

The Evolution of Romanian Villages Since the Great Union of 1918

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Introduction

ROMANIA, AS described by its great poets and writers, is a country blessed by God. Upon his visit of May 7-9, 1999, Pope John Paul II called it, the “garden of our Lord’s Mother”. The Romanian rural population, however, has always faced perpetual poverty. Under these conditions, we ask the question: Why? What is the cause? Specialists in the field state that the principal cause might be the various people that invaded and controlled the Romanian people’s fate during history.

Romania’s history is a sad one, where the interests of foreign adventurers and Romanian opportunists intertwined, always changing direction, always keeping Romania among the most backward countries of Europe (Merce 2015).

If by 1988 Ceausescu’s systematization plan for Romanian villages had failed to demolish half of the planned 13,000 settlements, this might happen in the near future as a result of depopulation. At present, the Romanian youth, no matter their training level, are searching for a better quality of life and better paid jobs. Communism has destroyed, among other things, the people’s love for their Motherland, a feeling that our ancestors nurtured deep in their hearts.

The great Romanian writers of the past century have written about the love the peasant has for his land, about his morality, and about the Romanian village.

George Coșbuc (1966-1918, born in the village of Hordou, Bistrița-Năsăud County, now renamed Coșbuc), the poet of the peasantry, presented in his poems the whole life of the peasantry, from the happiness and joys of the weddings to the sorrows and pain of death, capturing the totality of the natural landscape in which the peasants lived and worked at the turn of the 20th century. In his poems, he presents the antagonism between different social categories, the miserable life of the peasants, the exploitation and abuses by foreign upstarts. Coșbuc’s peasant is deeply rooted in his country’s land, identifying him with the fatherland and the history of its people. The poet also forecasted the inevitable change of social order after the peasant uprising of 1907.

The poet Octavian Goga (1881-1938, born in Rășinari, near Sibiu) saw the “Romanian peasant as a tormented man of the land” (Autobiographical Fragments). He did not

picture a specific peasant, but empathized with the mass of land workers. Goga saw the village through the prism of the community, also evoking the personalities of the community: the teacher, the priest, the fiddler, all of whom had the sacred mission of maintaining alive both the national spirit and the hope for better times.

Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944, born in Târlişua, Bistrița-Năsăud County) believed that the Romanian peasant's love of the land is greater and more natural than that of other peasants, because they saw it not as an object to be exploited but rather as a living being that they strangely adored and feared. The Romanian land has a voice that the peasant hears and understands. The birth and endurance of the Romanian people within the area of the Carpathians and the Danube is intrinsically bound to the peasant, because the peasant is the beginning and the end. The Romanians could preserve their nation and lands because they had peaceful peasant roots. The novelist also said that the Romanian soul is the greatest miracle of history. Despite the tens of foreign people harassing it and torturing it, despite the foreign rules, despite the death of great peoples and the fall of supercilious empires, nothing could take away the confidence in its fate: when the time came, the Romanians emerged more united, healthier, and more confident than any other people. Coercive borders could not touch their hearts.

Lucian Blaga (1895-1961, born in Lancrăm, near Sebeș, Alba County), was a great poet, writer, playwright, and philosopher who described the Romanian village and its peasant as self-sufficient. It only needs land and his soul and a little help from God to bear with his destiny. The Romanian village did not let itself be lured into the history others made for the Romanians.

Blaga and Rebreanu saw the Romanian village and the Romanian peasant as generators of history and saviors of the Romanian people, over the past centuries.

Nowadays, we ask ourselves: Does the land still have the same significance for the Romanian peasant? Are there still peasants like those described by Coșbuc, Goga, Rebreanu or Blaga? We will find our answer to this question 100 years from now.

The totalitarian Communist policies saw the village as a producer of goods and the peasants as “agricultural workers” or “cooperative farmers”. The ban on land ownership led to the gradual disappearance of peasants as well as of most village craftsmen and crafts. All this powerfully marked the spirit of the contemporary Romanian peasant, who lacks initiative and feels abandoned.

