

The Reform of Agricultural Policy in Romania

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Abstract

In majority of world's countries, regardless the size and the level of development, the state promotes a certain agricultural policy. This represents a fundamental component of the economical policy, but it contains also social policy measures.

With an important geo strategic position, a purposeful rural space and a population in the rural areas representing 40 percents from the whole country population, Romania is now the second biggest agricultural producer from the Central and Eastern Europe (after Poland). About 60 percent from the country territory is used for agricultural production and about 30 percent for forestry.

In the frame of Romania's adhesion to the European Union, the enforcements in applying a rural development program in the Romanian agriculture are linked by: the high percentage of agriculture in time and in the employed population, the subsistence character of the familial agricultural ranch, the weak development of the specialized agricultural markets, the lack of legislation regarding orientation and development of the agricultural markets, the lack of a real land market, the insufficiency of the finance sources for rural credit, and the capital entrance relatively restricted.

The reform of agricultural policy supposes a higher orientation toward the market an increasing of competitiveness regarding the agricultural products quality, the stabilization of agricultural incomes, the integration of the medium term objectives in the frame of agricultural policy, the continuous rural development, the simplifying and the decentralization in the agricultural policy area.

Keywords: reform, agricultural policy, competitiveness, rural development.

Introduction

When drafting this paper, I started from the idea according to which the Romanian agriculture faces an imminent process of modernization and growth that meets the requirements of the European Committee. The scientific approach was meant to point out its characteristics and particularities and to analyse the available statistic data, in order to reach some conclusions on the future development of the Romanian agriculture, as a EU member state.

Agriculture represents an important field for both Romania and the E.U. It is also an important economic sector considering its labor and GDP shares.

Agriculture contributes to the economic development, as an equilibrium factor that harmonizes the domestic economic development and settles the social conflicts generated by the alimentary problem. Agriculture

development favors the economic growth of different sectors and contributes to ensuring national independence and security.

Romania is the second large agricultural producer in Central and Eastern Europe (after Poland), with its important geo-strategic position, extended rural areas and 45% rural population. Agriculture uses about 60% of total land, and forestry about 30% of it. The agricultural share of total European Union area-15 is 40.6%, and in case of integration, the share in EU average-27 is 44%. In Romania, the arable land represented 63.4% of total agricultural area in 2002. This represents 11.3% of EU-15 arable land and 7.8% of EU-27 arable land. The Romanian agricultural production real value was stable during the transition period, lacking the relative decline of other countries in transition. The rich cultural patrimony and the rural tourism offer provide the premises of income increase in this sector (C. Angelescu, I. Stanescu, 2001).

Favorable development factors of Romanian agriculture

The crop production and consequently the food for population depend on land. Therefore the agriculture is directly and indirectly connected to land, as means of work and important capital element. Romania's agricultural area in 2004 consisted in 14,711.6 thousand hectares, out of which 14,057.6 thousand hectares private property.

Thus most of Romanian agricultural land is private property. According to the Land Fund Law No. 18/ 1991, the lands were receded to their previous owners or to their successors. They have now the titles of property and other rights for the respective lands.

The agricultural holdings in the European Union member states cover 128.69 million hectare agricultural area, out of which 57% arable land, 35% permanent pastures and 8% permanent cultures (vineyards, orchards, etc.). Compared to the European Union, Romania has a higher rate of arable land, a lower rate of vineyards and orchards, and a similar rate of pastures and hayfields. Romania's agricultural land represents 10.8% of total European Union agricultural land.

The agricultural holding area per citizen is 0.23 ha in the European Union and 0.42 ha per citizen in Romania. This considerable value and the fertile soils should arouse the interest of the Romanian decision authorities in agriculture.

Also Romania has 40% of the European flora and fauna and the forests cover 25% of total land. The climate provides a favorable background for a sustainable agriculture. However, uneven precipitation and temperature variations affect some southern regions that lack humidity (C. Socol, 2004, p.127).

The water resources, essential for agriculture, come from precipitation and irrigation systems. As precipitation is insufficient in some southern regions, the irrigation systems substitute this deficit. Irrigations generate surplus crops and stabilize productivity, resulting an efficient livestock rising.

