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Bulgarian agriculture in 21st century – the road towards a
new “feudalization”

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Bulgarian agriculture in 21st century – the road towards a new “feudalization”

Petar Dobrev

1 Introduction

In the beginning of 20th century Bulgaria was among those countries in Europe that had the highest number of parceled out land with hundreds of thousands of small land owners toiling at their land at the brink of survival. After 1944, Bulgarian agriculture underwent the typical for Eastern Europe model of collectivization and centralization. The agrarian reform of 1992, that was implemented by one of the first neoliberal governments in the country brought about new realities for Bulgarian agriculture. Today, 4% of agricultural enterprises manage more than 85% of all the land in Bulgaria; they are the recipients of the majority of European Union's subsidies and practically are feudalizing the desolated Bulgarian village. How did all this happen?

2 Prior to 1944

Prior to World War II, the majority of Bulgarian agricultural producers farmed very small, fragmented farms, predominantly producing for their own consumption. Technology was primitive and compared to the rest of Europe, Bulgarian land was the most fragmented.

While in 1934 the total number of farms in the country was 884 869, in 1946 the holdings were already 1,1 mln. Large-scale agriculture had a minimal share in the statistics – only 561 holdings that comprised of only 1% of all. Most of them were well organized capitalist enterprises but the rest were extremely small and thus barely able to secure the subsistence of the farmers. The plots over 10 ha where the effective use of agricultural machines was feasible and where the production could be market oriented, were merely 10,7% of all holdings and only 33% of all the land was concentrated in them. The vast majority of the holdings were under 5 ha – 63% of all. In 1934, the average holding size was 4,9 ha, while in 1946 this number dropped to 4,2ha. Moreover, very often one family's already small holding was fragmented to different parts, often quite far from one another. Some historians calculate that in 1946 land was parceled to no less than 12 mln. pieces. This counted to 12 to 14 pieces per holding in 1934 and 16 pieces in 1946.¹

All this led to problem well known in the Balkans in that period – surplus population in the villages. This subsequently caused the low productivity of agricultural labour. According to some sociologists at the time, over 1 mln. people were in surplus and due to the seasonal character of agricultural work only 52% of the work force were used. All this led to poverty, instability and dissent. Villagers earned four times less than people from the cities, while Bulgarian GDP as a whole was one of the lowest in Europe.²

Of course, certain areas like Dobrudja, in the north-eastern part of Bulgaria (on which my PhD is based), were exceptions to this rule. Most of the capitalist large-scale estates were concentrated there and the rich *chiftlikchii* there were quite influential socially and politically – both locally and nationally.³ Their economic and political success contradicts to some of the points in Michael

¹ М. Груев, Преорани слогове. Колективизация и социална промяна в Българския северозапад 40-те и 50-те години на ХХ век, София, 2009, с. 27

² А. Чакалов, Националният доход и разход на България 1924-1945 г., София, 1946

³ П. Добрев, „Родът Холевич и Котел – от протоиндустрия към земеделие“, in: Известия на

Palairot's well known book about the Balkans "*The Balkan Economies c.1800-1914. Evolution without Development.*" In the 30s and 40s modernization was visible in some of the smaller holdings as well, mainly due to the increased state intervention.

For example the state-supervised Bulgarian Agricultural Bank (Bulgarska Zemedelska Banka) had helped the co-operatives to establish this new institution and had already extended them crucial lines of current-account credit. Short term credit in sums from 500 to 1,000 leva (equivalent to French francs) were lent to peasants directly or through the cooperatives. Large by Balkan standards, these credits allowed peasants to purchase seed, fertilisers or iron ploughs. The bank also promoted the introduction of one new crop, sugar beet now refined a for domestic consumption, not for export. These short-term loans did not, however, result in significant purchase of steam-powered equipment for grain cultivation, nor did they promote any noticeable consolidation of scattered peasant plots.⁴

