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The effect of the Russian Food Embargo on small holders'
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The effect of the Russian Food Embargo on small holders' food production

Alessandra Moretti

Research Question: What is the impact of protectionist food policies, mainly the food sanctions, on small holders' food production?

Abstract

My research paper has to do with the analysis of the process of Russia's food protectionism culminated with the Food Embargo and its impact on small holders' food production. On the basis of the assumption that the Russian variant of Food Security departs from the global position on this concept because it promotes a certain extent of protectionism (whereof the Food Embargo is the predictable consequence) and by means of Polanyi's and Steiner's thesis on the importance of protectionism concerning agricultural and food market I hypothesise that due to its enduring protectionism the Russian approach on agricultural and food market draws upon Polanyi's and Steiner's theories. My second hypothesis refers to the role of peasantry in the Russian agricultural setting. Since the peasantry in Russia sees its work mainly as the driving force for subsistence, for the preservation of the land and for the protection of natural resources and not as a mere mean of production which has been also theorised by Polanyi and Steiner I will establish the hypothesis that if agricultural and food protectionism is implemented according to Polanyi's and Steiner's theories then it may have a certain positive impact on household agricultural development and production. By addressing the following main question: What is the impact of protectionist food policies mainly the Food Sanctions on small holders' food production? I will analyse the process of Russia's food protectionism culminated with the Food Embargo and its impact on domestic households' production using two frameworks, that of land as fictitious commodity by Polanyi and that of the agricultural and food market as special market by Steiner. This represents my interest in the pivotal role of rural household subsistence production both during the early post-communist period in times of food insecurity and in times food trade protectionism.

1 Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian region started to gain relevance in the academic debate on post-soviet rural policies due to the transition process the country underwent from socialist collective agriculture to capitalist private farming (Mamontova 2016). According to The World Bank, the means to realise privatisation of farmland and farm enterprises should have been to improve efficiency in agriculture and provide peasants with rights to land (World Bank 1992). However the privatisation occurred through a shared-based land distribution, allowing peasants to decide whether to keep their shares or to convert them into real land plots. Most of the rural dwellers decided to keep their shares, because of the fragmented state support for establishing private family farms (Nefedova, Pallott 2007). The transition process was indeed unsuccessful because the peasants were unable to use their land to establish private farms, the former collective farms went all bankrupt while many fertile farmlands remained empty (Mamonova 2016). In order to survive rural dwellers became in fact particularly dependent on subsistence farming at their household plots (Mamonova, Spoor, Visser, Nikulin 2013). At the same time the crisis of 1998 led to the conviction “that the laissez-faire, neoliberal model had failed, and that a strong Russian economy would require a more interventionist state” (Wegren 2007). Wegren characterised this period as “bringing the state back in”. The state agricultural and rural policy became in that period increasingly interventionist, so much so that in 2006 Putin even made the revival of agriculture one of the four priority of the National Project. Later in 2010 the Food Security Doctrine was drafted and in closing in 2014 the Russian government instituted an Embargo for foodstuff coming from USA and EU (Wegren 2010).

In order to develop my argument I propose two hypotheses. I assume that the Russian variant of *food security* departs from the global position on this concept because it promotes protectionism to a certain extent, whereof the Food Embargo is the predictable consequence. On the basis of this assumption and by means of Polanyi’s and Steiner’s theses on the relevance of protectionism concerning agricultural and food market I hypothesise that due to its enduring protectionism the Russian approach to agricultural and food market touches upon Polanyi’s and Steiner’s theories. My second hypothesis refers to the role of small holders in the Russian agricultural setting. The Russian small holders see their work, as well as a source of income and for consumption, as the main driving force for the preservation of the soil, for protection of natural resources and as ecological and clean because self-produced, and not as a mere mean of production for. I will so establish the hypothesis that if agricultural and food protectionism is implemented according to Polanyi’s and Steiner’s theories then it may have a certain positive impact on household agricultural development and production. By addressing the following main question: What is the impact of protectionist food policies mainly the Food Sanctions on small holders’ food production? I will analyse the process of Russia’s food protectionism culminated with the Food Embargo and its impact on small holders’ food production using two theoretical frameworks, the land as *fictitious commodity* by Polanyi and the agri-food market as *special market* by Steiner, theorised following Polanyi’s one. This represents my interest in the pivotal role of household production both during the early post-communist period and during the food trade protectionism.

I will structure the research paper as follows: after this introduction I will discuss Polanyi’s and Steiner’s theories and apply them to the Russian case. I will then introduce some notions and concepts concerning the current state of food policy. In the second part I will consider the escalation of food trade protectionism happened in Russia from Putin’s first presidency on and culminated with the Food Embargo so I will focus on the Food Security Doctrine and on the Food Trade Sanctions. Lastly I will analyse the role of small holders food production and discuss the truthfulness of my very first assumptions.

2 A theoretical insight: The land as *fictitious commodity* and the agricultural and food market as *special market*

According to Burawoy many economists adopted Polanyi's framework to understand what took place in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. Polanyi's ideas have been recalled to stress the central role of the state and politics in the transition to a market economy. Indeed *The Great Transformation* has offered a critical evaluation of the introduction of the neoliberal model in post-communist governments, especially in Russia (Burawoy 1999). In Stiglitz opinion Russia has been the victim of two experiments in one century, communism first and then that of putting into place the notion of a self-regulating market economy, before the government had had a chance to set up the necessary legal and institutional infrastructure (Stiglitz 2001). Polanyi defines the modern market economy as a special historically rooted form of social organisation which needs governmental management and social control and not as natural universal mechanism regulating societies (Bollier 2009). His analysis suggests that if regulation gives rise to markets, these in turn stimulate further regulation in a chronic and growing upwards search for new accommodation of market and society (Polanyi 1944). Therefore again according to Burawoy if we apply Polanyi's logic to Russia we should not be surprised by a restoration of authoritarian politics or by the ascendancy of society particularly following the economic crisis which occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹ Below I will investigate why.