In 1990, Romania had 3,215.4 million hectares irrigated lands (21% of total agricultural area), out of which 2,931.9 million hectares irrigated arable land (31% of total arable land). After 1990, most

part of these irrigation systems were destroyed, and most present irrigated lands need technical repair works. At the beginning of 2005, the real irrigated area was 327.3 thousand hectares, representing 2.2% of total agricultural area. Though irrigations require high investments, they are extremely efficient in increasing crop production, compared to the other factors involved. If there were modern irrigation systems and the state subsidized the irrigation water, the cost of such agricultural products would be lower than those produced without irrigation.

Romania's forest potential is strength (26.7% of the national territory). The high share of deciduous forests (64.1%) of high economic value and the virgin forests unique in Europe (about 50,000 hectares) make this sector more important. High quality forest fruits and mushrooms, fishing and hunting are other potential fields that may attract financial sources in the rural areas(A.Păunescu,2006,p.34-35).

Regarding the human resources, about 45% of total population inhabits the rural areas, and the active rural population share exceeds 57%. The migration directions have changed lately and the rural population has increased. A comparative advantage of Romanian agriculture is the high number of agriculture specialists with medium and higher studies (over 6,000), meaning 500 ha agricultural land per specialist.

The major risks for the agricultural labor are: the ageing and feminization phenomena, the low education degree, the lack of stable income due to the seasonal work in agriculture. Part of the landowners that benefited by the Law No. 18/ 1991 could be named "weekend landowners".

The population decrease in agriculture may be the result of the rural economy general development, the agricultural productivity increase and the development of other economic sectors that attract the labor; also the rural population was encouraged to run other activities, as processing and marketing the agricultural products, infrastructure, rural tourism, etc.

Restrictive development factors of the Romanian agriculture

One of the restrictive factors of a sustainable agriculture is the capital. The Romanian agriculture has some deficiencies: the production capacity is old, the park of tractors and agricultural machines is 75% old, the capital market and agricultural credits are lacking (generating farm highly impaired assets)(C.Socol,2004, p.127).

Achieving competitive and higher quality agricultural products means to make the agricultural works on time and to supply tractors and agricultural machines in a necessary quantity, quality and structure for a modern agriculture.

The park of tractors and agricultural machine reduced considerably after 1990, but it has been recovered lately. The level of 1985 could not be achieved because: a) the tractors were sold during the first transition years to some economic agents or individuals that had no connection with the agriculture; this was the result of S.M.A.s and I.A.S.s change into companies, or C.A.P.s liquidation; b) the integral liquidated tractors were not used anymore; c) the new agricultural equipment was insufficient, as the investment fund was insufficient

for both agricultural state and private enterprises (A. Paunescu, 2006, p.41).

The changing number of tractors and agricultural machines determined changes of the agricultural area per tractor: 86 hectares and 56 hectare arable land per tractor in 2004. The present agricultural park is not sufficient to satisfy the increasing need for tractors and agricultural machines, considering the average load of 30-35 ha per tractor in our country. The value for the European Union is 10-11 hectare arable land and 18 hectare agricultural land per tractor.

Regarding their quality, the tractors and agricultural machines in Romanian have two main characteristics: a) high usage, most of them exceeding 8 year usage; b) the improper structure of the agricultural holdings resulted from the Land Fund Law. This has negative effects on agricultural work, on their timing and quality. Add the repairs to old tractors and combines that imply high costs and make the machine unusable for a while.

In case of the rural infrastructure, only 54% villages have direct access to the national road, rail or airway networks; more than half rural roads are unpaved; the fresh water supply represents 38.4% of total national water supply; the rural sewerage system represents only 5.6% total; almost 20% of total villages benefit by the natural gas distribution network.

In addition, the Romanian villages have a small number of schools, cultural institutions and health centers. Beside agriculture, the villagers are involved in other non-agricultural economic activities that could be extended in order to increase their incomes: beekeeping, sericulture, ceramics, pottery, wood and wool processing, etc. Many Romanian villages may be attracted into an integrated program of rural tourism promotion.