The situation in Bulgaria was not much different than in the other Balkan countries. Speaking of the late Ottoman Empire, Shefked Pamuk describes the generally low productivity of agriculture in otherwise fertile areas like Eastern Trace and the Adrianople region where almost no modernization happened prior to World War II. The situation was quite different in the region of Adana though, where a combination of factors led to successful capitalist agriculture.⁵ Quite similarly to Bulgarian Dobrudja, the Adana region was scarcely populated and thus with lots of available fertile land, especially after the state invested in dykes in the late 19 century. All this led to a successful export oriented agriculture, focused especially on cotton.⁶

But regions like Dobrudja and Adana were rather exceptions that confirmed the otherwise bleak state of Balkan agriculture prior to World War II. If we want to speak about of the effects of the "green revolution" in Bulgaria which really affected village life, we should look at the socialist period in the history of the country.

3 The socialist period

If by 1946 only 0,8 % of Bulgarian farmers owned more than 20 ha, in 1958 93,2% of the land was collectivized and 3200 TKZS (producers' cooperatives on the pattern of the Soviet kolhoz) were functioning. Thus the the most important part of the concentration of the land was achieved and large-scale cooperative agriculture started to dominate.⁷

Of course, collectivization didn't come without resistance. Western analysis has emphasised, and recent Bulgarian scholarship has recognised, the role of 'extra-legal' pressures that were very frequent at the time - threats, physical beatings and arbitrary arrests.⁸

Scholars like John Lampe acknowledge several other important legal inducements like the continued growth of Soviet-style machine-tractor stations (MTS), rising from 71 in 1949 to 200 by 1957. Tractors per 1,000 hectares more than doubled to reach 3.6 for 1953-7, over 10 times the 1939 level, if still just one-third the Western European average. The machine-tractor stations had received monopoly

центъра за стопанско-исторически изследвания, Варна, 2016, т. 1, Градското стопанство в българските земи през вековете.

⁴ J. Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century*, London and Sidney, 1986, 30-31

⁵ S. Pamuk. *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913. Trade, Investment and Production.* Cambridge, 2010, 97

⁶ S. Pamuk. *Op. cit.*, 103-103

⁷ Л. Канева, М. Мизов, Е. Кандиларов, *Изследвания по история на социализма в България, Преходът – II*, София, 2013, 61

⁸ М. Груев, *Цит. съч.*

rights to such modern equipment in 1948. More important, delivery quotas per hectare for the state-controlled system of agricultural marketing, already in place since the Second World War, were set higher for private holdings than for collective farms. From April 1950, holdings over 10 hectares owed the state 75 per cent of their grain crop. New income tax rates also hit the individual smallholder harder.⁹

In the end of the 50s the communist government initiated a merger of the existing collective farms into 957 giant units, averaging about 4,500 hectares a piece. Later, still larger agro-industrial complexes were assembled in the 1970s, known as APK, which finished the third wave of land concentration in the country.¹⁰

This third stage of post-war Bulgarian agricultural development, following the creation and then the enlargement of Soviet-style farms, sought to industrialise agricultural production. But the new large-scale collective farms soon found themselves too dependent on the state. Their economic and legal independence was lost, as well as what was left of the collective democratic way of management.

Still, Bulgaria's agricultural record was an impressive one, for at least part of the post-war period. From 1956 to 1970, crop and animal production grew at an annual average of 4.1 per cent per capita, a higher rate than that achieved anywhere else in Eastern Europe. For the decade before 1960, the advance of its final years came primarily as a result of massive new investments associated with the completion of collectivisation. From 15 per cent in 1950, agriculture's share in net Bulgarian investment rose to 28 per cent by 1960, also the highest figure for Eastern Europe.¹¹

In 1962 the gross agricultural production was 152% that of 1939, while in 1970 it reached 211%. Capital investments grew, as well as irrigation and the use of fertilizers. Agricultural education was spreading, both at high schools and at university level with the creation of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv. Compared to European level, the income of Bulgarian peasants was still low, although at the level of gross production, Bulgaria could well qualify as a well-developed state. Peasants' incomes were getting close to that of workers and administration. For the first time peasants, who were members of the collective farms, were socially secured.¹²

