

*Christian Giordano, Dobrinka Kostova*

## **The Unexpected Effects of the Land Reform in Post-socialist Bulgaria**

### **Aspects of Bulgarian Agricultural History: “A Small Nation of Small Peasants”**

In order to understand the present situation in Bulgarian agrarian society, it is necessary to outline briefly some basic historical processes which influenced the rural environment between the end of the Ottoman Empire and the collapse of the socialist regime.

Bulgarian agricultural history over the last 150 years may be summarized in the somewhat abridged but succinct formula of four societal formations succeeding one another. Patriarchal society gave way to early capitalist society, superseded by socialist and finally post-socialist society. We use the latter term being aware of the fact that it is rather vague. From an evolutionist perspective one could add that the Bulgarian “development model” moved with accelerated modalities from a patriarchal to a specific version of urban industrialized society.

Consulting reports by domestic and foreign travel correspondents and observers between 1850 and 1945, one can verify that Bulgaria is invariably described as “a small nation of small peasants.” This image of Bulgaria was embraced, reinforced, and later regarded as an unquestionable fact by the then ruling political and economic elite. This representation of Bulgarian society proved to be a cornerstone in the construction of collective identity and the accompanying mythology. It would however be wrong and unfair to see this self-attribution as a mere product of an arbitrary invention. The idea of a “small nation of small peasants”, which might indeed make Bulgaria resemble a “Switzerland of the Balkans”, conceals a partial reality that a sociologist cannot disregard.

During the 500 years of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria displayed a specific form of land possession correlated to the then prevalent patriarchal kinship system. We wish to avoid delving into this subject and, specifi-

cally, avoid a discussion of the “zadruga” (family agricultural holding). This institution, similarly to the Russian “obščina” or “mir” (peasant commune), has been the focal point of many projected hopes, desires and longings by the intellectuals of the time. A non-specialist in this field can hardly grasp the precise meaning of the “zadruga” (Todorova 1990: 30ff., Gešov 1887: 426f., Bobčev 1906–1907: 32f.) and we just want to point out that in the patriarchal society of Bulgaria land ownership was in every respect non-dividable and not for sale.

The traditional Bulgarian social norms in principle neither allowed land to be divided into small plots, as was the case in Polish Galicia, nor for property to be concentrated in large estates as in neighbouring Romania. Before independence (1878), Bulgaria was truly a “small nation of small peasants”.

Independence was the starting point of the slow but inevitable decline of the old patriarchal society. It therefore seems reasonable to speak of an early capitalist phase in the years between 1880 and 1945, although many residues of the old social structures have lived on, especially in the more peripheral regions. The formation of the autonomous Bulgarian State led to profound legislative reforms, which thoroughly transformed the social structure of agrarian society. Following the country’s “Europeanization”, an Occidental legal system was introduced which overlapped or replaced the conventionally guaranteed norms of customary law. This held true especially for the land law inheritance regulations which were taken over, with appropriate modifications, from the civil laws of France, Belgium and Italy. Inheritance practices similar to real estate division were thus introduced, which in turn considerably favoured land fragmentation (Bell 1977: 13). Bulgaria was truly on its way to becoming a “small nation of *smallest* peasants” as evidenced by the statistical data of 1934 and 1946, just before socialist agrarian reforms were implemented (see Table 1).

Table 1

Allotment of real estate in 1934 and 1946 (in %)

Size of properties	1934	1946
0.1–1 ha	3.0	14.0
1–4 ha	29.4	41.7
4–10 ha	47.9	36.6
10–20 ha	16.6	6.8
> 20 ha	3.1	0.9

Source: Minkov and Lazov 1979: 12.

As our interviews clearly show, the early capitalist phase is nowadays still perceived in the “collective memory” of the older generations, who

have directly lived through the experience, as a painful time of abject poverty and backwardness. This view, common not only among the staunch long-standing communists, is borne out by history that shows how in the countryside the political situation between the wars can be characterized by the peasants' continuous unrest and frustration. Three points should be remembered in this connection:

- the remarkable popularity of the Russian revolutionaries in the rural areas (A. Herzen),
- the success of rural populist ideas that were convincingly advocated especially by Aleksander Stamboliiski (Bulgarian politician, lived from 1879 to 1923),
- the massive presence of communists in the countryside which, since the parliamentary elections of 1919 and 1920, became the second largest faction in Bulgaria as well as the strongest communist party in the Balkan region.