The most salient point of Polanyi's theory to my research is therefore the third phase of its *The Great Transformation* thus the reaction of society to a market² economy and to the commoditisation of labour, land or nature and money (Polanyi 1944). Land, labour and money were enclosed into social relationships, but after their commoditisation process they have been threatened by the markets. Polanyi considers them *fictitious commodities* in the sense that labour, land and money are indeed, elements of the industry but they aren't real commodities because they are not supposed to be bought and sold in a market-based system as they are not produced by the capitalist production process (Wilkinson 2015). Commoditising labour and land, which respectively represent human beings and nature, means to incorporate them in the market mechanism and to subjugate the whole society to market laws. (Polanyi 1944) Moreover the markets push the society and nature towards a crisis by considering nature as limitless and human being as commodity (Bollier 2009). As a result, this inclusion of *fictitious goods* makes the self-regulating market a counter-social mechanism just as it is a counter-nature phenomenon as it reverses the order of priorities between the medium, the market and the end, the human beings (Steiner 2007). As Polanyi commented it, society's self-protection against the commoditisation of labour, land and money should not be romanticised, because it comes at enormous cost. The role of the state is particularly important here because, while it coordinates the external conditions of the market, it also defends the society against the market. Ultimately Polanyi's vision of the state is that of "a double force in between the market and social protection" (Stiglitz 2001).

Russia's peculiar reaction to the commoditisation of these three pillars of social and economic life was more a self-protective approach rather than an active and dynamic regulation (Burawoy 1999). I will now focus on the commoditisation of land in Russia which is strictly linked to the labour ones. After the fall of the USSR the Duma managed to reject both the market initiatives of the executive power and the guidelines of the World Bank and the IMF on how to privatise its agricultural land, deciding not to privatise it (Burawoy 1999). Until 2003 the Russian parliament declined to extend the land market to the agricultural land and when it eventually happened, foreigners were not allowed to purchase it (Nefedova and Pallot 2007). Affiliates and workers of the collective farms could decide to either sell it exclusively to insider members of the same collective farm or to keep their share in order to develop a private peasant farm. Although most of the collective farms were already collapsed as productive centres in the face of pressures from all sides such as rising inputs cost, declining consumer purchasing power, cheap imported food, and labour exodus, they didn't manage to disappear

¹ As argued by Wegren (2010) Russia today might be approaching a some sort of not uniform protectionism and restoration of neo-feudalism.

² Market here is defined as actual contract between seller and buyer.

completely, but they transformed significantly their purpose. Since they could no longer offer wage labour they became service centres which offered machinery, fertilisers, limited credits, transportation to markets and so on. This situation led to an enormous fall in grain production, in the re-emergence and expansion of subsistence agriculture as the lack of waged labour induced small holders cultivated at their household plots and lastly in the increasing production of vegetables, fruits and poultry by private holders. In addition factory legislation and social laws were projected to protect land laws and contemporarily agrarian tariffs were enacted to protect natural resources and the environment (Burawoy 1999). Therefore Russia was and now still protects its land from the commoditisation process by treating it as *fictitious good* also by means of the trade protectionist policies the country adopted. Agricultural and food market protectionism emerged in Russia almost ten years after the liberalisation process promoted through the Shock Therapy with Putin taking office. Despite all this, since 1991, the Russian governments have endorsed the neoliberal economic doctrine which calls for the transformation or the elimination of all the sub-optimal economic actors among which the unproductive large-scale agricultural enterprises and small-scale producers (Nefedova and Pallot 2007). But how did Russia face all of this? I will go into the details in both sections committed to the escalation of food trade protectionism in Russia.

Philipp Steiner expanded Polanyi's theory upon food, which in turn follows the same commercialisation process. His argument lies on the premise that the agri-food market is a *special market* because the commodities it produces are actually *fictitious goods* on which human life strictly depends. Moreover, according to Steiner the meaning of the *special market* formula is built upon the major purpose of agriculture, which would no longer be that of producing agricultural commodities, but rather that of making the farmers be sustained by the matter that they in fact maintain and protect the landscape and the natural resources. But what is very *special* in the definition of *special market*?³ Following Weber, Steiner pinpoints the emergence of the city, happened in the 13th century, as the main cause of distance between the urban dweller and food so between the urban individual and the nature. In addition the institution of the unfettered market has always been to produce social and cognitive abstraction. Social abstraction is developed by eliminating the market-encounter which enables urban consumers to have a concrete knowledge of the products they buy and of the rural individuals who are beyond these products, whereas cognitive abstraction is produced by removing the consumer from the production process. Both abstractions are dominated only by human beings' idea of the market as social mechanism within a regime in which the globalised market can be virtually controlled and that provides food in quantity and quality to those who can pay for it. When and if this regime is broken there may be fears for food security. It is exactly this that make the food market a *special market*, as it is responsible for strong representations linked to the conditions ensuring the lives of individuals while creating both the social condition for food production and the spread of food fears. Another important factor defined by Halbwachs and recalled by Steiner is that the urban individual has been deprived of the process through which its food product has become such, the only indicator for the consumer to understand the quality of the product is now the price, hence the market (Steiner 2007). How may this discourse be applied to the Russia? This will be considered in the part dedicated to rural and urban small holders.