The Romanian poet Adrian Păunescu (1943-2010, born in Copăceni, Bălți County, Bessarabia, Republic of Moldova) wrote, in 1985, that the peasant problem had never been solved and that peasants never got to live as they deserve. Under the Communist rule, the Romanian villages suffered three significant processes of degradation or destruction: depopulation, demolition, and stagnation, while the Romanian peasant struggled to remain in the village. In 1988, hearing about the decision to demolish the villages, Păunescu wrote a poem in which he urged the Romanian people to pray for the country to escape destruction, because beautiful things can happen if the villages and their houses are not destroyed.

The historical turn of December 1989 provided the Romanian villages with new prospects of existence, consolidation and development, but few of them were capitalized on by the rulers of Romania (Mateoc-Sîrb 2002).

Results and Discussion

AT THE beginning of the 20th century, villages played an important demographic role due to their considerable share in the total population and ethnic composition. This is still valid nowadays (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Evolution of Romanian population by demographic area

Year	Total population	Rural population	Urban population
	No	%	%
1930*	18,057,028***	79.8	20.2
1948*	15,872,624	76.6	23.4
1956*	17,489,450	68.7	31.3
1966*	19,103,163	61.8	38.2
1977*	21,599,910	56.4	43.6
1985	22,724,863	50.0	50.0
1989	23,151,564	46.8	53.2
1990	23,206,720	45.7	54.3
1992*	22,810,035	45.7	54.3
1995	22,680,951	45.1	54.9
1999	22,458,022	45.2	54.8
2000	22,435,205	45.4	54.6
2002*	21,680,974	47.3	52.7
2003**	21,627,509	47.1	52.9
2005**	21,382,354	45.3	54.7
2009**	20,440,290	46.1	53.9
2011*	20,121,641	46.0	54.0
2015**	19,875,542	46.1	53.9
2016**	19,760,314	46.2	53.8
2017**	19,644,350	46.4	53.6

SOURCE: Our own processing by *Anuarul statistic al României colectie 1938-2011

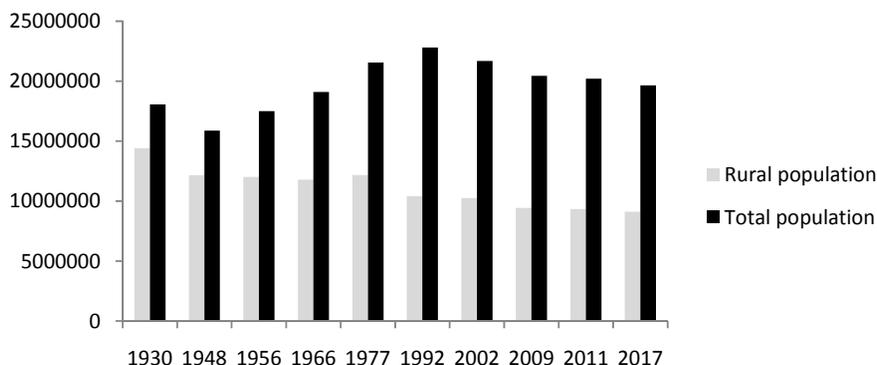
INSS, TEMPO-online, 2018, *populația României Mari

Statistics show that, in the 20th century, Romania's population grew at an annual rate that was higher than that of developed countries and lower than that of poor countries. The annual mean growth rate varied during the 20th century: until 1945, the evolution of the population was highly affected by the negative effects of the two world wars. After World War II, Romania's population grew continuously until 1990, when it reached a peak of 23,206,720 inhabitants, of which 12,608,844 urban inhabitants and 10,597,876 rural inhabitants.

After 1990, the evolution of the population was a negative one because of the liberalization of abortions and of negative natural growth; starting with 1992, there has been massive migration, which peaked in 2000. All this caused the ongoing decrease of the Romanian population (Figure 1).

During the analyzed period, Romania's rural population decreased continuously, while its urban population increased from 20% in 1930 to over 53% in 2017. All this was caused

FIGURE 1. Evolution of Romanian population



SOURCE: http://www.wikiwand.com/ro/Jude%C8%9Bele_interbelice_ale_Regatului_Rom%C3%A2niei

by migration to towns and cities after World War II (including the migration of German minority), by massive industrialization, and by the low birth rate (Oțiman 1997).

