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EFFECTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1921 AGRARIAN REFORM IN IAȘI COUNTY

DOBOȘ SEBASTIAN¹

Abstract: *The historiographical and socio-economic topic of the 1918-1921 agrarian reform, marked by a considerable degree of difficulty due to a multitude of objective, quantitative as well as qualitative factors, represents a point of reference in the research endeavours focused on the social and economic evolution of Romania. In fact, the major difficulties in the scientific approaches dedicated to the reform initiated by decree in 1918 are inherently determined by the statistical and historical sources, the causes being the stages of registration, sampling, centralization and processing processes, as well as the material and personnel resources which were very limited at that time. The issue of statistical and economic data volume deficiencies can be easily observed upon consulting archived documents, which contain numerous modifications, alterations and other interventions, researchers encountering real difficulties in extracting data and exploiting their real potential. The effects of the 1921 agrarian reform on the evolution of the inter-war society of Iasi County were overall multiple and complex, influencing to a greater or lesser degree all spheres of activity: economy, politics, culture, a.s.o. Substantial changes in the agricultural property structure following the implementation of the agrarian reform resulted in the small peasant household as a basic economic unit in the primary sector of Iasi County. The inter-war agricultural censuses corroborated with the statistics compiled by the authorities show that land ownership in Iasi county underwent substantial changes, compared to the situation prior to the year 1918.*

Key words: *agricultural sciences, economic history, historiography, interdisciplinarity, rural economy*

JEL Classification: N00, N30, N50

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the agrarian reform of 1918-1921 was approached by a number of economists, sociologists, historians and reputed politicians who reflected, studied and offered arguments for and against this cardinal event of national history. It is also appropriate to mention the sustained efforts of a series of dedicated teachers, archivists and other professional groups interested in the field of history. Due to their research efforts, materialized in larger or smaller, but certainly relevant works, the success of the interwar reform has gradually yielded a series of multiple interpretations, the researchers' perspective being influenced by the socio-political context. At the same time, it is imperative to mention the contribution of numerous foreign authors who brought a better understanding of the problem of the 1921 agrarian reform in the Kingdom of Romania, which shows peculiarities at the level of its administrative-territorial components, in accordance with the political programs implemented by the ruling parties. The interest of foreign researchers in the history of Romania, the agrarian reform carried out between the two world wars included, can be accounted for in terms of its amplitude compared to the other similar reforms carried out over time in the countries of Eastern Europe as well as the importance of Romania as a country with a predominantly agrarian economy, a vital supplier of cereal products for the highly industrialized economies located of Western Europe, particularly until the 1929 crash.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Researching this reference event of the history of Romania involves a number of bibliographic, documentary, analytical and especially statistical difficulties. Part of the study of economic history, the agrarian reform of 1918-1921 is definitely a topic of research with a special status. Although the aim of obtaining quantitative results to support theoretical assertions and assessments derived from primary sources is a fundamental one, the importance of studying and making use of the available archival funds cannot be overrated. Thus the inventories and documents

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in the County Offices of the National Archives of Romania, including the Iași Branch, represent an indispensable research resource.