All these facts suggest that the early capitalist phase is actually a rather "dark chapter" in Bulgarian history and not a "flourishing past" as some post-socialist intellectuals and politicians would have us believe. As in most Balkan states, during the first half of the century the agrarian sector in Bulgaria experienced a process best described as "misguided or failed modernization" (Sundhaussen 1990: 156ff., Sundhaussen 1993: 23ff.). Tables 2 and 3, showing a comparison between some countries of Southeastern Europe and France, quite clearly illustrate the precarious situation in Bulgarian agriculture.

Table 2

Rural overpopulation  
(Agrarian population per km<sup>2</sup> of cultivated land, 1930)

Country	Inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup>
Yugoslavia	101.1
Bulgaria	81.3
Romania	79.7
Hungary	63.1
France	28.0

Source: Castellan 1994: 78.

In view of the situation, it is not surprising that Bulgarian peasants have thought of socialism as a truly effective alternative; in some regions, for example in Dobrudža, it was endorsed enthusiastically. Neither should it be forgotten that the communist rulers in the whole of Central and Southeastern Europe, immediately following the end of the Second World War, enacted reforms step by step. They did not embark directly on collectivization

but rather began by expropriating the greater landowners and distributing land on a private basis. This helped particularly the impoverished small peasants and those without land. At first, during this process, every person with more than 20 hectares of land (30 hectares of land in Dobrudža) was dispossessed without compensation. With these measures, 300,000 hectares were nationalized, of which 130,000 ha were distributed among 135,000 families while the remaining 170,000 ha were handed over to the state-owned enterprises that were being constituted.

Table 3

Per capita income in US\$ (1938)

Country	USD
Bulgaria	81
Romania	94
Yugoslavia (including Croatia and Slovenia)	106
Hungary	108
France	246

Source: Castellan 1994: 78–79.

The process of collectivization in Bulgarian agriculture was relatively slow: in 1950, the newly established agricultural collectives controlled only 51% of cultivated land, whereas the property law had not yet been touched. The peasants had de facto ceded their land to these collectives, remaining de jure proprietors.

Parallel to the forced industrialization, which the communist rulers regarded as the primary task of a People's Republic, the collectivization of the Bulgarian agrarian sector was strongly driven forward in the following years. Although the communists, in accordance with the teachings of Engels and Lenin, considered the existence of these private small peasants inappropriate, it was not until the end of the 1950s that this process was finally brought to a close.

The starting point of a new phase in Bulgarian agriculture was 1970. By creating gigantic agro-industrial complexes, the regime imposed an extensive centralization which left a dire economic and socio-cultural legacy. A decentralization aiming to correct the mistaken development and at the same time to demonstrate the real potential of the "socialist planned economy" was introduced from the mid-1980s onward. This hesitant "reform policy" was totally overwhelmed and swept away by the unexpected events of 1989. Without going into further details of the collectivization process, we would like to point out two related, sociologically relevant problems.

A. The collectivization of agriculture was accompanied by forced industrialization which led to considerable migration from the countryside into

the cities. The country experienced powerful urbanization and, as Gešev pointed out, Bulgaria became one of the most urbanized countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Gešev 1995: 173). This observation is confirmed by the data in Table 4.

Table 4

Decrease of the number of people working in the agrarian sector and reduction of the total agrarian population in Eastern Europe and Eastern-Central Europe between 1950 and 1990

Country	Decrease in employment (in %)	Reduction of the agrarian population (in absolute figures)	1990 (1950 = 100)
Estonia	-24.5	-132,000	77.3
Lithuania	-25.9	-287,000	72.8
Latvia	-40.1	-670,000	63.7
Belarus	-45.3	-2,643,000	56.6
Ukraine	-32.3	-6,841,000	71.3
Poland	-21.6	-386,000	97.4
Czechoslovakia	-24.4	-2,231,000	63.1
Hungary	-14.7	-781,000	84.7
Romania	-31.0	-1,683,000	86.1
Bulgaria	-38.5	-2,218,000	58.0
Yugoslavia	-31.2	-1,315,000	89.5

Source: Eberhardt 1993: 34–35.

The figures show that under socialism not only the number of employees in the Bulgarian agrarian sector dropped to 38.5%, but also that over 2,000,000 peasants left their villages to seek new jobs mainly in industry or services. This massive inner migration led to the formation of new social classes that adjusted to city life and have only maintained a “mythologized” relationship with the countryside and their original rural society. Until 1989, these “red middle classes” were satisfied with the security of a state-guaranteed job and the shabby comfort of the blocks of flats in the then notorious districts of Sofia, as for example “Mladost” (Youth) and “Družba” (Friendship). There was still some contact with villages and the countryside, but this was mostly connected with the “economy of home-made preserves” during weekends (Smollett 1989). This was a way of obtaining preserved and fresh agricultural products, which were scarce or even unavailable due to the cities’ poor supply system.

