons, but only 69.5% benefitted from it [3]. The 1921 agrarian reform took place in the period 1918-1928, but the 1921 legislation – unlike the previous ones (and the one from the 1945s) – was the most extensive, a total area of 3,304 thousand ha being allotted to 1,479 thousand persons (out of more than 2,300 thousand applications), compared to 1,995 thousand ha allotted to 516 thousand persons in 1864.

Besides its profoundly social nature, the allotment of land to most of the peasantry – by the 1921 agrarian reform – was unique in the field also due to other features, such as:

- Most latifundia were affected – i.e. the vast property (the state had only a few hundred thousand hectares) in lots of over 100 ha – reducing it to 15-17% of the arable land and to 27-28 % of the agricultural land of the country [2].

-Ownership was made by the mass sale of land (between 5,811 thousand ha and 6,127 thousand ha, according to some data), for the amount of 12,016 million lei, payable by peasants in 15 years.

-Under this reform, there were established commons, in whose absence the peasantry would have been dependent on great owners and leaseholders.

-At the economic and organizational level, the share of large undertakings – with their advantages, as assessed by most commentators – diminished, and the peasants’ small-scale farms became predominant.

The achievement stage of the 1921 reform was presented after more than 12 years (in 1933) (see the table below) [8].

Table 2. The agrarian reform of 1921. Expropriations and allotments, December 31, 1933 (thousand ha)
Expropriations

| Definitive | | Under trial | |
|-------------------|---------|-------------------|------|
| No. of latifundia | area | no. of latifundia | Area |
| 22,523 | 6,126.8 | 312 | 50.6 |

Allotments

| Peasants enrolled thousand | Final allotment | | Commons | Village hearts | Special allotments | Total area |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------|---------|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| | With lots | Area | | | | |
| 2,308.9 | 1,479 | 3,404 | 1,117 | 65 | 35 | 4,620 |

State reserves

| Forests | Building plots | Road Institution | Leased to locals | Designed for colonization | Sold land | Non-productive | Total |
|---------|----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------|
| 856 | 75 | 318 | 81 | 128 | 17 | 44 | 1,518 |

Source: [8]

A positive and novel element for the 1921 reform is represented by the formation of commons, in whose absence the peasantry had deepened its dependence on the great landowners and leaseholders for half a century. At the same time, the state increased its reserve by over 1.5 million ha (mostly forests). The transformation of the large landed property into small peasant properties triggered some social effects (most peasants became land owners) but also some economic ones, i.e. it reduced the large undertakings and

their advantages, to small ones, which had a rudimentary inventory and low yields [2].

The agrarian reform of 1945. This reform was unique in its own way, as it was performed under particular domestic and external conditions. The reform had a very populist nature (or electoral, in today’s terms), aiming mainly at attracting the peasantry’s sympathy – a class still prevalent in Romania – to the new social-political order.

The hypocritical nature of the reform lies in the fact that its transience (the reform would be annulled only four years later by the resolution of the CC Plenary Meeting of the Romanian Communist Party of March 3-5, 1949 on the collectivization of agriculture) had been known since that time. Under the pretext of abolishing any form of exploitation of the peasantry by landlords and other categories of exploiters, all landed property up to the limit of 50 hectares was expropriated, without any compensation, which actually meant the confiscation of the land.

Moreover, tractors and other agricultural machinery and equipment were seized. Unlike the land, which was distributed partially to the peasants, they became public property, i.e. state property, and formed the tractor and agricultural machinery fleet of the future stations for the mechanization of agriculture.

The 1945 agrarian reform was also the smallest. There were expropriated 1,444 thousand ha, out of which 1,058 thousand ha were distributed to 800 thousand peasants (the rest became state property). In fact, the expropriation of the properties greater than 50 ha continued after 1945. Thus, in 1948, the state increased its land property to 2,871 thousand ha of agricultural land and 710 thousand ha of arable land. In 1950 (after the collectivization campaign had begun), the state’s agricultural land heritage amounted to 3,086 thousand ha (21.5% of the total) agricultural land and 863 thousand ha of arable land (9.2% of the total national arable land), which would form the future state-owned sector of agriculture.

As far as the operation structure was concerned, it remained equally fractured and unfit for rational operation, despite the changes in the property structure, for the

peasantry's benefit.