Two major trends have reshaped the structure of Bulgarian agricultural production since 1960. One is the growth of livestock at the expense of crop cultivation, backed by a related rise in feed as against bread grains. The other is a shift away from the industrial crops, primarily tobacco and cotton, that had become so important by the inter-war period, in favour of fruit, vegetables and vineyard production.¹³

The modernization trend was visible, although it also had its negative aspects like gradual village depopulation as a result of the collectivization and the industrialization of the production in the new large APKs. But these problems were nothing compared to what happened after 1990.

4 The transition

After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the beginning of the so called "transition to democracy" in Bulgaria, one of the spheres which was about to undergo a drastic transformation was agriculture. In 1991 the Great National Assembly ratified a new law about land ownership which planned a gradual

⁹ *J. Lampe. Op. cit., 148*

¹⁰ *Л. Канева, М. Мизов, Е. Кандиларов, Цит. съч., 63*

¹¹ *J. Lampe. Op. cit., 169*

¹² *Л. Канева, М. Мизов, Е. Кандиларов, Цит. съч., 65*

¹³ *J. Lampe. Op. cit., 171*

decollectivization and a transition to free market principles in agriculture. There was also a new law about cooperatives which had to correspond to the changes in ownership.¹⁴

But in 1992 all collective farms were officially disbanded and property rights in land returned to the families which held them prior to collectivization. The main reason for this drastic change was political – the new liberal right-wing party SDS was aiming to restore pre-war agrarian structure in a bid to create for itself a wide base of supporters, grateful for the returned land. Fears that this would scatter plots and make the desired creation of a middle class impossible, were not taken into consideration. The idea was that land owners would be the most conservative social group and thus a solid electoral support for the new party. At the same time, sociological surveys showed that nearly 60% of the peasants remained in favor of collective farming and only 21% were willing to establish their own farms.¹⁵

According to scholars like historian Iliyana Marcheva, Bulgarian land reform, stretching from 1991 to 2001, was more drastic but at the same time less effective than that in the other socialist countries. At the same time it is important to note, that its neoliberal character was for the most part supported not only by institutions like the World Bank and the new liberal Bulgarian parties, but also by the former communists. The collective-minded peasants had to be persuaded in the virtues of private agriculture with all the ensuing problems. Still, the bulk of the agrarian reform was done by the liberals SDS as an attempt to decommunize the villages. Unlike other post-socialist countries, Bulgaria entirely destroyed collective farming, including those created in the period 1990-1992. As a result, all large-scale agriculture was demolished and the road to favourable market conditions was doomed to be a slow one. The scattered plots were difficult to rent, while the actual decollectivization was happening very slowly from a legal perspective.¹⁶

The actual decollectivization was carried out by the so called “liquidation councils”, comprised most often by people foreign to any sort of agricultural work, but with strong political ties. All the equipment and machinery, owned by the APKs and TKZSs was auctioned by the liquidators, often without any government control and much below market prices. Each peasant from the respective cooperative received part of the cooperative's animals – which was in most cases not more than two or three cows or sheep – certainly not enough to start private farming. In this way animal breeds that were unique for Bulgaria were virtually slaughtered in the matter of months. Even Philip Dimitrov, then prime-minister of Bulgaria, conceded that his government was not able to “guarantee fair rules for the work of the liquidation councils.”¹⁷

Over 15 thousand agronomists and other agricultural specialists were left unemployed as a result of the reform. By the way, the results were especially adverse for the Roma minority in Bulgaria. Until 1989 45% of the mechanics and 65% of livestock workers in the cooperatives were from the Roma minority. They received good salaries and their children went to school along with their Bulgarian neighbors. With the liquidation of the cooperatives, the Roma received no land, since their nomadic ancestors had none prior to the war. This led to huge Roma unemployment and poverty and also to the creation of Roma ghettos in the big cities like Sofia and Plovdiv. Ever since then, the “Roma question” is one of the gravest social problems in Bulgaria and at the same time incites blatant racism from the part of politicians and nationalist groups.¹⁸