B. Collectivization, as postulated by official doctrine, turned the remaining villagers into wage earning labourers who, for their own part, lost the agricultural *savoir* and *savoir faire* over the course of time (cf. Roth 1989). The characteristics of rural mentality and rationality such as initiative, at-

tachment to the land, sense of responsibility, work ethic etc. were virtually wiped out. The definite destruction of the rural way of life and the emergence of a passive and often demoralized attitude in line with the motto "a pseudo-job with fixed working hours for pseudo-wages", were indeed closely related to the creation of the agro-industrial complexes after 1970. Socialism consequently caused the aging farming population to remain "agricultural" but not "peasant".

### **Post-Socialist Agrarian Change. Why Doesn't the Reform Work?**

After the overthrow of the communist regime in 1989, the Bulgarian rulers tried to bring about a radical "transition" as quickly as possible, which they regarded as the starting point for the transformation to a capitalist market society. The change also included agrarian reforms aimed at re-privatizing Bulgarian agriculture (Zakon za sobstvenostta 1991, Law for the Ownership 1991). Re-privatization under the 1992 land law (Zakon za izmenenie 1992, Law for the Change of the Law for the Ownership 1992), despite subsequent modifications (Zakon za izmenenie 1995, Law for the Change of the Law for the Ownership 1995), could even now be seen as the cornerstone of the entire reform project. This meant that rural property should be restored according to the "actual" boundaries of 1946 to the then owners or to their heirs. This essential cornerstone of the agrarian reforms was presumably introduced for various reasons.

First, politicians might have conceivably decided to act that way to acknowledge and redress the injustice suffered under collectivization. This view seems rather naïve to us because it presupposes an imposition of political culture on the model of "civil society." After all, according to élite theoreticians (G. Mosca, V. Pareto, R. Michels) this has been known to be a willful misconception or, in the best of cases, a political myth rather than a sociologically relevant reality. That is true not only in Eastern Europe but also in every other part of the world.

In our opinion a second, much more realistic explanation is that Bulgarian politicians of the centre-right government (UDF, Union of Democratic Forces) at the time were pursuing the "agrarian" dream of the "small country of small peasants". They had a radical political purge in mind as well as the re-introduction of a "whole", "genuine" and "natural" rural social order, uncontaminated by socialism. This "nativist" model, which could aim at restoring a past ideal state of affairs, was probably reinforced by the advice of Western agricultural experts. In a small privately owned family business the latter might have seen the best guarantee for a smooth transition from a collectivist to a market economy, i.e. to a more efficient form of agriculture per se. We ought to remember that most post-communist leaders

at the time of the revised 1992 agricultural law enactment came from the capital city's urban stratum and had no clue about either agricultural politics or the real situation in the villages.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that the transitional model designed for Bulgarian agriculture is somewhat atypical. Unlike the transition models described above, the "transitional curve", as used in the relevant discourse, does not progress in a linear fashion. To be more precise: in the first phase of the transition, history is to be made "reversible". The attempt is made to "erase" socialism as if it were a historical "black hole" or a "dead end", and simultaneously go back in time to start where the preceding epoch ended. The "typical transition" only begins after this "return to the future". This model does indeed have a certain fascination and at first may even seem a plausible solution. In reality, however, implementing the planned reform proves to be extremely problematic for the following reasons.

A. Restoring rural property according to the actual boundaries of 1946 meant that land given back to the "old-new" proprietors was divided into lots or even pulverized as it had been before collectivization. This actually meant reintroducing one of the key factors of the "misguided or failed modernization" in the pre-socialist period hence a straight continuation of the disastrous pre-war tradition of Bulgarian agriculture. This attempt to reverse history would amount to archaizing the agrarian sector and be contrary to any modernization strategy.