One question that remains has to do with the reasons why villagers preferred to leave their native places and chose another place to live and another way of living.

The literature points out that, despite the fact that agrarian specialists at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century emphasized the need to organize and set up medium-size peasant households in Romania, capable of solving the problem of food for villagers, the agrarian Acts applied after the Great Union in 1918 organized and promoted small properties with households of up to 5 ha, which was not enough to ensure decent living standards for the families of the households.

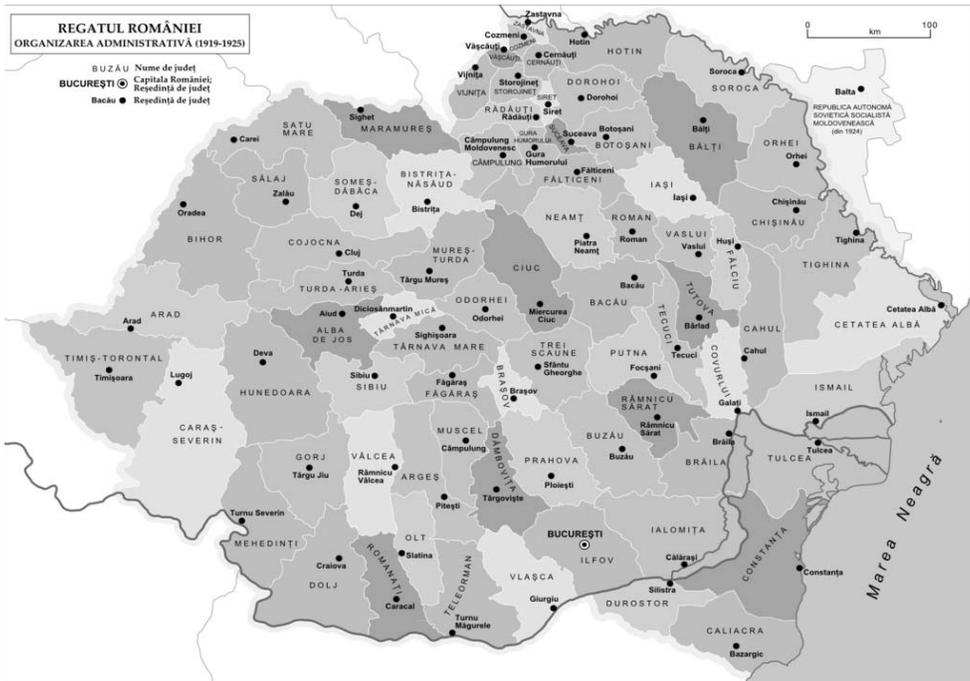
After the Great Union of 1918, Romania had nine historical provinces: Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, with a total area of 295,049 km² and a population of over 18 million (Figure 2).

TABLE 2. Romania's population per counties after the census in 1930

Historical provinces	Area (km ²)	Total population	Population density/km ²	Urban population		Rural population	
				N	%	N	%
Oltenia	24,078	1,513,175	63	198,229	13.1	1,314,952	86.9
Muntenia	52,505	4,029,008	77	1,101,766	27.3	2,927,242	72.7
Dobrogea	23,262	815,475	35	196,478	24.1	618,997	75.9
Moldova	38,058	2,433,596	64	592,127	24.3	1,841,469	75.7
Basarabia	44,422	2,864,402	64	370,971	13.0	2,493,431	87.0
Bucovina	10,442	853,009	82	228,056	26.7	624,953	73.3
Transylvania	62,229	3,217,988	52	519,675	16.1	2,698,313	83.9
Banat	18,715	939,958	50	167,489	17.8	772,469	82.2
Crișana și Maramureș	21,338	1,390,417	65	276,254	19.9	1,114,163	80.1
TOTAL	295,049	18,057,028	61	3,651,039	20.0	14,405,989	80.0

SOURCE: Our own processing by Anuarul statistic al României 1938, Săgeată 2015, Oțiman 2013

FIGURE 2. Romania's administrative-territorial map after the Great Union in 1918



Lazăr presents, in his book on the social and agrarian problems of the peasant economy between 1925 and 1935 (a reference work for the first half of the 20th century), an analysis of the rural area for the period in question, and concludes that some progress was made, that is was a step forward in Romania's history, but this economy remained inferior to that of other countries, for the same period (Table 2).

