

THE COLLECTIVIZATION OF THE ROMANIAN AGRICULTURE AND THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THIS PROCESS (1949-1962)

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Abstract:

Of all processes imposed by the communist regime, the forced collectivisation of agriculture, following the Soviet model, proved to be, over time, the most complex and with long-term negative consequences for the Romanian society.

We can ascertain that among the objectives of collectivisation, the economic efficiency held a secondary position if compared to the politico-ideological objectives.

The imposition of a socialist type of agriculture in the Romanian rural area was achieved by intensifying the class conflict, by liquidating the kulaks (Romanian rural bourgeoisie), etc. through means of intimidation and repression.

In Romania, compared to other socialist states, the transition from a capitalist agriculture to a socialist one was achieved gradually during 1949-1962. The collectivization of agriculture in the Romanian rural areas proved to be a difficult process due to the attachment of the peasants to the land and their refusal to enter the collectivist structures.

Key words: *collectivisation, the Soviet model, a difficult process, rural bourgeoisie, the communist regime.*

Of all processes imposed by the communist regime, the forced collectivization of agriculture, following the Soviet model, proved to be, over time, the most complex and with long-term negative consequences for the society in which it was applied.

This way, "among the objectives of collectivization, the economic efficiency, which had been generated by mechanization and the establishment of collective farms over large areas, held a secondary position if compared to the politico-ideological objectives, namely the breakdown of the socio-economic relationships in the rural area, the imposition of new values on the traditional ones, the change of the individualist mentality of the small owner, the transformation of peasants into agricultural workers in collectivist structures, such as grain factories".(D. Cătănuș, O. Roskam: 2000, p 11).

To achieve the process of collectivization in the Romanian rural area, the Communist Party appealed to economic, ideological and political arguments. From an economic point of view, the idea that spread after World War II regarded the small peasants' property being unprofitable, not coming under the requirements of the modern economy and being an obstacle to the technological progress. Following the Soviet model, the communist authorities in Bucharest, argued that only the state, as the sole investor, was able to implement the modern agricultural technology and practice agriculture on large surfaces.

The reorganisation of the rural world, by imposing a new set of social, economic and political values, has helped the single-party state to accumulate new economic resources. By imposing a new rhythm and life style on peasants, foreign to the ancestral traditions, the totalitarian regime contributed to the destruction of the Romanian village

and the transformation of the small farmers and large landowners into employees of the state.

According to the marxist-leninist dogma, which claimed that "every day capitalism is generated by the small property", peasants' expropriation was a sine qua non condition for the implementation of the communist project of forced industrialization in Romania.

On 23rd March 1945 the Agrarian reform Law was published, which prohibited the circulation of the territorial fund such as sharing, selling, renting or mortgaging it, and due to the Order no.825 of 19th April 1945 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Domains, the owners of tractors and agricultural machineries had to give in the machineries to the state and, this way, the state became the sole buyer of the agricultural products. In the same period the Supreme Council of National Economy, led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, was established. The responsibilities of the Council were taken over by the State Planning Commission in 1948.

The transition from a capitalist agriculture to a socialist agriculture was accomplished gradually. This way, we can distinguish three main periods regarding the process of forced collectivization:

- the period between 1949-1953 is characterised by the violence and persuasion used by the communist authorities in order to enforce the collectivization process.
- During 1953-1956 a relief could be observed as far as the process of collectivization is concerned as lower farm taxes were collected by the state.
- during 1957-1962 the violence against the farms escalated along with the acceleration of the collectivization process. (Dennis Deletant: 2001, p.106).

Analyzing in depth the consequences of the three periods we can ascertain that in Romania, the collectivization process lasted longer if compared to the same processes in the other socialist states.

"Lecții în ajutorul celor care studiază Istoria P.M.R." ("Lessons to help learners of PMR History"), published by the History Institute of the Party attached to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, ascertained that through the Agrarian Reform of March, 1945, PCR (the Romanian Communist Party) aimed at destroying the landlords as a social class and not at the allotment of land to peasants. Because of the agrarian reform of March 1945, out of the 1,468,000 ha of expropriated land, peasants were given only 1,109,000 ha, while the difference of 359,000 ha was improperly seized by the communist authorities and included in the state reserve funds.

