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## Problems of Bulgarian Agriculture and Rural Space

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### Abstract

Nowadays Bulgaria experiences a difficult transition from totalitarian system into market economy. The main element of these changes is the agrarian reform, whose basis is the restore of the private property on the land. The process is going with different speed in time and space. There is a decrease in production and standard of living. Very serious problems are depopulation, backwardness in the development of the peripheral spaces and hill/highlands. A lot of conflicts impeding development of rural spaces and settlements are analyzed. It is offered elaboration of special regional policy for rural space and as a basis of economy should be agribusiness.

In the nineties of this century Bulgarian society experiences a radical change: from socialism and totalitarian economy to democracy and market economy. Most affected are agriculture and rural space where it has the leading role in the economy. Probably the most difficult part of Bulgarian transition is the agrarian reform. This is closely connected with the problems of the national food supply, respectively with the process of social and ecological changes in the countryside.

### Bulgarian agrarian reform goes slowly

On one side of the reform are the reform are the owners of agricultural land who are, in fact, adult people. Now they live mainly in towns and are very often away from the land they should come into

possession. The number of proprietors has increased since they are heirs of the owners who have lost their land from the socialist system during the forties and fifties. People travel around the country to get their land back and notary acts and to define the surface and borders of the parcels. That's why this is a huge and difficult process. Agrarian reform acts require to the geography of holdings during the 50s. One can say this is socially fair, but nowadays scientists raise questions whether Bulgaria will have in this way a modern agriculture? Sure not, because if the agrarian reform ends with land return only, than the average size of a parcel (field, garden) will be under 1 ha. Most of the owners will have less than 5 ha which in most cases are dispersed into 5-10-15 pieces through the settlement land. The return of the land is a slow, a political process. According to information of Ministry of agriculture, forestry and agrarian reform by middle of April 1998 are restored scarcely 19.1% of APL (Agriculturally Productive Land). Finished plans for re-parceling have 30.4% of APL. But about 1/5 of them are under objection of the new owners and these plans should be checked up and corrected. Legal documents of ownership on the agrarian land are available only for 15 % of APL. Now owners who have temporary documents from the Community Land Commissions cultivate rest of the lands. The projects aim is returning 5,585.5 thousand hectares.

### Agrarian production is still stagnating

Some low fertility mountain land, vineyards and orchards are not cultivated and have been turned into wasteland. Their rate amounts to 10-15% as a

whole. The single owners and their families cultivate rest of the lands. Bulgaria has no tradition in using the word "farmer" and the Bulgarian agriculture is much poorer than the farmer agriculture of the West. The small size of holdings is the reason for the agricultural co-operatives revival in Bulgaria. These new co-operatives are different: some include the full cycle of agrarian production, others are created only for common use of agricultural machinery. It is going a process of a weak integration between producers and industrial companies or merchants of draft contracts.

**New problems to deal with**

Undoubtedly, Bulgarian agriculture, the rural settlements and rural space have many other problems - social, economic, ecological etc. How do these problems effect the rural space, rural settlements and its spatial organization as well? It should be add that Bulgarian villages in some aspects are much more strongly affected by the crisis than cities and only by food supply or by clear air they have principal advantages.

Bulgarian villages develop under different social conditions. There is a marked difference between them according to the distance to the nearest town and especially to the large administrative and economic centers. The best positions to development have the villages of periurbane zones where as the remote villages are threatened to disappear.

By an averages of density of population in Bulgaria of 78 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, in the west and south border communities density figures drop to 10-15. If regional policy does not take strong measures, in 15-20 years the mountain space of Bulgaria would suffer a strong depopulation. In this respect a new law of hill and mountain spaces is to be passed by the Bulgarian Parliament.

The main negative factors for rural development are the incomes and their structures, as well to the personal expenditure structure. The ratio between working men of countryside and those in towns amounts about 44:56 in benefit of urban worker. Here are the differences of income structure (in %):

**Table 1.**

| Indicators                    | Towns | Villages |
|-------------------------------|-------|----------|
| Incomes from wages            | 61.9  | 37.5     |
| Incomes from pensions         | 17.5  | 29.8     |
| Incomes from home agriculture | 1.3   | 16.1     |
| Other incomes                 | 19.3  | 6.6      |

A clear indicator for a difference in quality of life is the expenditure structure between town and village inhabitants (in %):

**Table 2.**

| Indicators                                  | Towns | Villages |
|---|-------|----------|
| Food expenditures                           | 45.0  | 49.3     |
| Spirits expediters                          | 1.7   | 2.1      |
| Tobacco expenditures                        | 2.3   | 2.0      |
| Dwelling expenditures                       | 13.1  | 11.1     |
| Personal expenditures: dress, shoes, health | 12.5  | 9.2      |
| Education expenditures: leisure             | 3.7   | 2.0      |
| Transportation and communications           | 7.8   | 5.6      |
| Others                                      | 13.9  | 18.7     |

## *Problems of Bulgarian Agriculture and Rural Space*

The lack of economic conditions for a sustainable development of young families is an important factor for a bad demographic situation. Nowadays is very difficult to find a village with an increasing population. In the middle of the nineties the natural increases are 3.8 per 1000 by 0.7 in towns and 10.4 in the countryside. The unemployment rate amounts to 10-15%.

Despite the problems, the agriculture turns to be the main and some times the only source of income for small and middle-sized town residents. There still exists an illusion that Bulgarian agriculture dispose on sufficiently labor force and that is who little attention is paid to its skill level. Even in the largest cities some residents produce agricultural products during their year vocation. At the end of the summer and at the beginning of autumn even in the capital city one can see people conserving food for the winter season.

Agriculture and forestry contribute now 11% of GDP.

### **Perspectives: new changes are expected**

What kinds of changes from geographical point of view are typical of the Bulgarian agriculture and how will they reflect on the rural space and settlement development? Here we will make a short comment.

- Generally during the last years is observed a stop of decrease in agricultural production. In 1998 or next year it is expected the first increasing in agricultural production since the mid 80s. The mentioned decrease mostly affected the agriculture of the hilly and mountain spaces, therefore the ratio of agricultural output of lowlands is going up. Production costs are lower there and on principal the production is cheaper. But this competition destroys the basis of the mountain economy and the rural spaces are on the doorstep of crises.

- Unfortunately the concentration of agricultural production in lowlands has no connections with periurbane agriculture. Over 2/3 of Bulgaria population live in town and over 30% in the largest cities with over 100 thousand inhabitants. The agriculture of the periurbane zone has lost a part of its specialization and the radius of meat, milk, vegetables and fruit deliveries has increased very much. There is a need of a rapid organization of modern periurbane agriculture.

- In Bulgaria are expected about 1.7-2.3 million people to become land owners, including of the state, church, communities and citizens. Their heirs are minimum 4-5 millions by 8.2-8.3 million inhabitants of this country. Bulgarian laws permit a

minimal size of one parcel to be 0.1-0.3 hectares (field, garden or pasture). It is expected that the average owner in Bulgaria will receive about 3 hectares land, divided usually into 5-15 pieces. This will make the future holdings economically ineffective. The outlook is encourage of land market (still unsolved problem), state support of co-operatives and establishment of corporation companies and also passing a Land Consolidation Act by Bulgarian Parliament.

### **References**

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