In almost a century, the average area of the peasant farm had changed from 4.55 ha to 4.34 ha. Thus, the structure of expropriations and allotments (on January 8, 1947) was as follows:

Expropriation

Number of expropriated owners143,219

Expropriated area (ha) 1,443,911

Allotment

Eligible persons 1,114,888

Number of owners 796,129

Distributed area (ha) 1,057,672

State reserve (ha) 387,565

Landing titles

- written 665,646

- granted..... 608,317

The expropriation also extended to the private ownership of capital, as all agricultural machinery and the corresponding share of the livestock were transferred to state ownership. Furthermore, no compensation was granted; thus, this was an act of confiscation of the agricultural and industrial goods from the private property. As a result, from an economic perspective, a large part of the modern agricultural undertakings – equipped with mechanized techniques, situated at the top of the Romanian agriculture, with a superior organization level in terms of yield and efficiency – were disaggregated. Thereafter, the conditions and practice of the tithes and corvées – as remnants of the relationships between peasants and landlords – were forbidden by law; except for the undertakings of 50 ha, the agrarian structure of the country became entirely peasant, with the stratification specific to the interwar period [2].

The socialist transformation of agriculture.

This name was given to the most radical and profound agrarian reform in the Romanian history. The land ownership system, the type and size of agricultural undertakings, the technological system, the organization, the financing and everything related to the agricultural and rural system were changed. However, it is strange that no one wondered why the so-called popular democracy regime (installed on March 6, 1945) decided to carry

out the collectivization of agriculture only after 3 years of leadership.

Was it an indigenous initiative or the whole system was imposed by the Soviet Union on all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that entered its influence sphere after the Second World War? Some historians [6] chose the first option:

"A leading principle of the democratic-popular regime was represented by the confiscation of the private property that brought any kind of income (land, buildings, factories, workshops, installations/equipment, transport enterprises, banks, trading forms etc.). The regime aimed at transforming the citizen into an employee, and the salary became the only form of income; the peasant's dependence on the regime was complete" [6]. Thus, the principle was indigenous, not imported (s.n.). The solution was provided by the USSR and resulted in the kolkhoz. The "formula" would also apply to Romanian People's Republic, by all coercion means, violence, mass arrests, even assassination [Giurăscu et al.].

Therefore, the model, the recipe was only imported and not imposed by the USSR and the Red Army (which remained in Romania until 1958). Moreover, the Soviet councilors would be present in all ministries for another five years. We believe that the offensive on private agriculture, i.e. the collectivization, was imposed against the peasantry and even against the autochthonous rulers.

It is unlikely that, in 1945, all the Communist-Marxist leaders of all the countries under the Soviet influence had suddenly (and at the same time) the idea of agricultural collectivization, leaving aside that some of them were not even convinced of its advantages. In our opinion, they acted in obedience to the mighty Eastern ruler, who named them heads of their peoples. As far as Romania is concerned, things seem to have happened in the same way, especially since the rich and poor Romanian peasants strongly wanted to get their own land, which they would work for their own benefit. A proof in this regard is represented by the report of a discussion between Petru Groza (president of

the Plowmen Front) and the Communist rulers, probably in the autumn of 1944:

"Also, last year, in autumn, when we went to Bucharest, among others with our friend Zaroni, the first question that the leaders of the Communist Party asked was: "You, the plowmen, what program do you have? What do you want us to do with the land?" Naturally, the plowmen replied, "We want to own the lands we are working on. Moreover, we want to get the land of those who have more than they need; we want to give land to those who do not have or have too little, i.e. under two or three yokes, so that they would have land too". The Communist Party approved this because its program aimed at abolishing the landlords and dividing the land among the peasants, and we have fought together the entire fall. You have read the gazettes and you know: we've been fighting hard, the proletariat from factories and cities fought together with the plowmen, so that the latter receive justice and be granted individual properties. Indeed, today the plowmen are free, they are no longer subject to the landlord, they own the land they are working on; now, every man owns his land yoke, and this is largely due to the Communist Party" [11].

