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## **5 CRITICAL STATUS OF RURAL ROMANIA**

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### ***5.1 Economical and administrative organization of rural Romania***

Romania has a registered number of 13 123 villages administratively grouped in 2 668 communes. The number of villages within communes varies between one and 40. Thus, 8 % of Romania's communes consist of only one village being the economic and administrative centre. In several mountaineous areas with dispersed settlements, such as the Apuseni Mountains or the western slope of Retezat-Godeanu in the Southern Carpathians, the number of villages often exceeds 20. Thus, at the upper limit stands the commune of Cornereva in the Caras-Severin department with 40 villages. The average number of villages per commune in Romania is 4.85.

The rural territory represents 213 750 km<sup>2</sup>, which is 90 % of the national territory. The rural population amounts 10.4 millions (Jan. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1992), representing 45.6 % of the nation.

The average surface of a village is 1 625 ha. The average number of inhabitants per commune is 4 245 and the average per village amounts 875 persons.

Communes and villages widely differ by their demographic potential. Thus, the ratio between the lower and the upper limits is 1 : 15 for communes and 1 : 250 for villages.

The administrative organization of rural areas was promoted under conditions of relative concordance between the communal surfaces, the demographic potential and the major relief units of the national geographic territory (mountains, hills, plateaus and plains). Usually, the territorial surface of communes is reduced in the plains, while the demographic potential is high, due to fertile and highly efficient soils. In the hilly and subcarpathian areas, especially in mountain regions, communal surfaces are very large; the demographic potential is lower, closely related to the fertility of the soils.

As a rule, in plains the administrative territory of communes follows geometrical patterns, e.g. hexagons and squares, whilst in hilly and mountaineous areas, the oblong pattern is dominating. This corresponds with different orographic conditions as well as the different ecological potential (arable land in the lower parts, fruit- and wine-growing and hayfields in the medium parts, forestry and

pastures in the higher zones). The most expressive example are the communes of the Retezat-Godeanu Mountains, mainly within the boundaries of Gorj department.

Concerning the relations between villages and their superposed market centres we consider fairly reduced geographical distances but also great disadvantages because of precarious conditions of communal roads, often impassable by automobiles during rainy seasons.

As second rank administrative units<sup>1</sup>, the communes are managing the economic life of the incorporated villages, registering the economic phenomenon at communal level. The registered data are subsequently being made public, the only official source of documentation. Such a pattern is highly inefficient, providing no information on the real share of each village to the total economic potential of the commune.

The importance of the rural areas for Romania can be assessed by examining the display of some relevant statistic information. Thus, almost 3 million persons are engaged in primary activities, representing 30.7 % of the employed population. The contribution of agriculture in the accomplishment of the Internal Raw Product (I.R.P.) is about 18 %. Agriculture has had and still has a leading role in the equilibrium of external payments. Thus, in 1985, the weight of agricultural exports was 77 % of the whole export value, decreasing to 22 % in 1990.

## ***5.2 The agricultural background of rural Romania***

In Romania the state, cooperatives and private proprietors are the main users of the land. The State Agricultural Enterprises (SAE) are using the land of the Rumanian Republic according to farming patterns. SAE take a large share on high mechanization indexes, more advanced agro-technical use and generally practise an intensive agriculture by large investments in mechanizing labour. SAE own approximately 20 % of the nation's farmland. The usual payment is in money.

The cooperative principle in the economic organization began to predominate in 1962. For the time being, it is still the most widespread type of farming, accounting for as much as 70 % of the farm land. The working hand is gathered in Agricultural Production Cooperatives (APC), each village in the cooperative sector being the headquarters of an APC. The work is, at least theoretically and on the staff, organized in brigades, made at their turn of working teams.

Practically, in the majority of cases, these organizational patterns are not operative. The general practice is parcelling between families and other working hands who work on the parcels individually. The payment is in kind. In the animal-growing sector, the mixed payment - in farm products and money - is also

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1 First rank units are formed by departments.

customary. The cooperative farmers are also provided with the so-called "additional parcels", some 25 to 30 acres, which are mainly the gardens within the village precincts, actually a heritage. These parcels are the true economical support of cooperative farmers.

The private proprietors amount 16 % of the active farming population of the country, i.e. 5.9 % of the entire active population, according to the main social categories (50 % industrial workers, 25.5 cooperative farmers, 5.9 % individual farmers, 13.9 % intellectuals and functionaries).