The implementation constraints of a rural development program in the Romanian agriculture are connected to: the high agriculture shares of GDP and employed population, the subsistence family farms, the weak development of some specialized markets, the lack of legislation regarding the agricultural market development and directing, the lack of a real land market, the insufficient financing sources for rural credits, the relative low capital inputs.

Other restrictive factors of a sustainable agriculture development are the following:

- the phenomenon of uneven structuring in the agro-alimentary economy generated a separation between the crop and animal production, the agriculture and alimentary production, the agro-alimentary sector and the rest of economy;
- the predominant cereal character of the Romanian agricultural production has negative influences (crops are two or three times smaller compared to the developed countries of Western Europe);
- more job opportunities provided by the sector of forestry and wood industry;
- the small subsistence agricultural holdings (less than 3 ha) still have an important share (72%) and the large agricultural holdings (more than 10 ha) have a small share (0.3%);

- the rural development financing Program SAPARD agreed with the European Union values 53 million Euro yearly;
- the credit negotiated with the World Bank and guaranteed by the Romanian Government values 150 million dollars yearly; it targets the commercial banks to supplement the SAPARD financing sources;
- there are possibilities to grow ecological agricultural products, based exclusively on natural conditions (C. Socol, 2004, p.129).

Agricultural policy objectives in Romania

The fundamental objectives of the agricultural policy should be compatible with the European Union agricultural structures, simultaneously with the gradual implementation of PAC mechanisms.

Romania's advantageous integration in the European structures should meet at least two requirements: the structures should be compatible to the European ones and the performance should maintain the position on the common market. These performances cannot be achieved without developing and improving the agricultural structures. Romania does not have the rich countries' resources or a top management experience to develop the most performable agricultural structures in short time. Therefore it is necessary to sequence the objectives and to use efficiently the available resources.

The slow rhythm of structural changes in Romania is determined by some disadvantages that could be overcome only by efficient economic mechanisms based on a legislative background adapted to the starting level; these stages and objectives should rely on financial and social support (A.Paunescu, 2006, p.52).

Agricultural policy and rural development

Through specific public policies, the Romanian Government intends to achieve the following objectives:

- 1 Finalizing the reform of landed property by:** ending the process of land reversion using the lands of the Agency of State Domains; privatizing the lands remained after this action and fair compensations if the reversion cannot be done in kind; finalizing the legal background and starting the process of fair compensation for the buildings, agricultural and forest lands that could not be receded in kind; monitoring the landed property reversion; tabulating all agricultural and forest areas outside cities, including those resulted from coming out of severalties, introducing unity cadastre at the state's expense; passing the forest roads and other assets (forest ranges, tree nurseries) situated on the receded forest lands into the property of forest owners' associations; clarifying the land inheritance procedures.
- 2 Stimulating the individual farms to turn into agricultural and commercial family farms, forming and strengthening the rural middle class**
- 3** In addition to the support policies for all agricultural holdings, the following measures will be put into operation: the state budget will support the tax expenses for agricultural land sales and barter, and paper expenses; promoting a National Program of Investments in new animal or crop farms, or consolidating the existing farms; this program should target especially the young families; ensuring a lifelong ground rent equaling 100 Euro yearly

per hectare sold to a person aged at least 60, or 50 Euro yearly per hectare owned by a person aged at least 60 that gives up working his land in favor of a registered agricultural holding.