Despite the many established methods of approach, materialized in the form of statistical analyses and tables quantifying the effects of the 1918-1921 reform which appear rigid, difficult to approach by researchers unfamiliar with the rigors of statistical methods, the topic of the agrarian reform undoubtedly calls for more quantitative analyses, which are a major factor in understanding quantitative data. The major difficulties associated with such scientific approaches are determined by the statistical historical documents themselves, which include information concerning the processes of registration, sampling, centralization and processing, all of which were performed at the time not only with inappropriate tools, but by a small number of staff. Thus the archive documents involve statistical and economic data deficiencies (centralizations, figures, amounts or weights), something that becomes obvious on even a brief consultation of these documents: there are many alterations, rectifications and all sort of corrections, so that potential researchers are bound to experience serious difficulties in extracting the relevant data. Moreover the documents filed in multiple archive units are often found in several copies - sometimes differing versions of the same document, so that the recorded figures and sums vary considerably. According to some researchers, in situations in which there are several variants of the same document, if the accuracy of recorded data cannot be established with certainty or if it is impossible to otherwise determine the degree of accuracy, all the variants of the archived facts should be presented side by side. On the other hand, several researchers and authors agree that the abundance of primary and secondary sources, making up a vast thematic bibliography, both qualitative and quantitative, is in itself a research difficulty. The archival funds that have survived the vicissitudes of time cannot be consulted without considerable efforts of selection and especially synthesis of historical data. On setting oneself the goal of obtaining as objective results as possible, in accordance with the current scientific requirements, it is only fair to admit that complete objectivity is not easily achievable. Consequently, despite possible arguments to the contrary, it can be safely said that, in order to ensure that one obtains results and interpretations as accurate as possible from a methodological point of view, an interdisciplinary approach is an absolute requirement. On engaging the topic of the 1921 agrarian reform in Romania, an interdisciplinary approach will involve, besides historiography in its dual interpretation, the agronomical sciences, demography, economics, geography, statistics, sociology, psychology, law, computer science and possibly more.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The agricultural situation in the county of Iași at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was plagued by contradictions, a natural consequence of the historical evolution, which also characterized the national economy at large, so that the situation of the county of Iași did not set itself apart from that elsewhere in the country. In this context, the land fund, the main wealth and production factor of Romania in contrast to other European states, was monopolized by the extensive agricultural holdings covering thousands of hectares, the property of landowners and often exploited through the lessees, which constituted a separate social category. In the region of Moldavia a large number of lessees were Jews, a situation was bound to lead to discontent. Many estates were managed and exploited intensively in the interwar period starting in the late 19th century and resulting in the emergence of the “trusturi arendașești” (extensive let out agricultural holdings) which eventually held tens of thousands of hectares, exerting a monopoly – one of the causes of the violent events of 1907. Most of these large-scale agricultural holdings used the workforce of the agricultural proletariat as the legal basis of “tocmeli” or “învoieli agricole”, which were agreements concluded in written form or in many cases orally. Such agreements proved to be an important factor in the evolution of the interwar agriculture of the county of Iași (as shown by many archived testimonies and contemporary literature) as the contractual terms imposed to detriment of the villagers were not abided by, a situation which further contributed to aggravating the severe poverty of the “plugari” (plough-wielding peasants). A major problem, was the

discrepancy between the big landed properties and the small peasant household, which in most cases were burdened by usurer and mortgage debts as well as plagued by structural deficiencies, the main downside being its reduced surface, insufficient to ensure even a subsistence level for small agricultural producers; this tiny plot of land was nevertheless the foundation of the national economy.

Our own investigations of archive documents have shown that prior to 1939, 217 estates had been expropriated in the county of Iași, with a total area of 98,281 hectares. This situation can be accounted for by the expropriation procedure itself, which was an ample enterprise, complicated due to its legal support, and providing for multiple exceptions. Although expropriation was declared broadly finished in 1926, the definitive appropriation of the peasants was hindered by the large volume of work to be carried out by an insufficient number of staff, as the following excerpt from one of many similar reports indicates: “It is now time to acknowledge the titanic work carried out and the strong desire of Mr. Ion Axinte, the Prefect of the county of Iași, to see all the villagers entitled, without anymore grievances. His next objective is to know every villager in possession of his house and arable plot, so as then to ask them to work well and rationally to produce much. For any piece of agricultural cultural propaganda will be useless, if there are further applications for appropriation from people entitled to it. [...] For the purpose of accelerating the plotting work, Mr. Ion Axinte, the Prefect of the County, intervened vigorously at the VI Cadastre Inspectorate, with the result that all the staff of the Inspectorate VI Iași are currently working at plotting and quota measurements. Consequently, the current state of agriculture from the perspective of the effects of the agrarian law looks promising, if only time and man will allow for it to be completed”².