Individual farmers own 4.9 % of the national farming land, 15.8 % of orchards and 45 % of hayfields, the last equalling the APC propriety. This synthetic picture reflects the predominance of individual farms in the mountainous and hilly areas with less arable land and more orchards and hayfields.

The marginalization of individual farming and the uncertainty of propriety rights discouraged to the highest degree the investments and promotion of advanced agrotechniques. Moreover, the parcels are not consolidated, being subdivided and dispersed throughout the village precincts, hence the difficult access to the land and little cooperation of villagers. This is the result of parcelling by inheritance, the initial lot being subdivided by more heirs. This system's only advantage is the reduced risk of having the whole farming land on soils with low natural fertility.

Presently, the transfer towards private propriety unfolds slowly the real dimension of the lack of capital, modern farming technique and working hand. According to our opinion, the transition to a free market agriculture must not follow the pattern of land appropriation at the beginning of the postwar period. The parcelling must take into account the need for allotting the land to each farmer, who should independently decide on the structure and volume of the production he plans, according to the market demand.

There still remains a problem of uncertainty: the working hand. The restructuring of industry and services according to principles of rentability may provide the working hand that the Romanian agriculture acutely needs, the premises for a true revigoration of Romanian village life.

### ***5.3 Development after the Second World War***

After 1945 the normal (usual) evolution of our countryside has been changed radically as a consequence of the following political and implicitly economic stages:

- compensation of the postwar period (1945-1956);
- mass collectivization (1956-1962);
- period of forced industrialization (1963-1984);
- period of forced liquidation of debts (1985-1989);
- structural decompensation of rural areas (December 1989 up to nowadays).

After the breakdown of the political system in December 1989, the financial balance of Romania showed a surplus of about 4.5 billion dollars. As mentioned before, the contribution of agriculture to the liquidation of debts was absolutely decisive.

The forced industrialization stage had the most negative effects in rural areas, particularly because of a huge emigration to the great centres. Within the interval 1948-1977, rural Romania lost more than 5.12 million persons, this is almost one third of the total population (taken as an average of this period)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1: Characteristic demographic conditions in rural Romania**

Before 1940	In present times (~1990)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• young demographic structure</li> <li>• higher birth and death rates</li> <li>• a moderate matrimonial level</li> <li>• a larger family size due to historical traditions</li> <li>• a rather low level of divorces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extremely overaged rural population</li> <li>• a higher birth and death rate than in the urban areas</li> <li>• a very low matrimonial level</li> <li>• smaller family size due to a low standard of living</li> </ul>

Source: V. Trebici (1985)

The present crisis of rural areas has different causes such as political, structural, topological, sanitary conditions or public utilities, with complementary effects among these conditions.

The abolishment of the communist political system in December 1989 had an explosive impact upon the rural: The lack of a coherent strategy of promotion towards a new economic and political order on behalf of those who took over the power, created a general chaos.

The most serious stroke for the rural economy was the premeditated separation of the working objects from the production means (the land passed over to the peasants), while the mechanized labour capacity (mostly the tractors) remained in the state ownership. So a rather poorly mechanized agriculture (71 ha land per tractor) has been obviously isolated from its vital support. Besides this major drawback, the reform acted upon a rural area free of farmers, a situation which has been strengthened since 1985. This situation also gave place to the joke which says that in 1907 the peasants were "crying for land" and in 1990 the land was "crying for peasants".

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<sup>2</sup> Matei I. Mihailescu (1985).

In 1990, from 10.6 million persons living in rural communities, the real peasantry represented 34.9 %, the category of worker-peasants 47.1 %, intellectuals and office workers 6.6 % and other categories 11.2 %. The number of tractors diminished by almost 14 000 (13 831; compared to 1980). The national production of fertilizers decreased heavily, from 1 113 000 tons (1980) to 463 700 tons (1991) and the quantity of manures available for agriculture decreased from 25 to 17 million tons within the same period.

Between 1980 and 1991 also tractor ploughs have decreased from 103 137 to 73 384, mechanic seeders from 48 970 to 34 988 and pulled combines for fodder harvesting from 16 876 to 2 627.