¹⁴ В. Михайлов, „Аграрната политика на правителството на Филип Димитров“, в: Минало, бр. 3, София, 2006

¹⁵ И. Марчева, Аграрната реформа в България 1991-2001 през погледа на историка. - в: Толерантният националист. Паметен сборник от приятелите на Стайко Трифонов, ред. И. Баева, София, 2009, 375-376

¹⁶ Ibidem, 377

¹⁷ Ibidem, 376

¹⁸ Л. Канева, М. Мизов, Е. Кандиларов, Цит. съч., 70

In 1999, production of some main agricultural branches has drastically fallen off compared to 1990: grain production by 37 %; fruit-growing by 60 %; tobacco growing compared to 1989 by 60 %; sugar-beet by 94 %; and wine-production by 50 %. The destruction of the necessary equipment and the production base has led to some serious disturbances of basic links in the production technology such as noncompliance with the technological and agro technical requirements, violating the crop-rotations, unbalanced and inadequate application of fertilizers and chemicals, etc. Almost one third of the arable land was left unused.¹⁹

But this was soon to change when European money started to enter Bulgarian agriculture before the country joined the EU in 2007. The SAPARD programme 2000-2006 (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development), established by the Council of the European Union to help countries of Central and Eastern Europe deal with the problems of the structural adjustment in their agricultural sectors and rural areas prior to their joining the Union, was one of the main factors for change in Bulgarian agriculture. Money from the programme were mainly used for modern tractors and harvesters, used predominantly for grain production. Most of the people who benefited from SAPARD turned out to be with close political ties, as later court procedures showed.²⁰

The rules of the programme suited predominantly the bigger companies, leaving aside family farms and cooperatives. This created the necessary incentive for the bigger players to buy out or rent the scattered plots, left unused after the land reform in 1992. This started the wave that turned Bulgaria into the country with the largest percentages of land concentration in Europe. Another reason was the way in which Bulgaria negotiated with the EU the funding opportunities under the Common Agricultural Policy. The size of the EU funds per holding was to be based solely on the plot size, disrespective of the kind of agricultural activity. But naturally expenses for grain production are considerably less than for tomato production, for example, so the bigger companies started to produce mainly grain, corn and rapeseed. Grain production started to predominate, entirely at the expense of livestock, fruit and vegetables, thus completely changing the structure of Bulgarian agricultural from the socialist period.

From 2000 onwards there has been a steady drop in the number of agricultural holdings and a trend towards the concentration of utilised agricultural area in the hands of few but large holdings.

The same holdings receive the bulk of the European funding. A recent report by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences shows that for the period 2007-2013 75% of all direct European funding was received by only 100 people. The situation was similar with the money for development of the rural regions, where the same 100 people received 67% of all the funding. Half of the top ten companies, which received most funding, are in one way or another linked to the same person – Borislav Dichevski. In this sense it is interesting to note that Dichevski's holding is called "Octopus".²¹

According to the report of the Bulgarian academy, this is indicative of the trends in Bulgarian agriculture for the last 20 years – concentration of land and capital; disruption of local chains between producers and clients; invasion of multinational supermarkets, dwindling livestock, fruit and vegetables production; production with low added value – mainly wheat; loss of traditional markets and seeds; no integration between food production and the tourist industry. According to the

¹⁹ N. Bencheva, Transition Of Bulgarian Agriculture: Present Situation, Problems And Perspectives For Development, *Journal of Central European Agriculture*, Volume 6 (2005) No. 4, 473-480

²⁰ „Делото Сапард премина границите на абсурда с експертните, Медиапул, 15 февруари 2016 (<http://www.mediapool.bg/deloto-sapard-premina-granitsata-na-absurda-s-ekspertizite-news245603.html>)