It is true that the Romanian peasants wanted the lands of those who had more than they needed. Moreover, the working conditions of the peasants lacking land or having insufficient land (being thus forced to work on the estates of great property owners or leaseholders in order to feed their families) were increasingly enslaving. The periodic uprisings – that at the beginning of the twentieth century culminated in the great 1907 uprising suppressed with cruelty by the authorities – attest to this state of affairs. This situation, called Neo-bondage by C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea (an adept of Marxism), needed radical reforms, including the overthrow of the current state form:

"the abolition of Neo-bondage" – he wrote – "will remedy the misfortunes caused by the Neo-bondage regime, not by the capitalist one; as far as the latter is concerned, another regime will come and heal all the wounds it produced; this is the socialist regime, which

will come, it will surely come". However, until then, he proposed the replacement of Neo-bondage by capitalism; thus, the agrarian problem would be connected to the agricultural one and the latter - to the industrialization of the country [1].

As far as the Romanian peasants were concerned, they wanted their own land, not organized in collective farms. The struggle and sacrifices they had made for 13 years opposing collectivization, sometimes at the expense of their lives, proved this to a great extent. They opposed collectivization not because they did not know what a collective farm was and because they were scared by *the boiler food*, as some authors suggest [7], but because of their thirst for land and for economic and social freedom. The same authors [7] admit that the army of councilors present in the country throughout the collectivization period did not play only the role of spectators to the implementation of the Soviet model. They were also coordinators and supervisors that translated the Soviet model into reality.

"The counselors' task was to ensure that the Soviet Union was not a mere model, but that it actually exerted power in Romania. The political analyst Stelian Tanase states:

"Here, the real power, the only power that held the leading team, was the Soviet power. More like anywhere else and in a less camouflaged way, the Soviets were present in the army, in the police, in the administration, in the economic life, where they directly controlled an important part. In the communist environments of other popular democracies, Romania was considered the 17th Soviet republic, as early as 1947" [7].

In Romania, the collectivization of agriculture was decided and triggered by the famous Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP), on March 3-5, 1949, under the slogan borrowed from the Leninist-Stalinist precious teaching: *"We support the poor peasantry, strengthen the alliance with the middle-class peasantry, and lead an uninterrupted struggle against kulaks".*

Collectivization began in force in the spring of 1949 and ended 13 years later, i.e. in the

spring of 1962. The first collectivized province was Dobrogea, then known as Constanta region, located in the southeastern extremity of Romania, due to the efforts of the party activists headed by Vasile Vâlcu. The collectivization of the agriculture in Constanța region ended in the autumn of 1957, almost five years before the end of the action at the country level [9].

The Prime Secretary of the RWP, Gh. Dej, highlighted the merits of Constanța region – the first fully collectivized area. The full collectivization opens up to the hard-working peasant from Constanta region new opportunities for economic and cultural development as they have never been and could never be otherwise. Subsequent to the agrarian reform of 1945, in this region, each peasant farm has on average 5.4 ha of agricultural land – the highest average in the country. Moreover, here, the peasantry felt more strongly than anywhere the lack of production means. In Constanta region, the fruits of mechanized socialist agriculture and its immense growth prospects were strongly emphasized. Dej's conviction, shared to the 2,000 participants, was that "the advanced experience of the region regarding the socialist construction in villages should be studied by all regional and district party and state organs, in order to be used according to local conditions and features.

The collectivization process had various rhythms, degrees and methods for the clarification and observance of the most hypocritical slogan, i.e. *free consent*, also imported from the Soviet Union. In a 1930 lecture entitled "*The Dizziness of Success*", Stalin stated:

"The success of our kolkhoznik policy is explained by the fact that this policy is based on the principle of the voluntary adherence to the colossal kolkhoznik movement and that it takes into account the diversity of conditions, in various regions of the USSR. Kolkhozniks should not be established by force. This would be a stupid and reactionary process" [6].

Even in our country, at high level, all the speeches delivered by party leaders would recall the need to respect free consent; however, the field activists knew how to

translate this recommendation.