The document entitled „Aplicarea măsurătorii terenurilor expropriate în conformitate cu Decretul Lege de către Direcțiunea Cadastrului (După formularul fișei cadastrale)”³ (“*The measurement of land expropriated in accordance with the Decree-Law by the Cadastre Department - According to the Cadastral Form Norms*”) at the level of the county of Iași, indicates that the total area of the measured estates prior to 1927, as set out in the “Instructions of the Decree Law no. 5697 of 1918” was 82,280.58 hectares, of which 62,088.62 hectares were due to be expropriated. Of these, 727.54 hectares were public domains, while 11,903.09 hectares represented the “unexpropriable areas left to their respective owners”. The cadastral authorities of the time estimated the “total expropriable areas” at 57,991 hectares and 23 ares, while the final measurement of the county's area was 60,634 hectares and 47 ares. The total area of “intangible” cultivated land belonging to landowners was of 15,301 hectares, the final recorded expropriated area in accordance with the decree-law being of 46,515.57 hectares⁴.

However, upon considering the figures listed in various tables of data concerning the measuring, dividing and plotting the expropriated estates according to the final provisions of the land reform law issued in 1921, obtained by compiling and centralizing the data from the cadastral data sheets of the agricultural holdings, a number of discrepancies become obvious. Thus, “Tabela XIV” (*Table no. XIV*) records a rectification of the total expropriated area of 40,419.59 hectares in the county of Iași, which makes for a difference of 6,095.98 hectares. The document certifies that, in accordance with the Decree-law no. 3697/918, at county level, an area of only 31.726 hectares and 84 ares was actually expropriated, while by transposing the final provisions of the decree in their final form in 1921 the area was of only 8,692.75 hectares. The explanation of this quantitative difference is included in the same document, which attests to the repeated changes of decision of the county commissions and the “Comitetul Agrar” (“*Agrarian Committee*”), in the form of two distinct columns, which record the areas returned to the deposed owners following their appeals. This happened in the “Cârligătura”, “Codru”, “Copou”, “Bahlui” and “Turia” administrative units, where a total of 517.75 hectares were returned to their former landowners as a result of successful legal actions, the official written explanation being that “s-a luat în plus proprietarului” (“*the owner*

² A.N.R. Iași, fond *Prefectura județului Iași*, dosar nr. 26, f. 98

³ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 15

⁴ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 3/1927, f. 369

was deprived through miscalculation”⁵). The statistical situation is detailed at the level of all the localities and estates, being possible to determine all the recalculations and corrections made by categories of land use (crops or pastures)⁶. It is important to note that there were cases in which some landowners attempted and sometimes succeeded, to circumvent the provisions of the law and to be granted exemption from expropriation of some estates or parts of estates. The Agrarian Reform Act of 1921 for the regions of Oltenia, Wallachia, Moldavia and Dobrugea (“Vechiul Regat”) allowed the expropriation of pastures and forests only under definite conditions.

According to the data recorded by “Serviciul Agricol Județean Iași” (“*Iași County Agricultural Service*”), by applying the provisions of the final decisions of Decree-Law no. 3697/918, by 1927, a total area of 84,992 hectares and 84 ares had been expropriated in the county of Iași⁷, out of which an area of 84,410 hectares and 54 ares were actually appropriated by the “Agricultural Service of the County of Iași” and distributed to the villages in the “Cârligătura”, “Codru”, “Copou”, “Bahlui” and “Turia” administrative units. The same documents mention that in the “Cârligătura” unit an area of 534 hectares and 30 ares⁸ had not been taken into possession at that date, and in the “Copou” unit, an area of 48 hectares had been returned to its former owner following a decision of the “Comitetul Agrar București” (“*the Agrarian Committee of Bucharest*”)⁹. According to the recapitulation drafted by the same county service and titled “Tablou anexă la situația model A.1927 - Vechiul Regat”¹⁰ (“*Annex to the Model Statement A.1927 The Old Kingdom*”) out of a total of 100,525 hectares and 96 ares, 93,270 hectares and 20 ares were crop areas, while the difference of 7,555 hectares and 76 ares represented pasture areas at the level of all the five regions of the county of Iași at that time. The same statistics also provide information on how the land was actually allotted. Thus, by 1927, out of the total area owned by the newly appropriated peasants, which amounted to 65,332 hectares and 59 ares, the local beneficiaries of the land reform owned 65,025 hectares and 59 ares while the remaining 307 hectares were allotted to the category known as “reangajați împrumătați”. The same table mentions an area of about 2,170 hectares which was farmed by lessees who were entitled to appropriation, as well as an area of 2,128 hectares and 35 ares set aside for potential colonists. Of this, an area of 386.75 hectares was destined to settlers from the Iași county, while an area over 4.5 times larger (1,741.6 hectares) had been reserved for use by peasants from the nearby counties. By subtracting from the total areas set aside for the resettlement claimants - 2,128.35 hectares, the remaining available land funds in the administration of the “Casa Centrală a Împrumătarilor Sătenilor” (“*Headquarters of the Agency for the Landed Properties of Villagers*”) amounted to 3,502 hectares and 92 ares¹¹.