B. Part of the land register, for example in Dobrudža, was destroyed or publicly burnt with anti-capitalist anger by party functionaries and peasants already during the first phase of collectivization around 1950. The land register was after all a symbol of the "Dark Age" of private property, then finally and definitively abolished. In other regions, the land register was incomplete and badly kept. The commissions in charge of the restitution of land in the 1990s had to rely on the testimony of the village elders who remembered the time before the communist takeover. Although all the commission members we have interviewed have praised their informants in the highest terms for their almost computer-like mnemonic performance, without consulting Halbwachs, it is well known that memory itself is selective and nearly always "pro domo". Numerous disputes, appeals and hearings ensued from this questionable settlement of the "actual" boundaries and have not yet been solved. Meanwhile, the ministry of agriculture has admitted that 928 land register maps need to be revised. This has led not only to a considerable delay in the restitution process, in effect producing a large number of "virtual" property owners, but also to legal insecurity making it more difficult to plan investments, raise mortgages and credits as well as create larger, more profitable businesses.

C. The peasant population's migration to the towns in the period 1950–1990 turned them into city dwellers employed in industry and services (Eberhardt 1993: 31–40, Zlatanova 1980: 74). Industrialization and urbanization as well as the conversion of the remaining rural population into wage-dependent employees led village communities and their culture to change significantly. The implied “historic reversibility” model induced the legislator to play down the far-reaching transformations socialism caused in the social structure and in the value system of the Bulgarian agrarian society as well as in its more urban descendants. Consequently, the current process of restoring land ownership has in a certain sense turned into a paradoxical “re-privatization without peasants”.

### **Social Actors: Interests and Strategies in Land Ownership and Cultivation**

The reprivatization of agriculture implied processes with deep social impact that need to be analysed in more detail. On the one hand, present agriculture is characterized by a strong domination of private interests. Statistical data reveal that agricultural land in the country covers 6.2 million ha, of which 4.8 million is cultivatable (Statistical Yearbook 1999: 136). About 27% of the arable land or around 1.5–1.6 million ha is divided among 1.7 millions “new” owners. The newly established coops cultivate 2.2 million ha and the private capitalist tenants (*arendatori*) — 1.1 millions ha. In 1993, the portion of private cultivation was 59.7%, in 1995 it increased to 74.7% (Statistical Yearbook 1996: 138), extending to full privatization at the end of the 1990s (Statistical Yearbook 1999: 137).

On the other hand, this has not yet brought economic prosperity to agriculture. Agricultural information bases reveal an output decline though lower than during the last years of socialism (Statistical Yearbook 1999: 137). One of the main explanations can be found in the ineffective use of the land. In 1998 for example, only two thirds of arable land was cultivated (Statistical Yearbook 1999: 138ff).

Concerning the unproductive land exploitation, the relation between *the ownership and the market* of land is significant. The tenants are interested in buying land as they have accumulated a considerable amount of capital over the past eight-ten years and they would like to invest it in land, as our interviews with them show. Foreign entrepreneurs are also ready to invest in land, if the Constitution would allow foreigners to purchase land. Paradoxically a significant number of “new” owners neither cultivate the land nor sell it. The state administration explains this by emphasizing that the land market is undeveloped as agricultural activity incomes are low, competition with cheap import is onerous for Bulgarian producers and there is a lack of capital and favourable credits for agriculture. In our opinion, this



reasoning is not a prerequisite but a consequence of the inadequate agrarian policy. As already mentioned, the basic problem in agriculture is its tremendous fragmentation. This is a substantial burden for rational cultivation and for a profitable sale. Potential buyers now have to deal with hundreds of proprietors to accumulate enough land for efficient and profitable cultivation. They have to pay reasonable fees for ownership transfers and invest time to conclude arrangements with a considerable number of sellers. One should not forget that there could be an owner within the particular area who does not want to sell expecting better prices in the future or the fact that some of the owners are still unknown. The land would remain uncultivated besides hindering the farming of neighbouring plots and several years might go by to restore and increase its fertility. Thus, the fragmentation of land brought on by the reform further burdens its accumulation. The latter circumstance is crucial for prosperous agrarian activity and the sustainable development of the sector.

The specific interests of the different actors further influence the relationship between property and land market. The motives, expressed in the desire of the "new" owners to keep the land, is not so much a matter of land attachment but rather a consequence of the political and mainly agrarian parties' policy towards land ownership. The agrarian parties lobbied in parliament and articles entitling the restituted land proprietors to pay no property taxes were added to the agrarian laws. Living in cities, most proprietors neither gain nor lose anything. Nonetheless, this is a question of crucial importance both for the latter and for the state — from different standpoints. In case of a deep economic crisis, the owners could profit financially by leasing the land if they should choose not to sell it. Satisfied proprietors and a property tax could be profitable for the state as well. Instead, the tax is not paid and both tenants and coops, if present, lease the land at very low prices making this a non-attractive option for the small owners.