3 Notions and concepts of food policy

Dealing with *food security* in Russia also means to be confronted with many additional notions concerning food policy approaches than the bare concept of *food security*. *Food sovereignty*, *food self-sufficiency* and *food insecurity* are the most important to be mentioned. During my research I came across several experts' opinions on what the Russian variant of food security really looks like. The debate on this topic still remains open. However, there is a consensus among researchers that *food insecurity* in the traditional sense is not widespread in Russia anymore but it still exists among the

³ Steiner argues that paying individuals to render a service to the community rather than just paying them to produce material goods (food in this specific case) does not make a market a special market for that matter (Wilkinson 2015).

poor and low-income groups. As a matter of fact, *The Global Food Security Index* assigns Russia a 99.5/100 score for having a very small proportion of its population under the global poverty line and a 100/100 score for the presence of food safety net programs. A short introduction to these concepts will be summarised here so to have a picture of what is relevant for Russia. According to Mooney and Hunt *food security* is one of the master frames of the 21st century public policy. The *food security* definition adopted here is the one negotiated during the *World Food Summit* of November 1996 in Rome according to which *food security* is pursued when all the citizens have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food in order for them to lead an active and healthy life (FAO 1996). This has four dimensions: *food availability*⁴, *food access*⁵, *utilization*⁶ and *stability*⁷. This is a cornerstone of the neoliberal vision of the globalised world since it represents a market-oriented perception rather than a state-centred. It suggests the dependence on transnational market mechanisms to send goods from the overproduction places to the underproduction ones, where the market forces embedded in this system justify the exploitation of land and labour. Substantially food security considers the human being as bare homo economicus, a rational being who tries to fulfil his own self-interest interacting through competition and selfishness rather than through cooperation and acting as a consumerist entity rather than through the establishment of culturally sustainable relations. Moreover, in this approach food is presented as an abstract commodity disconnected from its social aspect (Schanbacher 2010). According to Schanbacher again, the food security approach creates inequality, removes the state from its responsibilities for human and environmental well being and causes the degradation of the land because the concept itself is based on property rights rather than on human rights.

Regarding *food self-sufficiency*, the FAO defines it in two different ways: as that moment when a country closes off its borders to both imports and exports and focuses its resources on developing the agriculture sector so as to be able to produce all of its food requirements domestically; or as the situation in which a country produces a proportion of its own food needs that approaches or exceeds 100 percent of its food consumption. This application does not exclude trade as a possibility.

Food sovereignty is based on human rights, namely the right of all countries and people to develop their own agriculture. This notion has been first elaborated in 1996 by La Via Campesina, one of the very first organisation that united farmers from all over the world whose most powerful idea is to bring the farmers back to the centre of the discussion on agricultural measures. La Via Campesina's approach is very state-centred, allowing the state to hinder neoliberal policies, as well as strongly based on the community (La Via Campesina). In contrast to food security, food sovereignty is based on interdependence and respect for the environment. Such definition doesn't suggest to remove the food market in general but to construct those transnational food linked market relationships in new sustainable ways.

Food insecurity on the other hand, deals in very broad terms with the production, distribution and consumption of food. It mostly refers to inadequate food supply and insufficient caloric intake. According to the FAO it exists when people do not have access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for the development of a healthy and active lifestyle, it may be chronic, seasonal or transitory. *Food security* refers to the availability of food, whereas famine and hunger are the consequence of the unavailability of food, in other words the results of food insecurity. As follows, I will consider why Russia departs from the Western position on these concepts.

⁴ "The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid)." (FAO 1996)

⁵ "Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources)". (FAO 1996)

⁶ "Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security." (FAO 1996)

⁷ "To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security."

As argued by the authors of the paper *The Russian Variant of Food Security*, Russia's practice of food security indeed differs from that of the West in the sense that Russian authorities refer very often to *food security* while meaning *food self-sufficiency* which is a synonym of security in general. Furthermore Russian leaders use *food security* as a political weapon since they refer to the independence from food imports from Western countries and they link *food security* with national security in the National Security Strategy adopted in May 2009. Moreover, there is no federal program which promotes *food sovereignty*, therefore Russia remains highly linked to its industrialised overwhelmingly one-crop agriculture and although the country's small holders production is still high, it is only superficially relevant in terms of *food sovereignty*. One of the most important goals for Russia. Besides to be independent from the Western food supply and to be fully self-sufficient is becoming a leading exporter in grain. These three aims go hand in hand (Mamonova, Spoor, Visser 2013). Following the definition introduced above, the notion of food security by no means mirrors Russia's purpose as the country leads a protectionist food policy and aims at getting rid of food imports. As more suited definition is instead that of food self-sufficiency does, as Russia is highly concerned by the origin of its food but at the same time it struggles to deny the urge to become a major exporter. "It is important to note that *food self-sufficiency* is not an expression of *food security*, although the two can interact in important ways. The concept of *food security* does not include a consideration of the origin of food or a country's capacity to produce it, so long as it is available, accessible, nutritious, and stable across the preceding three elements. *Food self-sufficiency* is mainly concerned with the availability (i.e. supply) pillar of *food security*, and focuses on origin of food, or at least the domestic capacity to produce it in sufficient quantities." (FAO 2015-2016). Furthermore, as I will consider in the next sections there is a big portion of the Russian population which is deeply interested in maintaining the soil fertile. According to Nilssen they have raised self-sufficiency significantly in the last five years although this is mainly true if the total consumption and the Russian production are considered. But again these statistics should be correct for the reduction in the total supply, which went significantly down, while the price for many products increased, resulting in a growth in self sufficiency even considering the rural areas as still particularly dependent on their own food production. A final remark on this topic is that although the Russian government advocates for *food security*, inseparable within the neoliberal approach, it actually applies protectionist measures to agricultural and food trade which departs from the common understanding of the concept according to the directions of FAO and the World Bank (Wegren 2016).