The statistical records of „Consilieratul Agricol Iași” (“*Iași County Agricultural Council*”) mention a total of 4,298 hectares and 18 ares that were destined for land appropriation, but which were then farmed by lessees who were entitled to property. As mentioned above the issue of the village commons was a key one in the context of the 1921 reform. That there was a deficit of commons areas is indicated by the statistics compiled by the county councilor; in the county of Iași, out of a total of 22,412 hectares and 98 ares in 1927, an area of about 15,157 hectares had been allocated to this type of land, with the purpose of setting up new areas for grazing in order to satisfy the needs of stockholders. Following the distribution made by the “Serviciul Agricol” (“*Agricultural Service*”), of the available land fund, 15,139 hectares and 22 ares were classified as “date în debit” (“*under payment procedures*”), while only 18 hectares were under lease. Worth mentioning is the fact that, at the level In the five administrative units of the county of Iași, archived documents recorded that 7,255 hectares and 76 ares of commons land came from expropriations carried out under the “Land Reform Law”, having already been handed over by the “Serviciul

⁵ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 16

⁶ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 15-255

⁷ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 2

⁸ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 2

⁹ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 2

¹⁰ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 18

¹¹ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 9

Agricol” (*“Agricultural Service”*). In the “Cârligătura” unit, a total of 662 hectares had been expropriated, in the “Codru” unit an almost double area - 1,223 hectares and 22 ares, in the “Bahlui” unit almost 1,620 hectares, and in the “Turia” unit - 1,661 hectares and 50 ares. It can be noted that the administrative unit with the largest expropriated area was the one in the northern part of the county – “Plasa Copou”.