If this recommendation had been observed, collectivization would not have been achieved, not even in half a century. The collectivization campaign was carried out forcefully, abandoning the principle of free consent, although since 1950 the party had noticed the abuses and commissioned statistics and classifications in terms of case seriousness, because no action had been taken anyway. It was found on this occasion that up to that date, 789 abuses had been committed, out of which only 34 were *justified* [6]. However, in 1951, no collective farm was established; moreover, the persons enrolled were able to withdraw and the action was interrupted temporarily. At that time, the associations were predominant; in these associative forms, members retained their right to property on the land. Consequently, in 1956 only 29.3% of the agricultural area was organized in associative forms. The events that took place in the autumn of 1956 in Hungary and Poland also slowed down the collectivization campaign, and the authorities became more cautious. However, taking into account the share of less than 20% of the collectivized land, the party resumed in force the collectivization campaign in 1957 [6].

In order to boost the collectivization campaign, the mandatory quotas of the agricultural yields that had to be handed over to the state (introduced in 1946) were increased and extended to all individual farms. Thus, they increased from 110 kg/ha for the farms with 1-2 ha per family up to 520 kg/ha for those with 10 ha per family. In the spring of 1952, another enlargement and extension to collective farms took place. The middle-class peasants had to deliver between 300-350 kg/ha and the kulaks - 500-825 kg/ha, taking into consideration that the average yield was 821 kg/ha for wheat (the 1931-1935 average) and 1040 kg/ha for maize. Kulaks were forced to sell to the state almost their entire yield, and sometimes they had to buy products in order to deliver their quotas. Moreover, in 1952, another decree increased the sanctions for failure to deliver the quotas, while the latter continued to increase. [6]

The increase in the peasants' burdens triggered more and more protest movements; in response, the authorities turned to repression, arrests, sentences for the failure to perform certain fieldworks, but also for the failure to deliver quotas. The party leadership was aware of the situation and requested information. The data received showed that between 1950 and 1953, over 89,000 peasants were sentenced for various offences in the agricultural sector; 46.3% were kulaks, 41.5% - middle-class peasants, and 8.2% - poor peasants. In fact, the repression accelerated, from 15,467 sentences in 1950, to 40,989 sentences in 1952. However, in 1953, only 8,750 sentences were pronounced, the explanation being Stalin's death and the indications received from Moscow [6].

The problem of the land owned by the 1,029 collective farms, i.e. 280 ha/unit – which was far too little – remained to be solved; thus, they received land mainly from the state. The period 1956-190 was characterized by the abolition of compulsory quotas and their substitution with contracts (also obligatory at prices fixed by the state in the latter's favor). However, in July 1956, only 29.3% of the lands were collectivized and the party reinvigorated the sanctions, which triggered a natural response, i.e. the intensification of protest actions. In 1957, real riots took place and the authorities turned again to repression. Vadu Roșca case, from Galati region (1957), was famous in this regard:

The peasants opposed and, after an attempt to seize the mayor and the representatives of the district, an agreement was reached: the team was allowed to leave, and the second day the villagers would meet with the representatives of the authorities, for negotiations. While the peasants were assured that force would not be used in the collectivization process at Vadu Rosca, the village was surrounded by the Securitate, isolated from the rest of the commune, and the state of siege was declared. On December 4, 1957, around 9 am, after a short verbal altercation between the locals and the officials, fire was opened against the villagers gathered at the place called the "Casemata". The victim's record amounted to 9 dead and about 60 injured; numerous

arrests were made. Nicolae Ceausescu (young at that time) was sent to coordinate the "pacification" of the village. The RWP organization in the commune – which had 11 members – was abolished by Ceausescu: "You, as party members, were hiding under your bed! 11 individuals with 11 stakes would have knocked this village into shape! I abolish the party organization!" These were Ceausescu's words, according to an eyewitness. Finally, 18 sentences were issued for participating in Vadu Rosca riot, and the collectivization of the village was suspended from 1958 until 1960 [10].

In fact, N. Ceausescu was known for the gentleness of his methods. In 1958, when 80% of the peasantry had already been incorporated in commons, the campaign was resumed in its toughest form in the regions where the peasants had shown the most resolute resistance: Galati, Craiova and Arges regions. For instance, a group of party activists, including Nicolae Ceausescu, who came personally in order to give an impulse to the resumption of collectivization in sensitive areas, was assaulted and chased away from a village; this led Ceausescu to personally direct the intervention in force, firing himself on the peasants. Furthermore, the big boss, i.e. Dej, was no longer gentle when faced with the peasants' counter-revolutionary actions: "Is it not worthwhile to break the throat and spine of such men for such counter-revolutionary actions? These people must be beaten up hard; you should not feel sorry for them, because they are not fond of our regime".