4 Escalation of food trade protectionism from Putin's first presidency

In early 2000 when Putin rose to power Russian agriculture was declining and the food policy was highly ineffective. Russian food availability was strictly based on food imports from Western countries mainly for protein and fat-based goods, the dollar value of Russia's food imports rose unbelievably (from \$2 billion in 1989 to \$13.3 in 1997). In 1998 the financial collapse and the devaluation of the rouble arrived together with the worst grain harvest ever recorded (less than 48 million tons) caused by bad weather. So threatens to food security in the traditional sense were in progress (Wegren 2010). At that time the Russian government started to receive food aids packages from the US and the EU which lasted two years (Wegren 2005). According to the World Bank this support, may have caused the possibility for Russia to remain in an enduring even permanent, they said, state of food dependency on the West (The World Bank 2000). During my research I came across different scholars' views on the origins of the Russian protectionist policies and the devaluation of the rouble has been identified as one while the aforementioned food aid discourse was never recognised as such and it has even been seen as a shame instead. In the following section I will briefly trace the first protectionist policies which cleared the way for the Food Security Doctrine and the Food Embargo, which will be discussed in the second part.

By early 2000 a certain agricultural rebound was held. During 2000-2008 the rouble value of agricultural production more than tripled (Rosstat 2009), due to further state intervention and

government assistance programmes mainly to large farm enterprises⁸ and with the aim of pursuing and protecting state interests. In July 2000 the then Ministry of Agriculture Gordeyev announced the Basic Directions of Agrofood Policy to 2010 according to which the very first priorities of agricultural policy were to increase domestic food production and reduce dependence on food imports. The directions aimed mainly at ensuring the nation's food economic security (Wegren 2005). Although every category of Russian food producers⁹ fulfilled a positive growth in production by 2000 the governmental financial support programmes in form of subsidies and credits have been adopted almost exclusively for large scale farms which are those feeding most of the Russian population as well as producing for export to foreign countries (Wegren, Nilssen, Elvestad 2016). The government's financial support in early 2000s peaked in 2005 when the National Project was introduced by means of a R50 billion development program and agriculture became one of the four priority sectors of Russian economy. According to Wegren this has been the first genuine financial assistance program to agriculture since 1992 and since the agricultural collapse in the 1990s when subsidies existed only on paper. Hence due to the collapse of the agricultural sector, by 2005 there was an enormous need to rebuild it and the government was just in the early stages of accumulating financial resources from the rising price of oil. Overall, the percentage of profitable large farms rose from 58 percent in 2005 to 73 percent in 2007, and their level of profitability also increased (Wegren 2010). The nominal value of agricultural production rose from R1.38 trillion in 2005 to R1.93 trillion in 2007, accomplishing a 40 percent increase and animal husbandry, the most critical sector grew as well. Compared to the agricultural policies of the 90s the National Project was a success because signalled the real and enormous support to agriculture and its importance for the Russian development. This was replaced by the 2008-2012 state program and currently by the 2013-2020 program, which allocated R2.1 trillion to agricultural support (Wegren, Nilssen, Elvestad 2016). In the next section I will consider why researchers have different opinions on the efficiency of the National Project for households' food production.

When it comes to actual food trade protectionist policies, by 2000 Russia adopted diverse strategies (Wegren 2010). The fundamental tools to restrict imports have been the introduction in 2001 of import quotas for meat and fish and envisaged until 2015 for the former and 2020 for the latter and the concordant use of quota and tariff system, which applies lower tariff rates to imports up to the established import quota and higher tariff rates applied to imports above the quota. In 2003 Russia launched tariff rate quotas (TRQs) to limit the import of meat. A further strategy has been the use of import tariffs to provide protection to domestic producers with the average tariff rate on imported goods rising from 10% in 2000 to 18% in the following years. Moreover, lower import quotas and higher tariff rates for meat have been established in 2009 (Wegren 2005). Russia's protectionist policy also encompasses tariff policies that influences export levels and the use of state agencies (Rossel'khoznadzor and Rospotrebnadzor) to prove food quality and safety but these standards are politicized. Despite this all, Russian food trade protectionist measures were by no means uniform because they have been mainly laid down on competitive foreign goods to the Russian market. Although Russian food trade policy's intention was to reduce imports due to the economic growth started in 2000, real monetary incomes started to rise and so did the demand for protein and fat-based products and their imports, whose domestic production was still too low to meet the country's demand. At the moment the idea that there was a lack of food supply for these goods was widespread among policymakers: the country needed a higher level of *food security* and to do so it had to become self-sufficient (Wegren, Nilssen, Elvestad 2016).