At the beginning of the 20th century, of the over 18,000,000 Romanian inhabitants, over 14,000,000 inhabitants lived in the rural area: almost 80% of the total population lived by working the land on households smaller than 5 ha, representing 83% of the total agricultural households. In countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden or Denmark, this category of holding was much less represented (Lazăr 1944).

It is important to mention that, at the census in 1930, of the 11,362,886 inhabitants over the age of seven, 5,490,050 inhabitants were illiterate (i.e. 48.31% of the village population); of the total literate population, 92.95% (5,411,731) had only primary schooling and only 0.10% had academic degrees.

In Romania, both the excessively small plots and the unilateral cropping system kept crops and incomes very low. A few hundreds of kilos of maize or wheat produced by a small peasant farm meant nothing for the national economy and offered an ephemeral existence to the ploughmen in this category (Lazăr 1944). The fragmentation of plots because of population growth in the first half of the 20th century grew alarmingly. Fragmentation affected the peasants' living conditions. They earned so little that they could barely meet the most elementary needs necessary for survival: food. The scarci-

ty of food marked all Romanian peasants. The 3-4 ha households with precarious technology and affected by annual weather conditions could not ensure the necessary agricultural produce for self-consumption and neither fully use the working capacity of a peasant's family. There were 8-10 children on average in a peasant's family and, despite the high infant mortality rate, the natural population growth rate was 14.8% in 1930. Thus, small peasant households at the beginning of the 20th century were subsistence households, largely depending on the large agricultural structures that used the excess labor of peasant families and not paid labor.

Ever since the beginning of the 20th century there was a rural exodus, i.e. a transfer of the workforce from agriculture and forestry to other trades (Lazăr 1944). Today, we talk about the diversification of activities and about alternative sources of income in the rural areas. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was an identifiable rural exodus by immigration: when villagers of a state cannot find gainful employment in agriculture or in other occupations in that country, they move to other countries that ensure a secure living. If, 100 years ago, the Romanians emigrated to the U.S.A., nowadays they immigrate to all the countries of the world: Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, fewer and fewer to Germany, and also to Canada, the U.S.A., Morocco, Israel, etc.

The agrarian reform after World War I was an important step forward in the development of agrarian property, but it also had shortcomings: it did not successfully allot land to all peasants (Păun 2009).

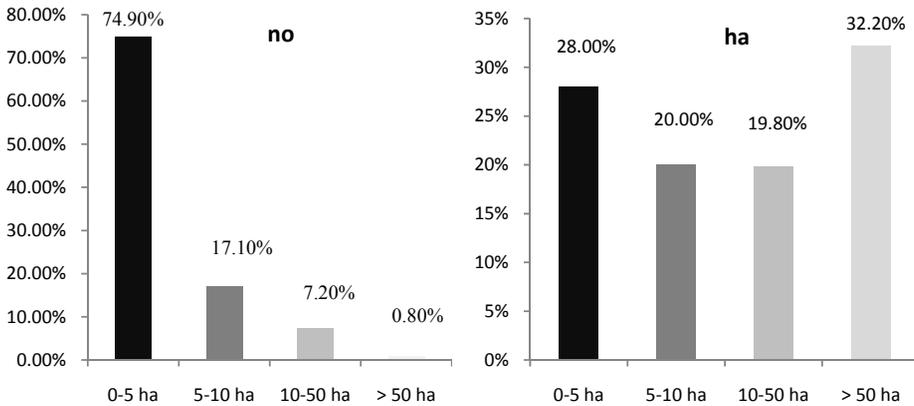
Overall, agricultural holdings in Romania were characterized, after the agrarian Act of 1921, by the following:

- Excessive fragmentation of peasant agricultural property - up to 5 ha - representing three quarters of all holdings;
- Low number of livestock for reproduction and work in households (33% of households had no cattle and 48% had no swine);
- Backward technical endowment and high indebtedness to banks because of the acute lack of capital;
- Excessively young workforce, with high demographic pressure based on latent unemployment;
- Low yields per ha and per animal, very low incomes at the bottom limit of subsistence, and very hard living conditions (Oțiman 1994).