In Iasi, in September 1961, angry that only 8% of the peasants refused to sign up, Dej said: "They must be told that they won't get away from the collective farm as they won't escape death". There were also more original methods of enrollment in the collective farm: in Pechea (the first collectivized commune in Galati region), a person hid in the stove oven from the team that had come to his home. However, his foot went out: "Do you enroll in the communal ownership?" The team asked him. He answered: "No!" They put ink on his toe and thus he signed "willingly" to enroll in

the communal ownership. He did not even have to get out of the stove.

The riots continued in 1958, 1959 and even after 1962, when at the end of April 23-25, the collectivization of agriculture was achieved. It was celebrated with great pomp, also in the presence of a large number of delegates from all categories of those who contributed in some way to this long process that had lasted 13 years or 156 months. As already mentioned, it was declared “achieved” because, according to the data from the table below, only 3.20% of the peasant families with an area of 433.1 thousand ha (4.9%) were still included in agricultural associations at that time (i.e. when the collectivization was declared achieved) [10].

Table 3. Dynamics of the socialist sector development in agriculture

| Year | Agricultural associations | | | Collective agricultural units | | |
|------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Units | Families (thousands) | Agricultural area (thousand ha) | Units | Families (thousands) | Agricultural area (thousand ha) |
| 1949 | - | - | - | 56 | 4.0 | 14.3 |
| 1952 | 1,834 | 84.0 | 187.6 | 1,795 | 165.5 | 713.4 |
| 1955 | 4,471 | 206.3 | 395.4 | 2,152 | 183.2 | 905.8 |
| 1958 | 12,748 | 1399.8 | 2,550.8 | 3,028 | 468.5 | 1,892.5 |
| 1961 | 6,677 | 1,080.6 | 2,058.3 | 6,424 | 2,051.0 | 5,973.3 |
| 1962 | 1,317 | 241.8 | 433.1 | 6,546 | 3,194 | 8,862.0 |

Source: [10]

In fact, the collectivization pace was so fast that between December 1961 and March 1962 (i.e. the last 4 months of the campaign), 37.1% of all families and 33.17% of the land were collectivized [6].

Regarding this sad period in the history of the Romanian agriculture, the authors Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery made a surprising assessment. They see this troubled and painful period of the Romanian peasantry as an enlightenment project that aimed at modernizing a backward country. Moreover, they consider the sufferings inflicted by the repressive Communist bodies only as departures caused by the Romanian peasantry itself, which forced the state to create the repressive apparatus that committed these departures (beatings, many detention years, crimes):

First, like others, we see collectivization as a story about an Enlightenment project for modernizing a “backward” country on a model from the Soviet Union, but we emphasize the departures from the model as well as its imposition. Second, more unusually, we emphasize the coming-into-being of the political organization that is often unproblematically seen as collectivization’s author – the Communist Party – underscoring instead the ways in which collectivization created it, as much as the other way around. Third, we explore in detail the “technology transfer” involved in this process, whereby the peasantry was tied in place differently from before, by transforming their relations to land and one another and by bureaucratizing their daily life [7].

The period of socialist agriculture. Let us agree with the above quoted paper that the socialist transformation of the Romanian socialist agriculture was an *Enlightenment project for modernizing a backward country* and make abstraction of the *departures* of the totalitarian communist regime (punches in the face, boots in the stomach, unjust trials and sentences followed by years of imprisonment, crimes), used in order to achieve its purpose. Moreover, the peasants who were guilty of having opposed this project suffered these atrocities, aberrantly called *departures*. Thus, the state had to create the tools necessary for the application of deviant measures.

This was a real holocaust, not a siege, which lasted 13 years, followed by nearly three decades of slavery. Nearly three decades when more than two-thirds of the country’s population was not tied to the land but enslaved on the same land that had been taken away from them. Indeed, the agriculture was modernized – the beater was replaced by the thresher and then by the cropper; the oxen and horses were replaced by the tractor. Let us make an inventory of the success achieved by the socialist agriculture: the quasi-totalitarian mechanization of all field work, and in some areas (aviculture) even its automation due to the socialist industry; the increase in the amount of fertilizers per ha, from less than 1 kg/ha to over 120 kg/ha; building irrigation

systems on more than 3 million ha; the increase in the number of tractors from 44.2 thousand before collectivization to over 151 thousand in 1989, the arable land per tractor decreasing from 222 ha to 62 ha (see Table 4), while in non-collectivized Western European countries there were 12-15 ha per tractor. This was due to the fact that, although the Romanian industry had the necessary production capacity in order to provide agriculture with a good supply, more than two thirds of the produced tractors were exported (in 1989, the entire tractor production was exported).