- 4 **Assigning efficiently the budget resources to support the agricultural producers by:** subsidizing the selected seeds, plant and seminal material, or improved genetic seminal material; granting subsidies to improve the quality of the genetic material used for heifers, sows, calf, sheep, lambs, rams; maintaining the direct support, bonuses and subventions for the basis agricultural products on the market; encouraging the production for short crops: industrial crops, sugar beet, bio-ecological and rotation crops, in order to restore the land agricultural potential and to produce specific Romanian competitive crops; subsidizing the insurance bonuses and paying the damages for natural disasters or wild animal induced injuries; supporting the costs for animal marking and identifying, supervising treatments; supporting a national program, divided for local communities, to control and diminish soil erosion; supporting the forest works for the private forests; amending the Law regarding the agricultural credit by creating a unity system to access both production and investment credits; setting the gas excise tax for agricultural works to a legislated value in the European Union.
- 5 **Supporting the agricultural production valuation through market measures:** amending the market Law so that it includes unitarily all state intervention mechanisms and the insuring sources for financing limits; the producers should be keep informed with the bonuses and subsidies, the products and their quantities involved, as well as their distribution, before the agricultural year begins;
- 6 using the minimum guaranteed price for basis agricultural products (wheat, milk, meat); supporting agricultural and timber exchange development; extending the wholesale market network; developing the offer of forest goods and services, other than timber; encouraging the public-private partnership to purchase basis agricultural products.
- 7 **Village development and modernization.** The Government will apply the rural development policies by: promoting a financial policy that allow family agricultural holdings and rural communities to access the international financing programs, in order to use entirely the structural funds for rural development; improving agricultural and fish product processing and marketing; developing and diversifying the economic activities that generate multiple activities and alternative incomes; assigning funds for the rural communities to provide conditions to attract teachers, health and veterinary personnel; continuing the rural water supply works and starting the national program of sewage and filter stations in villages and recent declared towns (that do not have a urban infrastructure); implementing the national program for rural road asphalt pavement, by developing the national program for rural road rock pavement; developing the local development plans in 4 years time and integrating them in the county and regional development plans in order to facilitate investments in rural infrastructure; correlating the rural territory development plans with the development projects of agricultural and public services (education, health, social assistance, culture and religion), as well as the public utilities (water, gas and sewage systems, sewage, waste collection); stimulating alternative activity development: traditional professions, non-agricultural activities and services; encouraging rural tourism and ecological production; economic evaluation of the

- peripheral and deprived rural areas in order to develop local development plans.
- 8 The purpose of these measures is to improve rural population's access to public services, to improve rural comfort and environment quality, and to diminish the pollution sources.
 - 9 **Pisciculture development.** The Romanian Government will apply the following pisciculture policies: technical protection measures of fish resources; evaluating the foreign fishing boat accessibility in the Romanian territorial waters; protecting the fish species and breeds in order to reproduce and supply selected biological material for the fish farms; modernizing the marine aquaculture units; facilitating new investments, modernizing the existing capacities.
 - 10 **Forest sustainable management.** The Romanian Government will promote the following measures in view of a forest sustainable management: increasing the forest area by: afforesting the eroded lands, unfit for agriculture, by the local communities, with state budget support for afforestation and forest works; protecting forest belts for fields, ways of communication and localities; tax remission for forest land barterers, in order to join and regularize the private properties; state budget support for private forest works; promoting a national program to build forest roads; supporting the private forest wards.
 - 11 **Improving the institutional background.** The Government will adopt the following measures: establishing the National Agency for Control and Supervision of Land Reversion, subordinated to the Government; creating an inter-professional organization that runs the public-private partnership, in view of purchasing, storing and valuing the basis products; changing and structuring the system of agricultural statistics according to the EUROSTAT system; improving the system of food quality control by respecting the minimum safety regulations for food required by the common agricultural policy; completing the process of laboratory development, customs control; developing the information, sanitary and veterinary systems; consolidating the Veterinary and Food Safety Agency; extending the agricultural accounting network; supporting the programs of quality improvement for fresh and processed products and processing unit compliance, as the results of negotiation with the EU; establishing rural offices for financial and agricultural advice; creating the legal background to subordinate the local and county offices of agricultural advice to the National Agency of Agricultural Advice; the result is a coherent relation of subordination, monitoring and evaluating; capitalizing the Romanian Fund for Rural Credit Guarantee; establishing and promoting the micro-crediting schemes for the poor rural communities (Prospects for Agricultural Markets 2001-2008).

Priorities to develop the Romanian agriculture

Among the priorities of harmonious agriculture development are the following: a) agricultural holdings; b) cooperation in agriculture; c) investments; d) agricultural loan; e) labor in agriculture; f) the research and the role of the agricultural specialist; g) distribution means and channels.