Archive documents provide information concerning details of general and global purposes, according to the provisions of the Decree-Law and of the Law of Land Reform. Of the total of 3,139.41 hectares of “reserves”: „Școli de agricultură de orice grad” (*“Agricultural schools of all degrees”*) – 106 hectares; „Ferme” (*“Agricultural holdings”*) – 264 hectares; „Locuri ocupate de clădiri” (*“Areas reserved to various buildings”*)– 11 ha.; „Loturi agricole model” (*“Agricultural model plots”*) – 280 ha.; „Loturi pentru Consilierat și Regiuni Agricole” (*“Plots designated for the use of the County Agricultural Council and Regional Agricultural Administrative Units”*) – 55 ha.; „Grădini de zarzavat asupra Casei Centrale” (*“Garden plots managed by the Central House”*)– 99.5 hectares; „Ministerul de Instrucție Publică (afară de școli primare)” (*“Ministry of Public Instruction (except primary schools)”*) – 77.5 hectares; „Ministerul Cultelor, Mitropolii, Episcopii, etc. (afară de biserici)” (*“Ministry of Cults, Metropolitan churches, Bishoprics, etc. (properties of local churches not taken into account)”*) – 100 ha.; „Ministerul de Război pentru orice destinație” (*“Ministry of war”*) – 60 ha.; „Ministerul de comunicații - cantoane de șosele” (*“Ministry of Communications - Road Cantons”*)– 103 ha.; “Subsecretariatul de Stat C.F.R., cantoane, stații etc.” (*“ State Undersecretariat for the Railways, Cantons, Stations, etc.”*) – 107.5 ha.; „Ministerul Sănătății Publice, pentru spitale, infirmerii” (*“The Ministry of Public Health for hospitals, infirmaries”*)– 50.94 ha; „Școli primare rurale” (*“Rural primary schools”*)– 545.36 ha.; „Biserici rurale” (*“Churches in rural areas”*) – 135.50 ha.; „Cimitire de oameni” (*“Cemeteries”*)– 20 ha.; „Cimitire de animale” (*“Burial plots for animals”*) – 10.75 ha.; „Terenuri tir și sport” (*“ Fields for practicing sports”*) – 83 ha.; „Drumuri de parcelare” (*“Agricultural access roads”*)– 760.31 ha.; „Serviciu Zootehnic (Loturi)” (*“Plots for the Livestock Service”*) – 123.50 ha.; „Ministerul de Industrie” (*“Ministry of Industry”*)– 2 ha.; „Iazuri cu stuh” (*“Ponds with reed”*)– 26 ha.; „Ministerul de Justiție” (*“Ministry of Justice”*) – 6 ha.; „Obor comunal” (*“Areas reserved for stock markets”*) – 1.40 hectare; „Lot apicol” (*“Beeharvesting plots”*) – 3 ha.; „Iarmaroace rurale” (*“Sites designated for rural fairs”*)– 0.20 ha.; „Fundăția <Carol>” (*“Carol Foundation”*) -14.45 ha.; „Tușișuri” (*“Bush-covered areas”*) – 126 ha.)¹². While in the year 1928 the total areas designated as reserves in the entire Kingdom of Romania amounted to 395,442 hectares, in 1930 the total was of only 353,781 ha.¹³.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The surviving records of the “Consilieratul Agricol Județean Iași” (*“Iași County Agricultural Advisory Board”*), also include data that supports the process of reconstitution and evaluation of the effects of the 1921 agrarian reform. Thus, although the authorities had officially declared the works completed by 1926, the data provided by the available primary sources shows as in other interwar counties, that the official declarations, made for various reasons, did not quite correspond to reality, not unlike the situation in the rest of the country. Thus, in the county of Iași, although apparently insignificant considering the more than 100,000 hectares under the agrarian law of 1921, an area of 3,502 hectares of “crop land” was registered as being “available” in the statistical documents in the former archives of the “Casa Centrală a Cooperației și Împroprietăririi Sătenilor” (*“Headquarters of the Agri-coop Agency for the Appropriation of Peasants”*): 2,280 hectares and 39 ares in the “Turia” unit; 1,160 hectares and 35 ares in the “Bahlui” unit and only about 62 hectares in “Plasa Copou”, all of which had already been leased at the time. The figure, although small, is indicative of the delays in the actual field operations.

¹² A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 18; f. 11-12

¹³ Anghel Frunzănescu, *Evoluția chestiunii agrare în România*, p. 112 (apud Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România*, Editura Academiei R.S.R., București, 1975, p. 163)

It can be noted moreover that out of a total of 100,525 hectares and 96 ares measured by the “Cadastral Technical Inspectorate” teams, about 90% was registered as already sold or otherwise “handed over”. The fact that by 1927 only 10,769 hectares (10%) were registered as leased can be taken as an indication of the overall success of the agrarian reform in the county of Iași.

An important problem related to the reform in 1921, in the whole country as in the county of Iași is the distribution of the land earmarked for expropriation which was then sold to the entitled peasants, by categories of use. Thus, “The Iași County Agricultural Advisory Board” recorded the existence of a total of 72,264.39 hectares of arable and pasture lands in the five administrative-units, a fact which also confirms that most of the available land was arable. Then as now this was very much a characteristic of all the counties in Moldavia. Further records mention the forested areas - 150 hectares in the “Bahlu” unit, only 16 hectares in the “Copou” unit as well as the 195 hectares of land “unsuitable for farming purposes”, located in the „Plasa Bahlu” (the “Bahlu” administrative-unit), which is crossed from the NW to the SE by the homonymous river, which makes for the existence of extended areas of land that is unsuitable for farming. The 948 hectares of “Water bodies and marshlands” further mentioned by the Advisory Board were also unsuitable for farming purposes.