²¹ Драгомир Николов, Диян Божидаров, „Кои са най-големите земевладелци в България“, Сега, 16 юли 2007, (<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=331581>)

economists from the Academy, the main reasons for these developments are the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU and the way the direct payments are distributed.²²

The average size of the EU subsidy per 1 da is 20 lv which covers 30% of the costs for grain production but only 2% for fruit or vegetables. In this way the fundings become an incentive for land concentration and large-scale grain production. But the fault is also with the national government since each country decides on its own how to redistribute European money. In Germany for example, holdings up to 50 ha receive 100% of the funds per holding, those up to 100 ha – 80%, those up to 300 – 60%, and those above 300 receive none. Only in Bulgaria and the Czech republic no such modulation exists and the more plot size you have, the more EU money you receive.²³

This leads to a certain commodification and financialisation of land use. NGOs like Za zemiata (For the earth) speak about “land grabbing” in Bulgaria, which designates the reorientation of the function of farmland from the production of use value (e.g. food for local communities) to the extraction of financial gains and/or rent, without considering sustainable local development. That is if investors’ rationality is not related to agricultural production but towards extraction of rent through subletting land or through speculating with land. “Land grabbing” should also include the large agricultural companies whose production is subordinated solely to the logic of international markets, and not to the welfare of local communities and the environment.²⁴

The concentration of land use and the current process of consolidation of ownership are most visible in Northern Bulgaria, and the already mentioned Dobrudja, because of the region’s suitability for intensive production of cereals (mostly wheat). The capital-intensive production in the region presupposes large investments, too. The economic development of the sector is very good but it does not deliver the expected social and environmental benefits. It creates an insignificant number of jobs and intensive production requires a lot of fossil energy sources (for the production of fuels and herbicides) which contribute to climate change and damage soils.

It is interesting to note that despite these obvious trends, Bulgarian national agricultural strategies such as the Concept for Land Relations Governance and the Consolidation of Farmlands assume that farmlands are too fragmented and that an active public intervention is needed in order for ownership and use to be centralised. Another example is the joint Strategy for Land Consolidation 2007-2013 of the Bulgarian and Dutch governments²⁵. It is important as it was adopted right when Bulgaria was joining the EU. It holds that there are too many small and fragmented holdings which “will encounter obstacles when applying for the direct payment schemes” with the EU. The role of the state in the document is understood not as responsible to support small and medium producers in receiving EU subsidies but to intervene politically in their exclusion from the market. One of the “main tasks” of the government is defined as offering a solution to the “problem” of “the fragmentation of holdings.” The strategy prescribes “implementing integrated consolidation projects funded by the state.” It defines consolidation as “one of the most important tools for the development of the rural areas and covers the notion of land development.” “The expected impact” is that the villages become “attractive for living

²² “Икономистите на БАН: От модела на земеделието губим 10 млрд. лева добавена стойност”, БАН, 7 юни 2016, (goo.gl/F8DP4h)

²³ “Концентрацията на земеделието в България“, За земята, февруари 2016
http://zazemiata.org/v1/fileadmin/content/globalizacia/docs/Koncentraciqta_na_zemedeliето_v_Bylgaria.preview.pdf

²⁴ Пак там

²⁵ Ministry of Agriculture and Food. 2006. Strategiya za komasatsia za Bulgaria. Ustoychivo izpolzvane na zemite v Bulgaria 2007-2013.
(www.mzh.government.bg/MZH/Libraries/Поземлени_отношения/strategia_komasacia_v_BG.sflb.ashx).

and for economic initiatives” by “developing competitive agriculture,” via concentration of the ownership of land and creation of “rational farms.”²⁶

Consolidation strategies speak of sustainable, social and environmentally friendly development. But data of the impact of the real centralisation of agriculture point to exactly the opposite – decreasing numbers of jobs and extreme concentration of intensive production of cereals. In the last decade the total number of agricultural holdings dropped three times. According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Food, in 2013 only 4% (or 8600) of agricultural producers used 85% of all utilised agricultural land. Between 2010 and 2013 only the number of holdings of more than 10 ha increased. The medium holdings were the fewest, and they utilised 1 to 2 ha.