According to some estimates, in 1930 around 10,000,000 peasants were poor and had below 5 ha, 3,000,000 peasants had average incomes and between 5 and 50 ha, and 1,000,000 were considered well-off and had between 50 and 100 ha or even more. The property structure change was determined by the enforcement of Act 194, which anticipated land sales. Most land sales were by newly-endowed peasants.

All this means that both agriculture and peasantry were declining. One of the causes was, on the one hand, the fact that the agrarian reform and other regulations were not implemented, and on the other hand, the world crisis of 1929-1933. In this context, we need to point out that the peasants' purchasing power decreased from one year to another because of the fall in agricultural produce prices and of the increase in production costs and in the price of all industrial products. With smaller and smaller incomes, peasants borrowed money for the payment of land areas, for the purchase of fixed

FIGURE 3. Structure of agricultural holdings by number and size in 1930



assets (livestock, equipment, etc.) and of production supplies (seeds, materials) or for the purchase of more land.

The decrease in incomes and in purchasing power caused an increase of the peasants' debts, so that, in many situations, the debt was higher than the value of the land itself.

Under these conditions, after the beginning of the crisis in 1929, almost 65% of the peasants with properties below 10 ha became insolvent although they owned almost 5,700,000 ha of arable land (Figure 3).

The analysis conducted by specialists on the evolution of agrarian structures after 1930 revealed three important aspects emphasizing the results of the reform of 1918-1921 in Romania:

- The amount of land sold by the new landowners after the agrarian reform was larger than that of the peasants who had been landowners at the time of the reform;
- The sale-purchase of agricultural lands was higher in villages located in the plains than in hill and mountain areas;
- The households newly established after the agrarian reform and those that added land to their household after the reform were subjected to a higher level of fragmentation when compared to households that existed before the reform (Mateoc-Sirb 1999 and Hera 2006).

Thus, the new peasant households were less resistant than those existing before the agrarian reform (Gusti 1938).

The precariousness of households below the level of acceptable holdings caused the development of extensive, cereal-based agriculture.

On the average, cereals accounted for 68-72% of the arable area, and the average yield was much below the ecological potential of Romania's soils in most crops. Analyzing the average yield for wheat and maize in several European countries in the 1930s, we see that Romania ranks at the bottom (Table 3).

The poverty of Romanian peasants is shown by the comparative analysis of social indicators in several European countries that indicate the precariousness of our peasants in the first decades of the 20th century. Romania's population faced huge issues regarding

TABLE 3. Mean wheat and grain maize yields during 1928-1936

Country	Wheat (kg/ha)	Grain maize (kg/ha)
Italy	1,368	1,803
Hungary	1,355	1,319
Yugoslavia	1,181	1,593
Romania	906	1,036

SOURCE: Our own processing by Lazăr, 1944

TABLE 4. Comparison of social indicators (1938)

Country	Share of illiterate people of total population (%)	Infant death rate per 1,000 new-born (%)	Mean life span (years)	
			Women	Men
Great Britain	-	55.5	62.88	58.74
Germany	-	59.8	62.81	59.86
France	3.8	65.6	59.02	54.30
Greece	40.8	99.4	50.89	49.06
Poland	23.1	133.8	51.40	48.20
Bulgaria	31.4	144.4	46.64	45.92
Romania	54.3	182.5	41.40	40.20

SOURCE: Our own processing by Merce 2015, pp. 16

the *infant death rate*, which reached alarming rates; the *average life expectancy*, about 40.2 years for men and 41.4 for women; and the relevant problem of *illiteracy rates*, reaching 54.3% of the total population of Romania in 1938 (Dan 2014) (Table 4).