The prevalence of arable land at the expense of other categories in the interwar period is further recorded by the many detailed statistics of the “Iași County Agricultural Advisory Board” and its successor institution, “The Iași Agricultural Service”, which was set up in 1933. Thus, the document titled “*Situația recapitulativă de modul cum s`au folosit terenurile luate în primire de regiunea agricolă II Codru*”, created in accordance with specifications provided by the „*Tabel anexă la situația model A. 1927 Vechiul Regat*”, mentions the fact that in 1927 out of the 7,522.1 hectares included in the agricultural circuit in all of the 15 villages in the “Plasa Codru”, 83.73% represented land registered in column “Column B”- “Culture”, of the table. The “Codru” unit comprised 15 villages in 1927, however note must be made of the extremely frequent alterations that were made in the structure and boundaries of the administrative units during the interwar period, including dismantling of hamlets, villages and / or communes). In the 15 constituent rural communes there were 1,223.22 hectares of pastures, a fact which proves that the farming of arable land was the main occupation of the small household members, particularly given the geographical features of the county bordering on the Central Moldavian Plateau and the Moldavian Plain.

While the total areas of land registered as “available for appropriation purposes” in Column h of the general statistics equal 4877,77 hectares, the following document in the same historical source, titled “*Situația statistică pe comune și moșii a repartiției după folosință a terenurilor expropriate în mod definitiv prin aplicarea Decretului Lege și Legii Agrare luată în primire de „Regiunea agricolă II Codru”* (“*Statistical assessment by communes and agricultural holdings of the distribution, with the breaking down of land use, of definitely expropriated properties in accordance with the stipulations of the `Decree Law` and the `Agrarian Law` in the `Codru II Agricultural Unit`*)¹⁴ mentions a total of 7,270.60 hectares that had been expropriated for purposes of appropriation of the inhabitants of the 15 constituent villages of the “Plasa Codru: „Buciumi, Bârnova, Ciurea, Cornești, Miroslava, Costuleni, Prisăcanii, Voinești, Mogoșești, Mironeasa, Schitu-Duca, Pocreaca, Poieni, Tomești, and Osii¹⁵. Another general statistics of the “Iași County Agricultural Advisory Board” titled “*Table II Implementation of the Law of Land Reform*”¹⁶ contains information concerning the application of final legal decisions of the “Expropriation Commissions”, including the fact that 790 hectares and 96 ares had been expropriated for the purpose of establishing communal pastures in the “Codru” unit and distributed to a number of villages; further information refers to detailed quotas by village and details of the expropriated estates¹⁷.

¹⁴ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 108-109

¹⁵ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 19

¹⁶ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 3

¹⁷ A.N.R. Iași, fond *Consilieratul Agricol Iași*, dosar nr. 6/1927, f. 22; f. 39; f. 58; f. 75; f. 92; f. 112; f. 129; f. 146; f. 165; f. 181; f. 196; f. 213; f. 181; f. 244

Unlike the official estimates and initial law provisions, the process of peasant appropriation took place during the entire interwar period, at a higher pace in the period between 1918 and 1928. By the year 1938, in the county of Iași, 22,988 villagers, including “settlers”, had been appropriated with an average plot of 4.3 hectares, most of them Romanian nationals, unlike in other counties in Romania; a situation which can be accounted for in terms of the demographic structure of the county with a Romanian majority. At the same time, historical documents indicate the fact that a large number of entitled peasants were left either unappropriated or only provisionally appropriated. The causes of this unfortunate situation were multiple, ranging from lack of available land to numerous perpetrated abuses. The situation was different from one locality to another, depending on the land available.

CONCLUSIONS

The effects of the 1921 agrarian reform on the evolution of the interwar society in the county of Iași were clearly complex and multifaceted, with far-reaching consequences in all the fields of activity: economic, political, cultural, mentalities, etc. Substantial changes in the structure of agricultural property, determined by the application of the land reform law provisions, finally imposed the small peasant household as the main economic unit in the agricultural sector of the county of Iași. As evidenced by the interwar agricultural censuses, corroborated with the statistics compiled by the agricultural authorities, in line with the tendencies recorded throughout the country, land ownership underwent major restructuring, compared to the situation prior to 1918.