Table 4. The evolution of the tractor fleet and of the main agricultural machinery in Romania (units)

| Equipment name | 1960 | 1980 | 1989 |
|---|--------|---------|---------|
| Agricultural tractors | 44,194 | 146,592 | 151,745 |
| Tractor plows | 46,130 | 103,137 | 83,286 |
| Mechanical cultivator | 20,667 | 40,198 | 35,386 |
| Mechanical seeders | 33,948 | 48,970 | 43,608 |
| Machines for spreading chemical fertilizers | 3,182 | 15,100 | 15,596 |
| Power-propelled spray and dust machines | 2,864 | 23,034 | 20,803 |
| Self-propelled straw reaper | 1,582 | 35,201 | 44,749 |
| Self-propelled corn harvesters | - | 3,793 | 17,195 |
| Trailed combine for maize harvesting | 846 | 921 | 4,115 |
| Trailed combine for fodder harvesting | 920 | 16,876 | 11,696 |
| Straw balers | ... | 22,115 | 23,252 |
| Arable surface per tractor (ha/tractor) | 222 | 67 | 62 |

Note: In Romania, in 1938, there were 4,039 tractors of different types.

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 1990 [15].

The same happened with chemical fertilizers. Although the production capacity of the industry was over 4 million tons, in Romania's agriculture, in 1989, there were used 127 kg/ha, while in Western European countries - 300-600 kg/ha. At the same time, almost half of the Romanian fertilizer production was exported. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the average yield per ha was half, as compared to that in the non-collectivized countries of Western Europe (Table 5).

Table 5. Yields in Romania and in some European countries in the main crops, in correlation with the fertilization level

| Country | Wheat q/ha | Maize q/ha | Potatoes q/ha | Sugat beetq/ha | Chemical fertilizers NPK kg/ha |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Romania | 25.9 | 34.6 | 157 | 235 | 106.6 |
| France | 50.0 | 52.1 | 279 | 467 | 300.8 |
| Germany | 49.5 | 57.8 | 291 | 473 | 471.4 |
| Netherlands | 62.1 | - | 375 | 478 | 788.8 |

Source: FAO Yearbook, 1980, Vol. 34, Rome, 1981 [14].

In the Romanian high-speed irrigation systems, which were unfinished and lacked of many essential elements, but which had cost many billions of US dollars, greatly contributing to the country's historical indebtedness, the yields per ha were far below the projected level, causing losses instead of profits. The construction deficiencies were accompanied by the increasing stinginess in the allotment of the main production factors (tractors and fertilizers exported in order to import oil, coal and ore, the energy needed in order to pump the remaining water from the industry) and by the more and more precarious quality of the technology. All these triggered small yields per ha, as far as the economy was concerned. Regarding the over 2 million collective farmers, this situation affected their minimum guaranteed income and then the global agreement (i.e. the payment of work according to the achievement level of the production plan that was never reached because the scales were growing every year).

The data presented in Table 6 show that the peasants' incomes were significantly lower than the average of the national economy. In addition, the figures in the table also include an assessment of the remuneration that collective members performed in personal households. Professor Parpala assessed the share of the latter at 44%; applied to the figures in the table, this reduces further the labor income of collective farmers.

Table 6. The evolution of the remuneration per total economy, in industry, agriculture and agricultural cooperatives (1960-1989)

| Specification | Years | | | |
|---|-------|------|------|------|
| | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1989 |
| <i>Remuneration at national level - lei / month workers^{*)}</i> | | | | |
| Average per economy | 759 | 1209 | 2169 | 2980 |
| Average per industry | 803 | 1226 | 2244 | 2971 |
| Average per agriculture | 668 | 1124 | 2066 | 2903 |
| <i>Remuneration of the cooperative members in Dobrogea lei/month^{**)}</i> | | | | |
| Constanta county | 243 | 562 | 930 | 1007 |
| Tulcea county | 194 | 366 | 500 | 465 |
| The peasantry's net nominal income from work in agriculture per active person, in Romania | 402 | 571 | 1973 | 1920 |

Source: *) Romanian Statistical Yearbook 1990 [15].