Therefore, we see that Romanian agriculture between the two world wars was not performing well: it was a subsistence agriculture in which 75% of the holdings of below 5 ha were not capable of ensuring their own existence. Act 18/1991 restored land ownership to all ex-owners or to their heirs (Legea 18/1991).

After World War II, the Agrarian Reform of 1945 made 2,000,000 peasants temporary landowners (for 4-5 years), until the process of collectivization started in 1949.

After the reform, a new agrarian structure was created (Table 5). Private land ownership represented 97.8% of the total agricultural land of Romania in 1945.

In 1945, small holdings (below 5 ha) represented about 91.2% of total holdings and 50.9% of the agricultural land of the country. Only 6.6% of peasant families owned holdings of 5-10 ha, but they held over 5,000,000 ha, i.e. more than 1/3 of the agricultural land of the country. The mean area of a private agricultural household was 2.64 ha per family.

Large holdings with 10-50 ha could be considered “commercial” at the time; after only 5 years, they were declared ‘well-off households’. They represented 1.9% of the total holdings and accounted for 1,800,000 ha of agricultural land.

After the agrarian reform of 1945, households over 50 ha represented only 0.3% of total holdings or about 326,000 ha of agricultural land. The agrarian reform determined an increase of the state sector from 20,000 ha to 176,697 ha, reaching over 2,000,000 ha in 1989.

TABLE 5. Agricultural holdings per size in 1945

Size	Holdings		Agricultural area	
	thousands	%	thousands	%
below 1 ha	2,001.9	36.4	956.5	6.6
1 -3 ha	2,311.1	42.1	3,982.8	27.3
3 -5 ha	697.3	12.7	2,474.4	17.0
5 -10 ha	363.7	6.6	5,020.9	34.4
Total 0 -10 ha	5,374.0	97.8	12,434.6	83.3
10 -20 ha	80.3	1.5	1,096.1	7.5
20 -50 ha	22.7	0.4	723.0	5.0
> 50 ha	15.2	0.3	326.7	2.2
Total	5,492.2	100.0	14,580.5	100.0

SOURCE: Our own processing by Anuarul statistic al României 1948; Madgearu 1940.

The agrarian reform of 1945 caused a new polarization of the agrarian structure of Romania. When we compare it to 1938, the number of holdings increased by about 2,200,000 ha, and the mean area per holding decreased from 6.1 ha in 1930 to 2.65 ha in 1945 (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Agricultural holdings per size during 1930-1945

Size	1930				1945			
	Holdings		Area		Holdings		Area	
	Thousands ha	%						
< 10 ha	3,020.0	92.0	14,838.9	73.7	5,374.0	97.8	12,434.6	86.3
10-100 ha	248.0	7.6	3,195.0	15.9	118.2	2.2	1,495.2	14.7
> 100 ha	12.2	0.4	2,100.0	10.4	-	-	-	-
Total	3,280.0	100.0	20,134.6	100.0	5,492.2	100.0	14,580.5	100.0

SOURCE: Our own processing by Anuarul statistic al României 1948.

The consequences of the agrarian reform of 1945 were complex and numerous for the Romanian rural structure, because landowners who lacked means of production were the first to join the Collective Agricultural Holdings (C.A.H.) established by the Romanian Labour Party (R.L.P.).

The decision to collectivize Romania's agriculture by the Planning Commission of the R.L.P. on 3-5 March 1949 led to the decay of the Romanian village: material and human decay of the Romanian peasants, and the ongoing depopulation of Romanian villages. They destroyed the economic foundations of households, they established compulsory quotas, they deported people to the Bărăgan plains, they deprived many people of their fundamental liberties and they also killed a lot of people.

For instance, the peasant leaders that started an uprising against the Communists in the village of Crișana were shot in the back on the Sunday of 3 August 1949, in

front of the church and of the school and left to rot there for several days to the horror of their relatives who were not allowed to bury them according to the Christian rite, and their families were deported and forced to stay in Bărăgan for 5 years.

These are but a few examples of the horrors perpetrated by the Communists after World War II.