In recent years all European small-scale agricultural producers are in crisis. There is a process of concentration of production in fewer but larger holdings. But concentration particularly in Bulgaria is a far more serious issue. Between 2005 and 2013 the number of holdings in Bulgaria dropped by 52%. In comparison, in Austria it is 17% and in Romania – 15%.²⁷

Bulgaria is a European leader when it comes to the share of utilised agricultural land used by large agricultural holdings. In 2010 about 87% of the UAA was concentrated in holdings of 50 ha or more. Only in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Great Britain was land distribution more unequal. The distribution of land in Bulgaria is especially unequal compared to the average in Europe. In 2010 the average share of holdings with under 2 ha of land in the EU-28 was about 50% and their share in Bulgaria was over 80%. In 2010 medium holdings (with utilised agricultural land of 2 to 10 ha) in Bulgaria had a share three times lower than the average share in EU-28.²⁸

Za zemiata NGO points out that in Bulgaria small holdings predominate but only in numbers, and not in terms of access to utilised agricultural land. Over 80% of agricultural holdings in the country have under 2 ha which placed Bulgaria second in Europe, just after Malta, by share of agricultural holdings with minimum access to land. What is more, Bulgaria had one of the smallest share of medium holdings in 2010 - 11.1%. Again, only Malta had smaller (but not significantly) share of medium holdings – 10.8% in 2010. Compared to other European countries, Malta is the nation with the least arable land in the EU – the total UAA in Malta in 2010 was under 0.25% of the total UAA in Bulgaria.²⁹

The governmental strategies for consolidation are explicitly oriented towards the regions at an altitude of below 800 m and it leaves out the less developed mountain areas. This means that the centralisation of agricultural production is only advantageous to the large capital intensive production of cereals.

The situation with livestock farming is no different. In 2013 barely 1.5% of livestock farms used 66% of the agricultural area utilised in that sector. These are holdings utilising more than 50 ha.³⁰

²⁶“Концентрацията на земеделието в България“, За земята, февруари 2016
http://zazemiata.org/v1/fileadmin/content/globalizacia/docs/Koncentraciqta_na_zemedeliето_v_Bylgaria.preview.pdf

²⁷ Ministry of Agriculture and Food: Agrostistics Department. 2014. Byuletin № 273.
(www.mzh.government.bg/MZH/bg/ShortLinks/SelskaPolitika/Agrostistics/Structure_agricultura_l_holdings/Posts_copy1/Buletini2014.aspx)

²⁸“Концентрацията на земеделието в България“, За земята, февруари 2016
http://zazemiata.org/v1/fileadmin/content/globalizacia/docs/Koncentraciqta_na_zemedeliето_v_Bylgaria.preview.pdf

²⁹ Пак там

³⁰ Ministry of Agriculture and Food: Agrostistics Department. 2014. Byuletin № 273.
(www.mzh.government.bg/MZH/bg/ShortLinks/SelskaPolitika/Agrostistics/Structure_agricultura)

The concentration of the use of land pushes out not solely the small and medium producers but also cooperatives. For the 2003-2010 period the number of cooperative agricultural holdings dropped by 53% and their UAA fell by 45%. Commercial companies' share however was rising – their numbers increased by 157% and the UAA they utilised by 144%.³¹

The development of intensive agriculture does not lead to the development from a social and environmental perspective. Capital intensive cereals production does not create new jobs. Efficient agriculture in Bulgaria produces only large quantities of cereals (mostly wheat) to export and Bulgaria is one of the world's leading exporting countries of sunflower seeds. However, the country produces little adequate food for the local markets. Bulgaria is being transformed from an exporting country to a country importing fruits and vegetables. This is also degrading in respect to food sovereignty. The country was producing almost the same amount of wheat during socialism as well, but back then only 5% of it went for export (compared to 45% nowadays). During socialism grain was used for livestock feeding and the country exported processed meat, fruit and vegetables and not just raw material.³²

The number of people employed in agriculture drops constantly. In 2001 the people employed in agriculture comprised 24% of all workers (770 000 people); in 2014 they were 20% of the workforce (or 705 000), and in 2014 they were less than 700 000.³³ The tendency towards consolidation of agriculture is accompanied by a constant drop in the number of jobs in the sector. This is why the social benefits expected to come with consolidation do not come true.