**) Calculations according to the average number of conventional norms and the value of the conventional norm in Dobrogea's agricultural cooperatives.

Professor Parpala also points out the regional differences in the collective farmers' income: "For instance, in 1978, almost ¾ of the cooperatives reported for a co-operator only 6,000 lei annually (i.e. 500 lei per month); over 1/3 of co-operators - under 3,000 lei annually, 150 cooperatives - less than 1,000 lei annually (83.3 lei/month) and only 6.5% of cooperatives - over 1,000 lei annually.

On the territorial level, the disparity is equally evident in counties such as Gorj, Maramures, Sălaj, Vâlcea, where the consumption fund for a co-operator able to work and a participant to work was under 3,000 lei. In counties such as Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Argeș, Bistrița-Năsăud, Suceava, Mehedinți and Dâmbovița, it was between 3,000 and 5,000 lei; at the same time, in Brașov, Constanța, Covasna and Timiș counties, each co-operator had a consumption fund of over 15,000 lei; thus, the most obvious disparity (1:8,7) is also between Gorj and Brasov counties (2,270:19,705 lei) [12].

As for the performances of the socialist agriculture, the academician Davidescu characterizes them as follows:

Although Romania has good ecological conditions comparable to those from France, the yields in most field crops and animal products were below 60%, compared to those

from EU countries. The causes of this state of affairs were numerous; some of them were:

- Managerial causes: choosing managers by file and not by professional and managerial skills;

- Establishing (by the central bodies) the plan and structure of crops as well as of the targeted yield level, without taking into account the ecological conditions and the technical endowment;

- Contracting the entire planned agricultural yield with the state at fixed, non-negotiable prices;

- Applying fixed prices for agricultural products, on a long-term (1965-1980), for the social protection of persons, without correlating them with upstream pricing. This explains the hundreds of billions of debts accumulated by the APCs (agricultural production co-operatives), debts that could not be paid; de-capitalizing agricultural enterprises. As a result, the lack of working capital contributed to the accumulation of debt due to high interest rates; the State monopoly on agricultural works, by the MTSs (machine and tractor stations), at fixed or non-negotiable prices; the use of small quantities of fertilizers and pesticides in agricultural technology; poor technical endowment. The arable land area per tractor was 80-100 ha, while in Western European countries it was 10-15 ha; the lack of credits on time and with convenient interests; the low degree of professional qualification of many workers in agricultural units; a variable and non-stimulating retribution system.

During this time, the agriculture had to support the costs of intense industrialization and social protection".

As far as the population's households were concerned, the academician Davidescu stated: *Although they held 12.1% of the arable land and 16.3% of the workforce, the individual sector achieved only 25% of the maize harvest, 15% of the pulse crop, 44% of the potatoes, 32% of the vegetables, 49% of the fruit and 25% of the grapes. At all animal products, individual peasant farms produced more per livestock units than the APCs and STEs (state agricultural enterprises) [4].*

Thus, we returned to the backward agriculture, which had existed before collectivization, and whose performance had been superior to that of the modern socialist agriculture.

The post-communist period. At the end of 1989, Romania was the last country to have liberated itself from the communist regime and made it in a spectacular way, in the sight of the whole world, with bloodshed. In terms of land reforms and policies, the events of 1989 should have triggered exactly the reverse of the decisions regarding the collectivization (which lasted no less than 13 years), taken by the Central Committee of the Plenary Revolution of the RWP. The return of agricultural land to its former owners or to their heirs could have been made in a few years, under appropriate laws. This did not happen for several reasons, which will be highlighted by several events and by the regulations elaborated under the new-old political class that was still preserving some totalitarian and associative principles.