Apparently, the "new" owners in the process of land restitution want their land back but do not plan to till it themselves. Most of them — approximately 1.5 million do not cultivate it at all or only produce for personal consumption. They are interested in cultivating a plot of land (0.5 to 1 ha) to meet family food needs or to have the opportunity of an additional agricultural activity.

Consequently, the contradiction between the ownership of land and the lack of strategy for its cultivation, is a barrier for the realization of agricultural activity in the country. Therefore, "new" proprietors are looking for alternatives which, however, do not involve their future as "peasants".

The possession of *small* plots of land, nonetheless, does not stimulate people i.e. the tenants whose main job is agricultural. In this sense, ownership itself does not foster a creative motivation in agricultural activity. The tenants' interest in agricultural activity certainly depends on other motivations.

*Firstly*, the tenants have the knowledge, the necessary contacts and the abilities to take risks in cultivating the returned land. Being the leaders of collectives during the last years of socialist rule, as in the region of Dobrudža for example, they have the necessary know-how to start agricultural entrepreneurial activity expecting significant incomes.

*Secondly*, the tenants, as former members of the local agrarian elite, also have the necessary contacts with people who control the market in the cities.

*Thirdly*, not less important is the fact that, thanks to their former status, in the socialist collectives' liquidation process they have been able to acquire the best kept machines, storage and offices from the collective management at a very low price.

Therefore, the former agrarian elite, currently the capitalist set of entrepreneurs increasingly controls the land. At the beginning of the reform, they owned small plots of land compared with what they thought they had to own to develop modern farming. One of them has declared that he could cultivate thousands of hectares, but he and his brother only have five hectares. Their strategy is to lease and, in the future, buy a high number of plots from the present small owners to accumulate and reach a stretch between 600 and 20,000 ha.

Due to the negative experience with collectivization during socialism, the owners, especially those living in towns do not hold the new coops in esteem (Giordano and Kostova 1999: 22ff.). They consider the coops "an appendix" of the old collective system of cultivation. Thus, their approach is rather to lease their land to the tenants in their particular area if possible.

The newly organized coops have the vestiges of the socialist collective possession. Their members are owners from the villages who are either quite old, not educated enough or too accustomed to the socialist collective cultivation, so they rarely have the nerve to develop agriculture on capitalist principles. The coops are organizations of landowners a minority of whom are engaged in cultivating the returned property themselves besides participating in the associations' activities. Moreover, coop leaders are often close to retirement age and rarely have good contacts with the trading agricultural firms and food industry. Due to meagre political support, the coops do not have much chance of getting financial credits or investments at favourable interest rates.

There is no real competition among foreign investors acting on the land market. They are few in number; for example in Dobrudža there is just the "Rainbow Farming" firm leasing 3.5 thousand ha. Foreign investors may buy land if they register a company in Bulgaria. However, they have to undergo the above-mentioned procedures and the uncertainties of land registers. Along with the non-transparent privatization procedures, which all foreign investors are complaining about, this leads to low foreign interest in Bulgarian agriculture. According to data of the Bulgarian Agencies for

Foreign Investments, foreign capital in agriculture is so far 8.5 million US dollars. This is a negligible amount compared with foreign investments in the economy as a whole.

The conflicting, separate interests and strategies in these social processes, reveal that the legal framework of Bulgaria's agrarian reprivatization has given rise to several social groups unforeseen by the reformers and alien to the "philosophy" of the laws.

The *first* group consists of a large number of owners who have no intention of cultivating their land. This group includes people whose quality of life in the period of significant changes is deteriorating (Socialno i ikonomičesko razvitie..., 1995: 35). Their strategy is one of survival, so they try to lease land to get some financial income. Their situation is quite fragile as the legal framework is still lacking clear definitions about leasing relations in agriculture.

The coops formed after 1992 are the *second* group in Bulgarian agriculture. They are in an extremely critical situation. Technical, economic and managerial problems are compromising their actual existence. Besides that, they are increasingly facing the aggressive competition of the better-organized tenants, who — as the example of Dobrudža shows — are starting to buy land from the small owners. The coop members are quite old and their heirs would probably rather lease or sell the land to the tenants if the latter pay higher rents or propose more favourable leasing prices than the coops.