Dobrudja, often referred to as Golden Dobrudja in nationalist mythology, is as we mentioned the region that offers the best conditions for capitalist agriculture and where most of the export grain is produced. But at the same time it is in the top ten Bulgarian regions with highest unemployment along with other fertile areas like Shumen and Vidin. Most of the agricultural work necessary for grain production is done by modern machinery which leaves most of the local peasants unemployed. The few that remain in the villages are entirely dependent for their existence on the landowners, creating a situation that in a perverse way resembles feudalism.

These trends received some government notice only recently. For the 2014-2020 period of the European Rural development programmes Bulgaria chose to direct subsidies towards the most vulnerable agricultural sectors – livestock, fruit and vegetables, essential oils and bioproduction. Also a limit of eurofunding per producer was set – 300 thousand Euro, no matter the land size. But there are easy ways to bypass these new measures – people like “the Octopus” Dichevski register different companies, each of which can receive a subsidy. Big players like him also invest in fruit and vegetable production to benefit from the new governmental focus – but plant only pumpkins and water-melons, since these do not require

[l_holdings/Posts_copy1/Buletini2014.aspx](#))

³¹“Концентрацията на земеделието в България“, За земята, февруари 2016
(http://zazemiata.org/v1/fileadmin/content/globalizacia/docs/Koncentraciqta_na_zemedeliето_v_Bylgaria.preview.pdf)

³²С. Радославова, „Тъмната страна на земеделието“, Капитал, 10 юни 2016,
(http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2016/06/10/2775436_tumnata_strana_na_zemedeliето/)

³³ НСИ. 2015. Статистически годишник 2015.
(<http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/StatBook2015.pdf>)

much more labour and irrigation than wheat. It remains to be seen if the government can deal with these loopholes, especially when we consider the strong lobby that big producers have. It should be noted that land concentration is starting to worry European politicians as well. At the end of april this year the European Parliament issued a resolution, which encouraged the Commission and the member states to fight land concentration with different instruments, including legal reforms, new forms of taxation and change in the model of subsidies.³⁴ In a country like Bulgaria, where as we said only 4% of agricultural producers utilised 85% of all utilised land, this European debate seems of high importance.

European members of parliament point out problems with land concentration that are painfully familiar to the Bulgarian peasant – it contradicts the idea for a sustainable development, it leaves family farms out of the market and bars access to land for the small and middle-size producers. Other negative aspects include village depopulation, unemployment, ecological problems, misspending of European funds, etc. The resolution doesn't have an obligatory character but at least raises concerns for the problem which is especially obvious in Bulgaria.

But it highly doubtful that the European Union can successfully fight land concentration since its regulations were some of the main reasons that created the problem on the first place. Change is nevertheless necessary, especially from the perspective of Bulgarian peasants. One from every ten Bulgarian villages is on the brink of extinction, according to a report by the National Statistics Institute from 2014. Out of 5009 villages in the country, 564 are already desolated or have less than 10 inhabitants.³⁵

At the same time Bulgarian peasants are the poorest in the European Union, and their living standards are worse even than those in some of the non-EU Balkan neighbours.³⁶ Which sums up the unhappy conclusion about Bulgarian agriculture in the 21 century. A country with excellent climatic and geographic preconditions for agriculture is forced to import most of its food, while village life slowly extinguishes in poverty. All of this should finally question the neoliberal model of agriculture not only in Bulgaria, but in the EU as a whole.

³⁴ Д. Ватева, „България на три ферми“, Капитал, 12 май 2017,
(http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/05/12/2969394_bulgariia_na_tri_ferm)

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