Just before the abolition of the former agricultural cooperatives by Law 18/1991 of the Land Fund, in 1990, by Laws 15/1990 and 31/1990, the former state-owned enterprises, as well as other specialized enterprises (vegetables, silkworms, fish) became commercial companies and autonomous administrations. Thus, the former owners of the lands included in these new types of agricultural units were not privatized. Concretely, the effective privatization took place only in 2000, under Law no.1/2000 following another law of 1997, namely Law no. 169/1997 (established by deputy Lupu, member of the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party). Moreover, on this occasion, the retrocession within the limit of 50 ha of arable land and of 30 ha of wooded land was agreed upon. Meanwhile, former landowners were advised to organize themselves into various associative forms (Law no. 36/1991, for example) [5].

In the meantime, the associative forms have practically disappeared, and the private state sector comprises three categories of agricultural undertakings, classified in terms

of size: family farms ranging from 1 to 100 ha with an average area of 48 ha and a share of 31,8% of the agricultural land; private commercial farms – including those owned by the state – ranging from 100 to over 10,000 ha with an average size of 424.5 ha, representing 34.82% of the agricultural area of the country; non-subsidized subsistence farms - 2,736.7 thousand units, with an average area of 1.79 ha and a share of 33.9% in the total agricultural area. The still very large number of this last category denotes the degree of land fragmentation in Romania.

The process of land restitution under Law 18/1991 and Law 1/2000 continues even nowadays, after almost two decades, accompanied by all sorts of illegalities and scams (false heirs, land restitutions on weaker quality sites, favoritism and other irregularities of which law enforcement officials are often responsible). Television shows and other media are full of cases that trigger different reactions from anger to indifference or hilarity.

The problem of the land sold to foreign natural or legal persons also abounds. In particular, there is targeted the fertile land in the Danube Delta with irrigation possibilities, in connection to the land reclamation policy that gives absolute priority to the rehabilitation of the irrigation systems in the south and east of the country, while neglecting other phenomena with a devastating impact on soil quality, such as erosion.

A historic moment in the field of land and agrarian policies was Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007. Since then, the agrarian policies (and not only) have been designed in Brussels, not in Bucharest. The peasants disinherited for the second time and the workers left without a job by Ceausescu's successors went *to sunny realms* in order to earn their living, under even more disadvantageous agreements than those described by Gherea's Neo-bondage.

During the preparation for the accession, the Romanian peasants were lured by advantageous offers, such as the *SAPARD* programmes [13]. Naturally, no one denies the generous ideas behind the establishment

of the European Union; however, Romania was too poor to benefit from the proposed benefits. The SAPARD offers and other European funds have benefited those natural and legal persons that in some way had accumulated some resources and afforded themselves to contribute with the required percentages. The Community policy originated in the Treaty of Rome (1957). This policy has been periodically updated and adapted to the new political and economic conditions, for instance between 1962 and 1992; the 1992 Reformation (Mac Sharry); Agenda 2000; the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2004-2013, etc. Throughout this period, Romania has tried to adapt and align to the requirements of the European Union's agricultural policy, more or less successfully.

CONCLUSIONS

There are few historical periods similar (if they can be compared) to the agitated twentieth-century. In the victorious camp at the end of the First World War, Romania was complete, as all the Romanians united on December 1, 1918, forming Great Romania. Over the two following decades, Romania recorded progress in the political, economic, and cultural fields. The Romanian agriculture was modernized and its performances were similar to those recorded in Europe, despite the reminiscences of the archaic relationships between the great and the small property holders. The Second World War had devastating effects on Romania from all points of view. Even before its beginning, the country's territory was amputated; during the war, the agriculture suffered the greatest material and human losses. Moreover, since a misfortune never comes alone, although, in the end, Romania was in the victorious camp, it had the misfortune to get into the influence sphere of its allied Eastern friend, i.e. the Soviet Union. Not only had the latter robbed our country for years by the well-known SovRoms, but it also imposed its own economic system, i.e. the socialism; thus, the state became the owner of all the resources of the entire economy, in the society. There followed another four decades in which the

citizens were stripped of all goods, including freedom, becoming state employees. Due to the megalomaniac ambitions of poorly targeted and damaging investments, Romania's agriculture was deprived of the resources needed by a modern and intensive system. Thus, instead of increasing, its performances decreased, compared to the European ones. The transition to the market economy, the accession to the European political and economic structures followed. However, the positive results are still expected. It is not for the authors of this paper to assess what is happening nowadays. Historians will do it someday.

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