Despite the strong anti-Communist resistance of the peasants in Făgăraș, Argeș, Muscel, Apuseni, Bukovina or Banat Mountains, most were shot or they died in prison and the collectivization was completed in 1962.

The first step in the collectivization of Romania's agriculture was Decree 133 of 21 April 1949 regarding the organization of co-operatives: article 1 of this decree states that co-operatives shall carry out their activities according to a State plan and are an important factor in the struggle to build socialism in the People's Republic of Romania.

Decree 155 of 15 June 1950 provided for the merger and control over agricultural lands: article 12 forbade the sale of land and reserved this right to the Ministry of Agriculture.

On 8 June 1953, Decision no. 1650 of the Council of Ministers approved the right of the state to form a model for the Cooperative Agrarian Holding, or C.A.H. (Giosan 1983).

Article 4 of the Statute stipulated that members should bring in all their land upon joining the C.A.H (HCM 1650/1953)

It is well known that the process of collectivization was a painful one: it caused physical and moral suffering to the Romanian peasants who found it extremely difficult to renounce their lands, their only assets. Starting with 1951, the Communists used force to collectivize. The establishment of "quotas", i.e. amounts of agricultural produce that had to be supplied to the State in an amount impossible to reach led the peasants and their families to starvation. In the first years after the beginning of collectivization, many young people (particularly from Crișana and Banat) used to go working as day laborers to be able to pay the "quotas" and keep their lands for the family. Despite all this, administrative constraints, pressure and the physical repression forced the peasants to give their lands to the C.A.H.

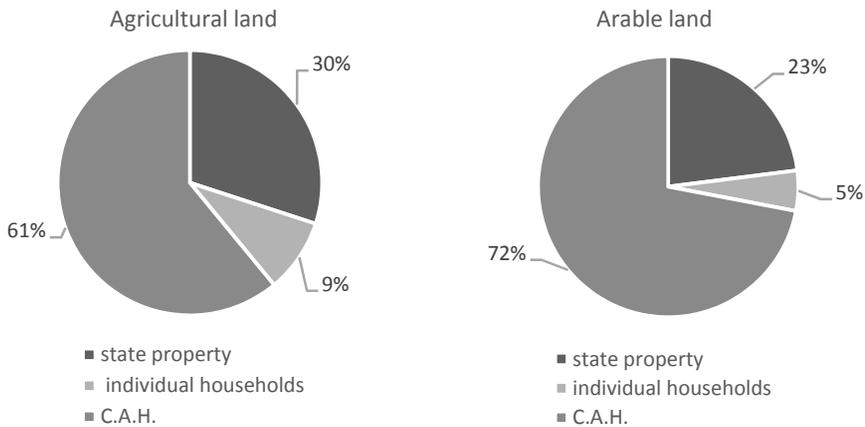
It was a huge ordeal for millions of peasants and their families. Retrospectively, we can say that collectivization also meant the death of the Romanian villages through abandonment and depopulation. Parents sent their children to schools, and the latter never came back to their villages as doctors, teachers, or engineers, preferring to become "urbanites". The poorest young people migrated to towns and cities, learned various trades and got jobs there, colonizing entire neighborhoods and turning into "urban peasants".

According to Bulgaru (1996), the mean size of holdings before 1989 was: 5,015 ha per State Agricultural Holding, 2,825 ha per C.A.H. and 2.34 ha per member of C.A.H. The structure of agricultural areas by form of ownership in 1989 is shown in Figure 4 below.

As for livestock figures, the largest shares were those of the C.A.H. and private sectors. They owned 82% of the cattle, 49.3% of the swine, 76.8% of the sheep, 100% of the goats, 93% of the horses, 42.2% of the poultry, and 90.7% of the beehives.

The collective agriculture system was, in the last years of Communism (before 1989), in crisis: many C.A.H. had, at the end of the year, large financial losses (Mateoc-Sîrb 1999).