These first protectionist steps can be framed in Polanyi's discourse according to his definition of the state as intermediate between markets and society, since the significant support that the Russian government addressed to the restructuring of the large scale enterprises. Another important consideration which follows Polanyi is that the Russian policymakers recognised that the introduction of the market pushed the Russian society to its breaking point (the second after the collapse of the

⁸ Since they play a major role in the grain production whose market is particular subject to government intervention.

⁹ Large scale farms, private farms and small holders.

Soviet Union) and erupted in a crisis in the late 1990s which required the governmental management and social interventions presented above. According to Polanyi the devaluation of the rouble, the bad harvest of 1998 and food aid packages led the Russian authorities to strive for *food self-sufficiency* and caused the closure of the Russian food market to foreign agents in order to protect domestic producers.

5 The Food Security Doctrine and the Food Trade Sanctions

With regards to Wegren, he pinpoints that the Russian food policy trends¹⁰ consists in three overlapping elements: the increase in food production thanks to governmental support, the economic nationalism and the Food Security Doctrine, emerged between 2005 and 2008 when the dollar value of food inputs into Russia more than doubled reaching 35 billion dollars in 2008 while global commodity prices were spiking, food inflation reached 18% and finally the increase the export of grain increased. Russian authorities expressed the concern that the exposure to the international food market would make Russian consumers suffer from prices increases. In 2010 the Russian government issued an outline that should define the national objectives and goals for ensuring domestic food security. The Russian President passed the Russia's Food Security Doctrine within the framework of National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020. In substance, the linkage between *food security* and national security allowed the government to legitimise the rising federal expenditures for the agricultural sector, which increased from R120 billion to R237 billion in 2015 and then dropped again in 2016 due to the decrease of oil price and the decline of the rouble. The doctrine however advocates for the food independence of the nation and is founded on quantitative and qualitative measures as established by the Russian law. The most important and probably most tedious quantitative production targets to achieve are 85% of the meat and meat products that the country consumes, the 80% of fish products and the 80% of milk and dairy products. Amongst others, Russia aims at producing the 95% of its grain and 95% of its potatoes (Joint Research Center 2014). The Food Security Doctrine moreover resulted in federal subsidies and credits especially addressed at supporting animal husbandry in order to meet domestic demand but also further subsidies and credits for the purchase of machinery, fertilisers, high quality seeds, for the transportation of grains, for crop insurance and milk production. This further resulted in the Agricultural Development Program 2013-2020 (Wegren, Nikulin, Trotsuk 2016). Despite the bad crop of 2010 due to the drought which resulted in a ban of grain export and a second bad harvest of 2012 between 2010 and 2015 the Russian agriculture had a positive growth for the remaining four years and the nominal ruble value of agricultural output increased for all categories of Russian food producers¹¹ (Rosstat 2015e). During 2015 it even overtook the thresholds set by the Doctrine for grain, potatoes, sugar and butter (Wegren, Nilssen, Elvestad 2016). The rouble value of herb production had a 78% increase from 2005 to 2010 whereas until 2015 the rouble value of crop production more than doubled. Grain production did so well that policymakers planned to expand its exports. For instance wheat production increased from 41,4 million tons in 2010 to 61,4 million tons in 2015 and corn production rose from 13,2 million tons to 31,2 million tons in 2015. Although considered a priority sector by the authorities since late the 2000s animal husbandry has not fared well compared to the former. Although the production grew between 2010 and 2015 by 27% it didn't achieve the desired results (Wegren, Nilssen, Elvestad 2016). According to Rosstat, Russian policymakers claim to be self-sufficient in pork and poultry and to be still dependent on imports for beef and milk (Rosstat 2015a).

The peak of food trade protectionism arrived on August the 6th 2014, when President Putin signed the *Decree No. 560*, which claimed that the importation of food from Western countries that had imposed financial sanctions on Russia consequently to the tension with Ukraine, was banned in order to protect the country's national security. (Decree on the Application of Special Economic Measures in Order to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation, 2014) The Russian Government issued on the day after the *Resolution No. 778* that specified the commodities that were to be penalised. Both must be seen as

¹⁰ In fact they consisted until the Western sanctions in a dualism because of the accession to the WTO in 2012.

¹¹ 42% for large farm enterprises, 8% for households, and 76% for private farms

political moves and as an elongation of the Food Security Doctrine, representing the deterioration of the relationship with the West (Wegren, Nikulin, Trotsuk 2016). According to Wegren: “Although Russia’s food embargo came as a surprise, Putin has been preparing the country for such a step for many years.” (2016) The embargo included beef, pork, fruit and vegetables, poultry, fish, cheese, milk and dairy products from the European Union, the United States, Australia, Canada, and Norway. In August 2015, the embargo was extended to Albania, Montenegro, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and from January 2016 to Ukraine and Turkey. As a result, in the years 2014-2016 Russia closed its market to countries that in 2013 accounted in total for more than half of Russian imports of pork, poultry, fish and seafood, vegetables and dairy products. The Food Trade Sanctions were imposed to the less accessible agricultural and food products for the country, providing it was no longer the case of a not uniform protectionism. This resulted in a significant deficit for the Russian food market, in a drastic devaluation of the rouble that made the volume of imports of processed and frozen meat, fish and cheese significantly decline and finally in a need for the country to increase the domestic production and, for the Russian consumers to buy local in order to protect domestic against foreign producers (Olipra 2017). According to the estimates of the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), the strongest production growth among the product groups covered by the embargo was recorded in the poultry sector, +24.6% in the years 2013-2016 and Russia is now close to satisfy internal food consumption. Similarly, approximately 64% of the Russian supply of fruits and 70% of vegetables came from small farms, home gardens and *dachas*, and as a consequence remained outside the modern trade channels. The embargo has been expanded twice and it will be underway until the end of 2017 (Wegren, Nikulin, Trotsuk 2016). It has been estimated that in the first two years and half of the food Embargo the EU lost a market which was worth about 17.6 billion euro in the market with Russia (Wegren 2017). According to Uzun and Shagaida the Embargo helped to boost domestic production because, although the Russian market remained open, the imports from countries not subjected to limitations lost their competitive capacity due to the devaluation of the rouble, to its initial fluctuation and then its exchange rate decline, which pushed up domestic prices for imported goods (Wegren 2015).