The major restructuring process of land property was a particularly active process in the interwar period, resulting from the constant dissolution of farmland into ever smaller agricultural plots. The 1921 agrarian legislation did not go unchallenged, for example by invocation of the fact that it failed to attach appropriate importance to the medium-sized property category. On the other hand, other contestants criticized the artisans and the responsible authorities of the agrarian reform on the grounds that its transposition into practice had failed to succeed in creating an economically self-supporting rural population category, given that despite the official publicly-assumed deadlines and the initial objectives of the law, in the end most villagers had been de facto appropriated with plots under the 5 hectare threshold, a limit considered by many specialists as the minimum necessary to ensure survival of an average rural household.

The research also aimed to determine the effects, developments and implications of the 1921 agrarian reform within the rural economy of the county of Iași, while including a brief comparison with the effects of the other major agrarian reforms of 1864 and 1945 at county level. The study aimed, last but not least, to establish the extent to which the ideological constraints influenced the research conducted prior to 1989, thus distorting the objectivity of the results. The research sought to highlight the modern character of the 1921 agrarian reform by introducing foreign bibliographic sources unavailable to researchers prior to 1989.

Given the literally overwhelming number of articles and studies devoted to the agrarian reform, careful study and further inquiry into the particularly valuable relevant results obtained through previous research proved necessary. This case study relies on the author’s own archival research, identification of relevant documents, followed by theoretical and statistical information processing through complementarity of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to the extent to which research data allowed it. Solid arguments of a historical nature concerning causal relationships, for example, take precedence over statistical analysis, given that quantitative methods are inapplicable outside of a well-defined theoretical framework. A case study is a difficult endeavour, but it is the only way to ensure objectivity of the proposed research. A field literature review was carried out, resulting in an extended use of the large numbers of relevant sources, interpretive methods, mainly descriptive, in order to obtain an in-depth objective knowledge of the research topic.

Notwithstanding the multiple perceived deficiencies, one of the important positive outcomes of the 1921 agrarian reform was the establishment of communal estates. The lack of such land

necessary for the provision of fodder for livestock as well as the increased costs directly imputed to the peasants by landowners or indirectly by the lessees of the farms were two of the main reasons that triggered the aggravated the degree of poverty of villagers, which in turn caused an increased dependency of villagers on the large agricultural holdings.

Finally, the major problem of the agrarian reform started in 1918 was the “smallness” of peasant-owned households and plots, an inconvenience further aggravated by the phenomena of succession divisions during the interwar period, of sale and renting, which were triggered by the unfavorable economic and financial conditions. A more in-depth knowledge of the evolution of the interwar rural space, organically linked to that of the urban environment, facilitated by the applied study and accurate analysis of the numerous historical sources at hand, albeit only fragmentary and inherently marked by the risk of subjectivity, which is fully understandable given the overwhelming quantity of information and the complexity of the topic approached, may prove to be a useful effort not only for those who take a particular interest in the subject. In this respect, it should be noted that by consulting the primary documents contained by the archival units that have survived the vicissitudes of time, it becomes obvious that an extended series did not benefit in from the attention and interest of an adequate number of researchers, despite their particularly valuable qualitative and quantitative content. Many archival units in Iași have remained for all intents and purposes in the same state they were in at the time of storage and preservation during the interwar period and then the Second World War. This can be determined, among other things, by mere consultation of the “List of readers” of the archived files, which, as is known, provides the signatures and full names of the various people who consulted them in the course of time. The documentary funds of the state archives of Iași were severely damaged following their 1944 eviction.

Potential research outcomes - new qualitative interpretations or quantitative assessments that can be obtained by further studying, without claiming to have a character of novelty or to substantially change the results achieved by former endeavors of authorities of the time involved in the implementation of the land reform, as well as the valuable research already undertaken by state authorities at time and scholars who have identified the general effects, trends, implications and relevant aspects of the agrarian reform of 1921 in Romania by means of analysis of collated local data can provide useful information not only for scholars of the academia or the general public, but maybe more importantly for present-day decision makers who play a part in the implementation ensuring the smooth running of the policies that govern the primary sector, given that a multitude of contemporary problems peculiar to the rural areas and especially to agriculture have proved to be an enduring historical feature.

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