The *third* group involves a small number of entrepreneur-tenants belonging to the past leadership of the socialist collectives, who in the transformation period are becoming agricultural capitalists. Paradoxically, the land reform brought profits mainly to them. The liquidation of the collectives with the 1992 law has meant the suppression of the agrarian socialist management through the collectives' property distribution and their leaders' dismissal. This has been a political attempt for the agrarian sector's decommunization in the country. The goal has also been to deprive the local agrarian elite as former collectives' leaders of political as well as economic power. Nonetheless, this main objective of the law has not been achieved. After a brief period of disorientation, the socialist agrarian management has begun its reorganization into successful agrarian entrepreneurs and in a short lapse of time they have transformed their "economic ethic" becoming enthusiastic supporters of the free market economy. These leaders, who until 1992 declared their loyalty to communism, have metamorphosed into staunch capitalists after the liquidation of the collectives. At the end of the 1990s they began reinvesting their profit in buying land from small owners and in this way they are becoming the most powerful agrarian actors in post-socialist Bulgaria.

However, the success of the tenants depends largely on the relations with traders and brokers. They constitute the *fourth* important group con-

trolling the input and output of the agrarian resources. The trading entrepreneurs from the big cities, the so-called "sharks with Mercedes and mobile telephones" use crude methods to establish a monopoly on the trade with agrarian goods and have the last word on prices. In a way this is a continuation of a ruinous tradition. As a matter of fact, since Bulgaria's national independence in 1878, the country's agriculture has always been a source of enrichment of urban economic sectors. Under socialism, the redistribution of agricultural profits was in favour of industrialization. In the period of transition, the goods necessary for agricultural activity and the market of the produced agricultural goods are controlled by trade groups living in the towns.

The *fifth* group consists of foreign investors whose strategy has been one of investigation and hesitant attempts to enter the agrarian sector. Their influence on Bulgarian agriculture is not yet significant. It will depend on the Balkan region's total peaceful development and on the liberalization of the legal system including enhanced opportunities in buying land, transparent privatization procedures, leasing and selling land at auctions, and access to reliable information on land registers.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The agrarian reform has accelerated the return of private property to Bulgarian villages. Nevertheless, land restitution has not restored the old peasant society of pre-socialist times. The idea of the reversibility of history has proved to be mistaken. Moreover, some unexpected and, for many politicians and legislators, unwelcome facts characterize the dramatic development in the Bulgarian countryside during the 1990s.

One of them is reprivatization without peasants. The new owners, who mostly live in towns, have not returned to their villages as the "peasantist" politicians hoped. The proprietors do not intend to cultivate the returned land themselves and they refuse to become peasants or farmers. They are city dwellers with their own specific urban lifestyles and values. The villagers use land ownership to lease it or produce the necessary food supply for survival. Such 'minimalist' agriculture is mainly subsistence orientated and the people involved have set themselves the sole goal of overcoming the troubles and turbulence of transition.

Another fact concerns the economic rise of agrarian capitalist entrepreneurs. The reprivatization of land without peasants has encouraged some leaders and members of the technical and managerial staff of the old collectives to invest individually in private agriculture. They lease a large number of small plots from the "new" small owners. This way a small group of aggressive capitalist tenants who could be defined by the terminology used by Max Weber (Weber 1956) as "Raub" — and "Beute-

kapitalisten”, are increasingly controlling and monopolizing the land. Most probably in the future the tenants will become a new class of quasi-latifundist owners. Nevertheless, they are currently the social and economic winners of the transition in Bulgarian agriculture.

The obsolescence of the coops is the next fact. The so-called “new coops” are actually a post-socialist continuation of the old collectives. Although they are now based on the principle of private property, they are persisting with the collective production. Management of these associations, rarely consulting the assembly or the members, takes all decisions concerning economic activities. This behaviour is partly caused by the managerial style inherited from the previous regime’s “democratic centralism”. Moreover, the members of the coops as small owners are totally indifferent to the activities of the associations. They are only interested in getting their rents after selling the harvest. The coops are the losers of the transition. The future will show whether they can survive the economic pressure of the more competitive tenants and the present government’s political stonewalling, whose aim is to destroy any relict of the socialist past. On the other hand, real new forms of cooperatives combining economic efficiency with democratic management are still unknown in Bulgaria.

The situation of Bulgarian agriculture shows that the passage from a collective to an individual social and economic order was successful from the legal point of view. But at the same time, in the countryside the rift between the legal frame and social practices is growing. This rift is a clear social indicator — using the words of Max Weber — of a conflict between state ‘legality’ and cultural ‘legitimacy’, which is probably affecting the whole country.

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