#### ***5.4 Elements of the critical situation***

On the background of the "demographic status" and of the "degrading technical equipment" several aspects have been emphasized:

- abandoning of modern agricultural usages acknowledged in the economically advanced countries;
- abandoning of large irrigating systems in the south of our country and in Dobrogea county;
- not taking into account the annual agricultural circuit in some important areas (concerning approximately 3 million hectares in 1991);
- demolition and unselective alienation of mobile and immobile goods which belonged to former agricultural units (these practices remind us of those carried out by Bolsheviks in 1917 when the Russian railways were destroyed pretending that they were constructed in the bourgeois regime);
- chaotic and wild clearing, including critical ecological areas (according to the information delivered by press, more than 50 000 ha of woodland have been erased only in 1991);
- excessive dispersion of land by regaining agricultural land which has been in private hands before collectivization.

The rural area in Romania has been "emptied" by its vital element, by the young population. The average age of the rural population exceeds 50 years while the industrial population is about 35 years old. The overaged and exhausted remaining generation has been outliving two negative checks:

- the land deprivation period and systematic collectivization;
- the present check of decollectivization leading to a widespread helplessness in regaining the former private land.

The present "rural landscape" is preserved by joining together and "interweaving" of three sacrificed generations:

- the first, consisting of the old farmers who outlived war and collectivization, unable to readjust the economic life of rural areas;
- the second, worker-peasants (today's and yesterday's commuters), physically exhausted by their status of two-job-men;
- the third, the young and numerically small generation is lacking the necessary experience and economic power demanded by the setting up of a new "private agricultural system".

Another critical situation rises out of the excessive crumbling of land properties and the return to old extensive and traditional agricultural practices. According to calculations concerning the socio-economic conditions in several villages of the Transsilvanian hill depression, we found out that almost half of the fuel used by machinery has been spent on removing them from one place to another. Under these circumstances each tractor is displaced over more than 450 km per year. The return to animal driven tools remind us of agricultural practices in countries we usually call "the third world". The horned cattle used for agricultural work has a considerable lower milk production, a fact which has negative impacts on the nourishing capacity of the population as well as on the budget of the rural families.

According to some general calculations which do not claim to be excessively rigorous, Romania suffers from the loss of approximately 50 billion dollars in the rural economy during the last three years (1990 to 1992).

Besides this critical status, rural Romania faces also topological deficiencies. They consist of the dispersion and excessive scattering of households, most of them belonging to settlements in the rural periphery, situations which lead to excessive expenditures for equipment. In order to endow a household of the "hodăi"<sup>3</sup> category, situated on the Transsilvanian plateau, so as to become modern, the following things are necessary: 2.7 km of roads, 1.9 km of telephone lines, 1.9 km of circuit lines, 1.9 km of water pipe. The costs of these requirements are approximately 10 000 dollars at present prices<sup>4</sup>. If we take into consideration the reorganization of the interior of households, the sum would increase heavily.

The critical status of public utilities in Romania lies in the overendowment of the vital communal centres and in poor communication facilities. To all this we must add the poor quality of public services in most of the rural settlements. Although the modernizing of public utilities amounts to 60-70 %, the newly set up houses do not meet the required degree of comfort and facilities.

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<sup>3</sup> This term means "scattered settlements".

<sup>4</sup> Anm. d. Red.: Die hier angegebenen "Kosten" sind nicht nachvollziehbar. Die Überlegung des Autors könnte folgendermaßen aussehen: 10.000 Dollar entsprechen gegenwärtig (Feb. 1994) etwa 200 Monatsgehältern, bei hoch bewerteter Westwährung also etwa 4 Millionen Schilling. Mit einer solchen Summe ließe sich in Rumänien freilich etwas anfangen ...

Theoretically, for a linkage of all rural settlements by at least one single - but fairly usable - road, there must be modernized 60 000 km (95 % of 62 990 km) at the country's level.

Furthermore, a high subsistence level of agricultural households is significant, one could even say, an excessive economic autarchy is a fact. This situation hardly can be abandoned. The lack of fluent and quick commercial activities capable to support the economic complementarity of different geographic areas (against the background of specific historical factors), really favours the promotion of autarchy in the private agricultural economy, with negative effects on quality and efficiency of production, as well as the organization and hygiene of the households.

We must finally mention the sanitary and hygienic conditions in the countryside. Running water is missing in about 90 % of 5 million rural households. The number of doctors serving the rural population is about one tenth of that in urban areas. The personal hygienic practices like those in advanced countries are replaced by insufficient traditions calling for abandonment.

A poor and one-sided nourishing behaviour, especially in mountain regions, completes the critical situation of rural Romania as a whole. A realistic reorganization of the rural areas, following modern and efficient agricultural and nutrition models, leads seriously to the implementation of radical methods of restructuring in most regions. We must radically stop the rural "drain system" in the whole country.