The scholars that contributed to my research acknowledge that prior to the food embargo the Russian government’s protectionist moves were very close to those adopted by Western states because of their ability to stimulate agriculture. The idea of *food self sufficiency* or independence doctrine is then embedded in this discourse. According to the Global Trade Alert it’s only by 2013 that Russia enacted more protectionist trade measures than any other country becoming the world leader in protectionism. However there are different positions on the motivation of the Russia’s state-centrist agricultural protectionism and on the embargo, the Russian government’s points are to protect domestic producers from competition and to stimulate national food production and economy in general; according to Nilssen instead the main aims are both to regain state control over economic transactions and actors and to strengthen the Russian self-sufficiency but also as political weapon because as he claimed: “Russian politics is strongly linked to economic interests”. Whereas according to Wegren it was driven by nationalism, xenophobia and fear of the international food market and exposure to it. Lastly Mamonova characterises the embargo as stimulus to grow national food production by means of increasing investments in it, but she rises an important issue on the distribution of investments among producers.

Food Security Doctrine and the Embargo apply to Polanyi’s discourse in the sense that, as already considered in the previous section, both measures represent the position of the state in regulating markets and society. The rouble’s devaluation and declining exchange rate against the world’s major currencies as well as the income deterioration led to rising prices for imported resources that in turn induced the import substitution process. The factor that cannot be framed with Polanyi is the Russian grain export and its goal to become the first grain supplier. Certainly the country needs this export to balance the economy and to generate the importation of critical goods not produced in Russia. Despite that to the instability of the markets on which Russia depends the most such as grain and oil exportation may lead, in times of crisis (drop of oil price or bad harvest), to negative regulations in terms of cuts to the subsidies on which Russian agricultural corporations heavily relies.

6 Understanding small holders

The first issue to consider while addressing small holders food production is to acknowledge what is understood with this term and how they are represented in Russian statistics. Academic Uzun claimed that the Russian current statistics designate small holders as those food producers – part of the population – generating 800 million roubles revenue a year. While rural households cultivate food at their subsidiary household plots of land mainly as a source of food and income urban households food production practice is oriented towards recreation purposes and as a supplement to the family diet (Wegren 2014). However Russian government statistics do not separate the rural to the urban households or *dachniks* output (Sharashkin 2008). Even though the trend resulted decreasing from previous years, in 2013 households achieved the 41% of the total rouble value of Russia's food production. Households activities are extremely labour-intensive and rely mainly on manual and familiar work without concerns about the soil condition (Wegren 2014). Moreover as stated by Wegren during my interview: "Their production is primitive, cut off from capital, technology, markets, and modernizing forces." The size of a subsidiary plot may range from 0.05 ha to 10 ha, with an average dimension of 0.5 ha (Sharashkin 2008). According to Pallott and Nefedova rural households increased their share of Russia's total utilized agricultural land from 1.4 percent in 1990 to 3.1 in 2000, while the share of urban households rose from 0.6 percent in 1990 to 3.6 in 2000. Whereas the subsidiary household plots' land is registered and its size is regulated by regional land laws, the income obtained from the sales of food cultivated at the subsidiary household plot is not subjected to taxation in order to incentivize people to produce food but then households have to respect some production's thresholds. This is the reason why government isn't really aware of the proportion of households selling their foodstuffs. The government indeed does not collect households production data, therefore everything is an estimate because households production provides family food security and sometimes it may contribute to local or regional food security. But despite that official statistics estimated that in 2012 commercialized households amounted to 18% of the total (Rosstat 2012b). According to Nilssen: "There is this strong distinction between the small scale and the large scale producers, so the small scale needs to be below a certain threshold in order to be left alone. In case its production exceeds some kind of invisible ceiling, authorities would be interested in taking over their production." Nowadays since it is all about estimates and the small holders food production happens throughout unofficial canals has been altered by some sort of state intervention. Those small holders that exceed production's limits on purpose because willing to sell it, not even always get the revenues expected. This happens in the urban or suburban area where also the distribution channels are becoming more and more official. Instead in the countryside where the line between producer, distributor and consumer is very short, this doesn't happen yet because of the lack of prosperity.