The imposition of a socialist type of agriculture in the Romanian rural area was achieved by intensifying the class conflict. For the political leaders in Bucharest the strategy regarding the socialist transformation of the agriculture was based on the support of poor and "mid-level" peasants and on the elimination of the kulaks (Romanian rural bourgeoisie).

The fear of a nationwide revolt made the authorities in Bucharest be more cautious and act more slowly in order to achieve this goal, using, however, means of intimidation and repression.

In 1962 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej announced on behalf of the Bucharest authorities the end of the collectivization process, while in other countries such as Bulgaria or G.D.R. (German Democratic Republic) the same process had been completed years before or had been abandoned (Poland).

The freedom of the decision making-process of the Bucharest authorities on the imposition of collectivization was relative because everything was performed under the supervision, direction and control of the Kremlin. The collectivization of agriculture in Romania, copying the Soviet model, a model imposed by Moscow in all Eastern

European countries with the help of the indigenous communist parties, contributed to the destruction of the private property and to Romania providing goods to the USSR.

This way, following the Soviet model, the agriculture was organized into a system of collective farms (kolkhozes); state farms (sovkhazes) and MTSs- Machine and Tractor Stations (*Statiuni de Masini si Tractoare, SMT*), etc. These operated according to well-defined rules, translated from Russian, along with the terminology used by the Soviet Russia: "kulaks" (rural bourgeoisie), "elimination of the kulaks as a class", etc.

If the nationalization of industry was a short process, the collectivization of agriculture in our country proved to be a difficult process since the Bucharest authorities were aware of the peasants' attachment to the land (in 1949 peasantry represented about 75% of the population, about 12 million out of the 16 million inhabitants). They were also aware of the economic crisis created after the second World War, of the 1946-1947 famine and of the products supplied to the USSR. All these affected the farms and contributed to the decrease of the agricultural production. For this reason the socialist transformation of agriculture in Romania should have been done gradually by establishing collectivist structures and by intensifying the rural class conflict.

Being aware that a rapid collectivization process could not be done due to the reluctance of the rural inhabitants and mainly of the wealthier peasants, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej stated in a report: "the kulak is dangerous, tough and combative. The Kulak is different than his fellow in the city as he does not focus much on the theory. He takes the ax, the hammer and is willing to defend his property with the sacrifice of his own life because he has the sense of propriety in his blood. We won't attack him the same way we attacked the industrialist ". (Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej: 1953, p.40).

In March 1949 the process of the agricultural collectivization officially set off at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party which set the general guidelines of the socialist transformation of agriculture. Thereby, an Agrarian Commission was appointed on 28th March 1949.

The Resolution of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of 3rd-5th March 1949 explicitly states: "The rural problem debated today is one of the most difficult and complicated problems of the socialist revolution and of the socialist construction (...). We support the poor peasantry, raise alliances with the "mid-level" peasants and lead a continuous battle against the kulaks" (Valentin Constantinescu: 1999, p.609). Ana Pauker was assigned responsibility for the organisation and the supervision of this campaign. She would take control over the whole activity of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Machine and Tractor Stations (*Statiuni de Masini si Tractoare, SMT*), the State Agricultural Farms (*Gospodarii Agricole de Stat, GAS*) and the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CAPs) were all subordinated to the Ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture also established the Directorate of Collective farms that which focused on the establishment of collective farms. Between 23rd and 24th January 1950 the Plenary of the CC elects the Organisational Bureau of the CC of PMR which would coordinate the activity of the cadres.

The whole activity of collectivization was monitored by the party organizations, by the police by the Security and by the Militia, whose tasks included intimidating people, preparing periodic work reports work on the so-called class enemies, namely those who showed resistance to collectivization.

If at the county level there were agricultural departments preparing the organisation of the agricultural farms, at a local level the whole process was entrusted to agricultural commission operating within the People's Councils , which were supported by the rural party organizations . The latter had to carry out an intense propaganda battle among rural citizens to convince the peasants to join the agricultural farms.

After 1948, the Communist Party carried out a broad propaganda campaign in the rural areas aiming to popularize the socialist agriculture, the kolkhoz system, copying the model created by Lenin and applied by Stalin. In this campaign a large number of people were involved (party members, propaganda secretaries, intellectuals of the villages, district party organizations, local party organizations and so on), and large amounts of money invested in propaganda films that were showed in villages, in the radio, in brochures, in newspapers, in propagandist books, in visits of the Romanian peasants in the USSR, between 1949-1950, etc.