Agricultural holdings. As a result of the Land Fund Law no.18/ 1991, the private land fund was submitted to a phenomenon of excessively division. Therefore the small agricultural property means a small holding, less profitable from the economical point of view. At present, an intense division of agricultural properties produces

through sales and division between inheritors. The advanced agricultural holdings can be done especially through land sale - purchase, leasing, granting and landlord association, holdings among which modern technologies can be applied in order to produce a higher quantity for the market. The types of agricultural holdings are not important: family farms, family association, agricultural companies, cooperative farms, but their agricultural policy based on property and commercial agricultural holdings.

A special attention must be given to the *marketing cooperatives*, meaning that the cooperatives that will take care of the whole food product chain, from raw material produced by farmers to the finished good passing through all the intermediary products. By their setting up, the farmers can control all their products. It is important to establish cooperatives of agricultural loan that provide an efficient agriculture. Besides the advanced agricultural holdings which have access to credits, some agriculture cooperatives would be established; they could hire credits and support different production activities of their members through its own internal mechanisms.

Because of the limited amounts they receive for subventions in agriculture, the subventions must not be divided for many objectives, but to credit subvention, especially the investment credits. Thus the interested persons having some material and human availabilities could be the beneficiaries; their results may contribute to Romanian agriculture development.

Another deficient aspect refers to *agricultural insurances*. A legislative and institutional frame should be adopted, the mechanisms and instruments necessary for the farmer, the individual landlord and the associations or agricultural companies to insure their crops and animals and to be forced to insure in certain conditions (when they benefit by budget support in the process of production), thus avoiding the financial want and their bankruptcy in the case of damage.

Investments. The lack of national or foreign capital, personal or attracted through credit, made the agricultural investments to be insignificant and the process of development, modernization and reorganization to run slowly. The investments did not succeed in covering the minimum to maintain on a constant line the previous capital accumulation; as for the future, the effort of investment to be multiplied in order to recover the created gaps. As a result of the lack of internal sources of investments, the attention of the economical agents and of the governments must be pointed to getting foreign capital through direct investments. The effort of attracting more foreign investors in the Romanian agricultural field has not been followed by expected effects, and the investment volume is below necessities.

Among the many investments done in agriculture, a special attention must be given to the investments done in tractors and machines and in the systems or equipments for irrigations, two parts without which a higher productivity can not be assured. The reduced number of tractors and the advanced rank of physical and moral usage make from this objective a far away goal. In present Romania, more than 75% of our tractor park is already amortized which shows its oldness and its reduced efficiency in usage. From the unprofitable tractors, a good part will be out of order very soon implying that the need of investments in new equipments is urgent.

The labor in agriculture. The creation of theoretical and practical training centers for the agricultural specialists, the possibility of studies and agricultural tests and the possibility of economic and financial advising for farmers all around the country represent necessary actions for agriculture and rural development. One may notice the developed countries' policy and strategy reorientation to rural development. This concept, in full development at present, may offer many advantages because of the Romanian space dimension, but in the same time it may create difficulties because of the lack of elasticity, of the impossibility of getting the necessary stocks, because of the precarious knowledge and because of this oversize (A. Paunescu, 2006, p. 56).

A policy of agricultural and rural development should take into consideration the human capital, the most important production factor. Often it is necessary to prime its quality, not its quantity. In order to improve farmers' and villagers' knowledge, a professional training is necessary; this can be done in professional schools, short or long intensive courses for all the farmers and especially for the mechanists of the agricultural machines, farmers, fruiterers, winegrowers, gardeners, etc.

In Romania, the percent of people working in agriculture is higher in comparison with that of the European Union countries. In the European Union, the modernization of the agricultural production determined a smaller number of people working in agriculture, with 4.7% in 2003. The difference between countries maintains because of the diversity of production structure, the land use and the cosmopolitanism grade. In this way, the percent of agricultural population is 17.7% in Greece, 13.7% in Portugal, 7.9% in Spain, 8.6% in Finland, 4.4% in France. The number of agriculture employees is higher than in Germany, Great Britain, Denmark, Holland, Spain and lower than in Portugal and Greece. In Finland, families provide 97% of the total workers and in Greece almost 96%. As a result of structural policy measures in favor of rural development, the double employment increases in the European Union. At present, from the 7 million persons employed in agriculture, about 15% have part-time jobs.