However the absence of governmental subsidies now households have been to a certain extent supported by the state. Among the scholars that I have been interviewing for the purpose of my research there is as well disagreement on the efficiency in developing households of the two years program for small holders included in the National Project for agriculture introduced in 2006. Given to the factors presented as follows American scholar Wegren evaluates the program as particularly successful for the development of small holders way of food production. The nominal rouble value of food production grew rapidly amounting to 26 percent growth, since the whole agricultural producers were given more than R87 billion in credits, ten times more than in 2005 and R17 billion above the original plan. Operators of subsidiary household plots were provided with more than R17 billion in loans only during 2006. In addition, at the end of 2006 a government program to help household operators was introduced that subsidized interest rates for two and five-year loans. Moreover in early 2007, Rossel'khozbank announced a policy that allowed private plot owners to mortgage land they owned. Even though the numbers show a large allocation of resources in the development of small holders there are some other factors to take into account in order to grasp it and to which extent did the beneficiaries of this program had access to these subsidies. With regard to Mamonova the project didn't work out consequently to money disuse, corruption and lack of information about these

subsidies among the rural households. She claims first of all that only 30% maybe even less of the money reached intended recipients, the others have just been “lost in transaction” and that the Russian government spend way less money on the support of small scale farming than any other European country. Additionally small holders in order to receive money for their development require many documents from the administration, which in turn asked those families for bribes, which sometimes almost corresponded to the amount of the subsidies. Hence those small scale farmers are somehow involved in corruption practices. Second as a result of the backwardness of rural Russia, people hardly hear about any kind of subsidies to their development and improvement because they do not have access internet, so who really stands to gain from these governmental budget appropriation is the urban dweller respectively small holder or *dachnik*. She argues thus that these allocations do not really go to rural cultivators but rather to the urban ones.

But what led urban dwellers to grow their own food in times of economic development where this practice is not intended as subsistence? The *dachniks* or urban Russians unlike the rural population are no longer dependent on food self-provisioning but they are now more than ever willing to produce food at their dacha plots. Mamonova and Sutherland identify three motivations at the root of this eagerness: the first reason is economic and deals with the legacy of the past food shortages, in fact small holders food production in general is path dependent because as Nilssen claimed: “ (...) it has to do with the fact that they still have this soviet mind asset. So if you have a problem you go through your head and you solve the problem as your father solved it years before. This is what is happening in Russia now, is a theoretical concept that says history matters. How can this change in the rural Russia? Because they need food of course to survive and so what could be the most efficient way for them to have food in cheapest possible way with the highest quality? By following the legacy of the past.” The second factor is the quick and recent urbanisation which led to the emergence of a new middle class and the last is socio economic and represents their need to escape the city and produce *ecologically clean food*. As Mamonova claimed: “The aspirations to organic food production and the increasing dissatisfaction with industrial large scale food production is an important driver of food exchange and generate social capital but also cultural capital. (...) This represents a civil countermovement to capitalism. (...) Russian dacha food production extremely widespread but lacking the organisational characteristics of a formal social movement.” Although there is no real social integration between rural dwellers and *dachniks*, the latter significantly contribute to the economy by buying rural small holders foodstuff that they not produce themselves.

This small holders discourse fits into Steiner’s theory as follows: the first factor to consider is the farmers enthusiasm in maintaining the productivity of the land. According to Tamara Semenova¹² differently to the large farm enterprises small holders have a different attitude to the land. They mainly use organic fertilisers, animal traction and crop rotations in their fields often also for budget constraints. But according to the graphic below realised by Rosstat, small holders result as productive as the large scale farms in terms of land productivity. Second important factor refers to the cognitive and social abstractions created by the institution of the free market for foodstuff and the fact that *ecologically clean food* can overcome them. The *ecologically clean food* idea has been coined in post socialist Russia and it corresponds to the Western concept of organic food but with some differing characteristics. The crucial characteristics on this type of food are two: the former is the proximity to the food production process and to the individual behind it and the latter is the fact that the ecologically clean food is mainly not regulated by market laws. Hence Russians prefer to eat foodstuff produced by themselves and their families so to be part of the process of production, so to have a product which is way cheaper than those in supermarkets and healthier. Of course not only rural dwellers but also urban ones have an access to this ecologically clean food, either on dacha plots of family or relatives or from relatives living in the countryside that produce some food. This together with the other issues presented above made possible the boost of dachas by middle class urban dwellers. Therefore whereas in 1996 the number of dachas was 81200, when their existence was strictly dependent on food shortages and economic crises, by 2010 they became 172000 and they more

¹² A representative of the rural social movement *Krestyanskiy Front* which ceased to exist in 2014

that sextupled the land acreage used (Mamonova and Sutherland 2015). Among Russian small holders the food market is in fact understood as a *special market* which can be organised within the social community and the individual is the primary agent of the food it consumes because embedded both in the production and consumption processes. In doing this the individual prevents both social and cognitive abstractions. The Russian special food market even though overlooked by the authorities and considered as backward subsidiary practice, may be the solution to deep economic crises, food insecurity and resources shortages but not at national level because households production is rather consumed than sold.

	1992	2000	2005	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
Enterprises of all types	100							
including:								
Agricultural enterprises	67.1	45.2	44.6	44.5	47.9	47.6	49.5	50.8
Household enterprises	31.8	51.6	49.3	48.3	43.2	42.6	40.5	38.4
Peasant (farm) enterprises ¹⁾	1.1	3.2	6.1	7.2	8.9	9.8	10.0	10.8

¹⁾ Including individual entrepreneurs.

Table 1: Agricultural Production by type of enterprises (at constant prices, percent of total)
Rosstat. 2016.