The introduction of mandatory quotas in the summer of 1949, according to Decree 306/1949, farmers were forced to give the state significant amounts of cereals and products, assigned by the state without taking into account their harvest for that year. Moreover, farmers had to pay an agricultural tax, and most of the times they ran out of food or grain for sowing.

In 1950, the General Secretary of the Central Committee held a meeting with the secretaries of the district party committees and with the trainers of the Central Committee. There were issues related to collectivization that were raised on this occasion. It was ascertained that during this period only the poor peasants had requested input in agriculture, due to a distrust of collectivization, which displeased the authorities in Bucharest. For this reason, starting with 1950 living and working in the Collective farms was no longer the wish of the peasants but a rule imposed by the party.

On 1st July 1950, all First Secretaries of the District Committees were summoned to Bucharest where they were given the task of creating a new organization plan for the Collective Agricultural Farms (GAC), which would have helped the acceleration of collectivization. During this period methods of intimidation and threat were used against whoever refused to join the collectivist structures. Therefore, a large number of peasants who showed resistance to collectivization were arrested, beaten and tortured, while their children were banned from going to school. Because of the resistance showed against the process of collectivization, in 1951, on Pentecost Sunday, dozens of families from Banat and Oltenia, from the villages and towns next to the border between Romania - Yugoslavia, were taken from their homes and deported to Baragan. Here, among thistles, they were forced to live in inhumane conditions until 1956 (Archives Association of Deportees in Calandra, file 1/1950, 1-3 tab, V. Marineasa, D. Vighi: 1994, p.21; M. Milin, L. Stepanov: 1996, pp. 20-21).

On 24th September 1952, Gheorghiu-Dej stated that "our agriculture is dominated by the small peasants' property, which provides a small amount of grain and generates spontaneous and mass capitalism" (Mihaela Sitaru: 1998, 132).

In 1954 the penalties for those who had not paid their quotas worsened one more time. As a result, the district delegates of the State Committee were authorized to seize their agricultural products or any other household goods, which were valued at "the unorganized market price ". If the debtor was not reliable the goods could be lifted immediately without asking the judicial authorities for permission, and the court was not entitled to grant postponements for the delivery of the collected products (Decree 24/1954, no. 7, January 1954). Under the terms of Decree 339 of 4th August 1955 the Ministry of Collections was established.

In Timisoara region, in 1955, the pace of the collectivization process was weak, which made Gheorghiu-Dej criticise the situation in this region where only 13.9% of the rural households were collectivized as opposed to Constanta region, a region where 46.9% of the households joined the Collective Agricultural Farms (GAC) (Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej: 1959, p.91). Please note that during this period the total area of Timisoara region was 2,141,170 ha, of which 61.6% (1,320,549 ha) was arable land

(National Archives of Timis County, Banat PCR fund Regional Committee, file 5/1956 , p.19).

Amid the events in Hungary, in 1956, in the rural area of Banat grievances against the communist regime were voiced more and more often. This way, from the informative notes of 1956 we learn about the conversations among the peasants who had expressed their desire for the abolition of the quotas and for the return to the previous political system.

During 1957-1962, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej decided to move to a new phase of the collectivization process, the last and the bloodiest, namely the compact collectivization. The peasants were compelled to join the collectivist structures by violent methods, such as threats, mistreatment, torture, pressure, arrests, jail sentences. For example, during the Plenary of 30th November – 5th December 1961, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej admitted that over 800,000 peasants were put on trial, and 30,000 of them being tried publicly "in the name of the struggle against Kulaks" . The event had a great impact on the rural world, as confirmed by the documents of that time, which prove that between 1st July 1957 and 1st July 1958, about. 700,000 families joined the collectivist structures, and in 1962 approx. 81% of the country's surface had been included in collective structures.

On 27th April 1962, Dej announced the end of the collectivization programme. 96% of the country's arable surface was represented by the collective structures and 3,201,000 families were employed in the collectivist structures. The abolition of the private property by the communist regime contributed to the destruction of the Romanian village and of the traditional structures, the term "peasant" being also discredited.

In conclusion, we can say that the process of collectivization in Romania was, on the one hand, the result of the political, economic and social ambitions of the Romanian communist leaders, while, on the other hand it represented a means for them to show commitment to the policy of Moscow, which, for our country, proved to be a political, economic, social and cultural model to follow.

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