FIGURE 4. Structure of agricultural areas per forms of ownership in 1989



The redistribution of private property through the Land Act no. 18/1991 as a result of social movements (the so-called Revolution of 1989) resulted in a large number (over 4,000,000) of individual households or family holdings. They thus created a new structure of agricultural units, dominated by family holdings. The restoration of land ownership on the old settings determined deep changes in Romania's agrarian structure: the return to the agrarian structure of 1938 marked a drastic step back for Rumanian agriculture, which went back in time by more than 50 years.

The share of individual holdings of 2 ha, fragmented into 5-7 plots of below 1 ha, represents today more than half of all the cultivated land.

The enforcement of the Land Act triggered the following processes related to the formation and evolution of private land holdings:

- Establishment of small and very small units of land in private hands. According to communal works, an agricultural area of 9,500,000 ha was distributed to 3,600,000 people with a mean of below 2 ha per family;
- Property redistribution to people not working in agriculture (about 30% of the area) and to elderly people (about 25% of the area); to people capable of agricultural work (about 40-45% of the area);
- Excessive fragmentation of the land lots (about 18-20 million plots) with negative repercussions on the use of irrigation and drainage systems, on soil erosion control, and the use of mechanized techniques leading to higher production costs;
- Increased use of part-time workers because of the small size of the holdings and the decrease in income from agriculture.

All these processes created difficulties in agricultural production and in the competitiveness of agricultural holdings, putting at risk their viability and even the food security of the nation. This is why determining the optimal size of agricultural holdings has been essential for their good functioning but this problem has never been solved.

Without the Communist experience, the Romanian peasants might have been farmers comparable with those of the developed countries of Western Europe, our com-

petitors on the food market of the European Union. Romania might have been an exporter and not an importer of food.

Today, we are members of the European Union, like France, Italy, and Denmark, but the level of development of the Romanian economy is far from that of these countries. Peasant agricultural holdings are as poor as they were 100 years ago. Private-family agricultural holdings are far from what they should be. Support for Romanian peasants after 1990 was precarious or even inexistent, and most Romanian villages are stricken by poverty.

The causes behind the major deficiencies in rural development and the lack of technical and economic progress in agriculture include: the lack of investments, defective management, the lack of a commercial infrastructure of production factors for agricultural holdings, agricultural trade companies, and processing SMEs, as well as major deficiencies in the management of the storage-processing-marketing chains for produce (the functioning of agricultural markets).

Numerous congresses, conferences and oral debates warn the civilized world that it has the obligation to revive the rural area through global policies.

Will Romania meet its responsibility, together with other European countries, to renew and revitalize the rural world? We can say, without fear of being wrong, that the development of our country is determined by the people of the rural areas.

To do so, we all need to fight for the recognition, preservation, renewal, development and endowment of the Romanian peasant and of the Romanian village: this is why we need to love our lands, our villages, and our peasants, and to start to helping them. Modernizing agriculture and the rural economy should be a priority based on the economic and social functions of the food system: ensuring a balanced nutrition for the population (and, therefore, food security), the necessary raw materials for non-agricultural activities and an active, profitable export of food products, increased landscaping capital, and the protection of the environment. At the same time, the rural economy in general, and agriculture in particular, is a huge market for upstream and downstream agricultural branches contributing directly to their development and to the development of agriculture and other related sectors, like forestry (Steriu 2013).



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Abstract

The Evolution of Romanian Villages Since the Great Union of 1918

This paper presents an analysis of the Romanian village and of the condition of its peasants from the Great Union of 1918 up to present day, seen through the prism of important events in Romania's history and of the writings of some of our great thinkers. The specialist literature indicates that all agrarian reforms in Romania, starting with Al. I. Cuza's reform of 1864 and ending with the agrarian reform implemented after 1991, had the same major deficiency: the peasants were granted land but no means of production, which prevented them from developing and consolidating their own households. Romania's agrarian issues have never been solved, neither 100 years ago nor today, and consequently the Romanian peasant is still poor and Romanian villages are still depopulated, as history repeats itself. This paper presents the causes of continuing poverty in rural areas and of village depopulation. Romania currently faces two major problems: a drastic population decrease and a demographic imbalance caused by the increase in the ageing population – both mainly in rural areas.

Keywords

agriculture, analysis, demographics, depopulation, factors, rural, poverty