	1992	2000	2005	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
Enterprises of all types								
Agricultural production	2.7	742.4	1380.9	2587.8	3339.2	3687.1	4319.1	5037.2
including:								
crop-growing	1.3	394.7	669.8	1191.5	1636.4	1918.8	2222.5	2636.8
animal husbandry	1.4	347.7	711.1	1396.3	1702.8	1768.3	2096.6	2400.4
Agricultural enterprises								
Agricultural production	1.8	335.6	615.6	1150.0	1600.8	1756.0	2139.0	2558.9
including:								
crop-growing	0.9	189.0	294.4	485.9	738.1	840.6	974.1	1183.9
animal husbandry	0.9	146.6	321.2	664.1	862.7	915.4	1164.9	1375.0
Household enterprises								
Agricultural production	0.9	383.2	681.0	1250.4	1440.9	1569.8	1750.3	1934.3
including:								
crop-growing	0.4	188.5	311.4	572.1	677.0	800.4	917.9	1025.7
animal husbandry	0.5	194.7	369.6	678.3	763.9	769.4	832.4	908.6
Peasant (farm) enterprises ¹⁾								
Agricultural production	0.03	23.6	84.3	187.4	297.5	361.3	429.8	544.0
including:								
crop-growing	0.02	17.2	64.0	133.5	221.3	277.8	330.5	427.2
animal husbandry	0.01	6.4	20.3	53.9	76.2	83.5	99.3	116.8

¹⁾ Including individual entrepreneurs.

Table 2: Agricultural Production by type of enterprises (at actual prices; bln. roubles; 1992 – tln. roubles)
Rosstat 2016

7 The Embargo and households food production

Russian scholar Mamonova asserts that although small holders produce a large amount of the domestic food supply among which 90 percent of national potatoes, their contribute to the national food security is highly overlooked from the authorities, whose support for households is rather seen not within the food security program or agriculture development program but as sort of social policy because these producers do not have enough money to develop their production to some appropriate level. According to Wegren instead the facts that: household production is not embedded within the market, it is a niche producer which only accounts for certain foodstuff, it is mainly for subsistence and it

doesn't contribute to food exports make it more suitable for this latter social policy practices rather than for food security development.

What is then the impact of the Western sanctions and the consequent Russia's countersanctions on those households? As regard to Wegren neither the Western sanctions nor the Russian countersanctions directly affected household producers. First he argues that households' lack of capital and mechanisation may yet offer them opportunities since financial sanctions, which targeted the Russian energy sectors and system of credit, do not altered their situation, but not in terms of impact because households are pretty isolated and protected. However the government matured some right incentives such as: giving households the possibility to take part in the funded credit policy and programs in the livestock sector but, be eligible to receive up to one hectare of abandoned agricultural land, in Eastern Siberia for example, not subject to taxation for at least the first five years. As he further claimed, they are more affected by regional policy limiting the number of animals and size of land not under taxation and so on. Second, households are isolated to the market thus they are not so likely to be affected by the Embargo. Nonetheless this isolation is leading to the decline of household's production, whose trend is going to be irreversible because they do not have the chance to enter the market. Anyways as long as there will not be prosperity in the Russian countryside rural household producers will continue to exist and when prosperity will be finally reached Russians would probably prefer ecologically clean food to industrial produced food.¹³

Mamonova speculates on the fact that the Western sanctions are not likely to impact small holders production in a negative way, instead they may stimulate them to produce more for self-consumption because of the high prices in the shops, but it will neither make them more commercialised because of the lack of policy stimuli nor boost their production because of poverty. Small holders' big issue at the moment is that as the sanctions began the large scale enterprises have been controlling the whole value chain and facility supply and small holders cannot compete with them and need to find alternative ways of food distribution and finding the supplies. If the Embargo on the one hand has a positive leverage on urban small holders, those more embedded in the market, which started to produce niche foodstuffs such as French or Italian cheeses, on the other hand it may bring to an hard recession period among urban small holders once the Embargo will be lifted up.¹⁴

The theories adopted for the research helped to contextualise protectionism and households production into the Russian setting and propose an answer to my research question that has both positive and negative implications as presented above. Although the Russian food trade protectionism implementation recalls Polanyi and the Russian society recognises its food market as special because of the factors mentioned in the previous part, its food production structure do not allows households to move forward because of the existence and overwhelming state support to large scale farms. After all, albeit the possibility that rural non commercialised households will boost their production and become a primary agent of Russian food security is very remote, they will probably improve their situation at household's and at regional level, due to the tight federal budget of the last two years, and the probable recession of Russian economic growth which led to the decreasing subsidisation of large corporative farms. As for the urban household producers and the rural commercialised ones, the Embargo is giving them a wider chance to improve their production. First because of the wealthy environment of their market for the urban ones and second because of an enduring lack of regulation for commercialised households in the countryside. So far is too early for them to claim victory.

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¹³ Interview with Prof. S. K. Wegren

¹⁴ Interview with N. Mamonova conducted on August the 14th 2017

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Alessandra Moretti was born in Rome, Italy and lives in Berlin, Germany since 2014. She is a Master student in Eastern European Studies and Sociology at the Freie Universität Berlin. She has always had a great commitment in studying the Russian society, which she could deepen thanks to a 6 months internship attended at the Moscow State University in 2012 as Italian culture and current news teacher. During her Master she increased more and more the interest in agricultural and food issues related to Russia. Indeed she is now working on the Master thesis on the topic presented in the abstract above: the effect of the Russian Food Embargo on the small holders food production.



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