In Romania, after 1989, the population employed in agriculture increased permanently and constantly and at present the difference between Romania and the European Union population that work in agriculture is 30% of total population. The agriculture employees are 3.5 millions at present, in Romania meaning half of The European Union total population employed in agriculture. They are farmers and qualified workers in agriculture and forestry, but the total number of employees in agriculture is higher.

As other connected actions to agriculture develop (industry, services, etc.), the population share employed in agriculture will reduce. In the next 20 years, the population share employed in agriculture will decrease by 10%, due to the measures of anticipated pension, the complementary measure of fund market fluidity and the measures of rural development.

The increase of labor training, especially for specific professions (professional schools for mechanists, courses for farmers, high-schools specialized in agriculture, etc.) is mandatory requirement. Any development will be conditioned by the labor education level, this

being an unfailingly priority among future structural policies.

Because all the economical activities develop in a corrupted economical environment which can influence the behavior of economical agents, the phenomenon of corruption must be carefully supervised. The deprived regions, the different access to budgetary resources, sometimes on conditions rationally created (indemnifications for calamities, bounties, fixed contributions for seeds, support for livestock raising, advances from the product bounties, etc.) create serious perturbations for the economical environment, always with critical influences for the sector (Toderoiu F., 2002, P. 64).

As a result of the negotiation with the EU, Romania achieved the following:

- three year period of transition, till December 31st 2009 to modernize the milk processing units;
- 8 year period of transition to remove the hybrid vineyards;
- other reference periods to negotiate the production quota other than the candidate states;
- Romania redirected to rural development to the sectors of development potential;
- the possibility to supplement by 20% the direct payments from the rural development funds;
- the arable land of 7,012,666 ha for cereal was negotiated and Romania will receive subventions from the European Union;
- for the rest of 2,4 million ha arable land, Romania will receive subvention in the quota stipulated by the community acquis for every crop;
- Romania received from the financial package approximately 4.7 billion Euro for agriculture in the period 2007-2009 as follows: 3.9 billions for the chapter Agriculture, 800 million for chapter 21 - The regional politics, as structural funds for the agricultural sector.

The almost 4 billions meant for agriculture will be assigned as follows: direct payments: 937.9 million Euro; market measures: 732 million Euro; rural development: 2,308 million Euro;

Conclusions

The reform of agricultural policy and its compatibility with the EU agricultural structures need:

- the development and application of the mechanisms of market economy in order to handle the competition and market forces within the EU;
- the Romanian state should buy land from the owners willing to sell it reasonably;
- introducing different land taxes in order to;
- the budget resources for agriculture should not be divided in subventions or other aids, but directed to credits with preferential interest for investments;
- encouraging association and cooperation in agriculture by means of fiscal facilities for associations and cooperatives; the farmer, the family farm based on private property should be the focus of association or cooperation; this process should run willingly;

- focus on the farmer's professional training and on the agricultural specialists' knowledge;
Another direction that might contribute to improving the weaknesses of the food sector, increasing the food competition and export includes:
- elaborating and applying the national standards, and adapting them to the EU requirements and world standards;
- developing a legislative background and normative acts that should include minimum requests toward to the quality of the Romanian agricultural products and impartially assure sanitary inspection;
- participating at exhibitions and studying the experience in food marketing;
- ensuring fiscal facilities for foreign companies that invest in agriculture.

The third direction refers to the economic mechanisms and includes:

- credit subvention for agricultural investments;
- ensuring state expenses transparency for food sector because there were many cases when persons that had nothing to do with agriculture benefited by funds;
- stimulating specific Romanian product exports, that interest a European market of 450 million consumers;
- repealing the VAT for the producers' agricultural goods; the VAT for food products should be lower and different; the integration in the common agricultural policy should mean the reduction of the agricultural farm products prices with at least 10%;
- agricultural producers' contribution to the budget should be calculated depending on the income and not on the land surface;
- giving up the actual compensation system for agriculture climate conditions even if they are not favorable, and creating the conditions to implement a private insurance system (A.Păunescu, 2006, p. 119-121).

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