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## AGRARIAN REFORMS IN INTERWAR EUROPE

### Abstract

The agricultural reforms of the first half of the twentieth century were a side effect of the industrial revolution and demographic explosion. The variety of solutions used in individual countries reflected the complexity of local problems. In comparison, the communist reforms implemented after 1945 were dictated mainly by ideological considerations, and their aim was not so much to solve real problems as to break the will to resist and incapacitate entire societies.

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### Introduction

Prior to World War I, entire Europe witnessed gradually growing awareness of the fact that the capital saturation of small and medium-sized agricultural property was higher than that of large agricultural property. Land parcelling was consequently beneficial as it increased the price of land. It could be beneficial even for the big landowners who had already allotted part of their property, leaving only the other

part in their own hands. There were also other arguments in favour of land parcelling, such as the population growth and the gradual growth of the affluence of the society, which led to the fact that arable land had to be taken over for residential purposes. Some economic historians draw attention to the fact that large landholdings ensured higher productivity than fragmented property.<sup>1</sup> From the strictly economic point of view, the adherents to this thesis cannot be denied being right to a large extent. On the other hand, it is worth remembering that from the 1880s, European agriculture had been in the state of a permanent overproduction crisis. Given the situation, productivity seems not to have been the top priority. What was more important were the potential effects of agrarian reforms. They could stimulate the development of non-agricultural sectors by increasing the domestic market thanks to the growing affluence of rural regions or by encouraging the transfer of capital from agriculture to other sectors of the economy, provided that the reforms were carried out properly.<sup>2</sup>

It was for the above reasons that many European countries commenced the parcelling of land already before World War I.<sup>3</sup> Although the idea of land parcelling was encouraged with a variety of incentives, it was, in principle, voluntary, gradual and based on market principles. Processes of this kind began in the developed countries of Central Europe from Scandinavian countries, through Great Britain, Benelux Countries and France. Meanwhile, in the peripheries of Europe, in both Eastern Europe and Ireland and the countries of Southern Europe, the parcelling processes tended to face additional problems. The transition to capitalism in agriculture was by no means complete everywhere. Remnants of feudal legal solutions remained persisted in many places. In addition, enfranchisement reforms resulted, on the one hand, in rural overpopulation and, on the other, in the continued existence of large landholdings.

World War I changed the climate surrounding agrarian reforms. Expectations of fast changes became more radical. An additional problem which emerged was that of military settlements resulting from promises given to soldiers during the war. The process of land parcelling in the centre of Europe accelerated, often through administrative coercion action and, in the peripheries of the continent, through political pressure for the implementation of agrarian reforms. The countries which belonged partially to the two groups referred to above found themselves in a particular situation. In Spain and in Italy, there were significant differences between the northern and the southern regions, while in Germany, specific East European problems present

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is, for instance, put forward by Wojciech Roszkowski: *Land Reforms in East-Central Europe after World War One*, Institute of Political Science, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa 1995.

<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, I consider the agrarian reform carried out by the American occupational forces in Japan after World War II to be a model example.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Biegelstein, *Reforma rolna głównych państw europejskich*, F. Hoesik Publishing House; Vol. 1, Warszawa 1924; Vol. 2, Warszawa 1926.

in Mecklenburg, in Pomerania or in East Prussia had nothing in common with those in Rhineland, Baden or Württemberg. Meanwhile, entirely different solutions, consisting in complete liquidation of the private ownership of land were adopted in the USSR.

It also seems important to observe that the problem of agrarian reforms was not solely a Central and Eastern Europe specific problem<sup>4</sup> but also concerned the southern and northern borderlands of the continent. The problems faced by both regions were in fact very similar in practice, in particular, when we do not treat the difference between the East European feudal rent and the institution of agricultural tenancy in too formalist a way.

What was specific to East and Central Europe was the unique combination of social problems and nationality structure. In many places, the nationality of the owners of great landed estates differed from the nationality of the common people who were to be beneficiaries of the reform. Thus, the reform changed not only social relations but also the holdings, the wealth of individual nationalities. Where such a mixture of interests was involved, it brought about the significant radicalization of reforms. For instance, in Bohemia, the great landholdings were mostly German, while in Slovakia – Hungarian. That is why the Czechoslovak reform was radical as it hit national minorities. It was similar in Lithuania, where the great landholdings were Polish, or in the two remaining Baltic states, where they were German. On the other hand, in Poland or in Hungary, the agrarian reform affected adversely the interests of Polish landowners, often (for instance, in Eastern Borderlands) to the benefit of national minorities. All this made the agrarian reform in some countries proceed slowly and be moderate in character. Radicalism and moderation manifested themselves in two aspects: in the compensation, which could oscillate from several to 100% of the market value of the real estate, and in the determination what landed estates were to be covered by the reform as well as at what pace the reform was to proceed.

## Agrarian reforms in Interwar Europe

Let us begin from an extreme example, that is from Soviet Russia. As early as on the second day of the Revolution, on 8 November 1917, the Decree on Land was issued.<sup>5</sup> The decree did not implement the Bolshevik concept of the nationalization of the whole land but rather the slogans hitherto voiced by the Party of Socialist

<sup>4</sup> On the subject of reforms in Central and Eastern Europe see: A. Rose, *Reformy rolne w Europie Środkowej po I wojnie światowej*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Reform Rolnych, Warszawa 1925.

<sup>5</sup> A. Lipiński, *Prawo Rosji i ZSRR 1917–1991, czyli historia wszechzwiązkowego komunistycznego prawa (bolszewików)*. *Krótki kurs*, Wyd. C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2012, pp. 216–218; A. Starodworski, *Sowiecka reforma rolna*, Warszawa 1925.

Revolutionaries. The decree confiscated without any compensation the land belonging to large landholders and the Church. Excluded from the confiscation were individual farms. The confiscated land was passed to councils of peasant delegates till further decisions were taken by the Constitutional Assembly. Simultaneously, the decree abolished forever private ownership of land and banned trading in land. As the constituent assembly was dispersed, the All-Russian Executive Committee became a substitute parliament. In February 1918, it issued a decree on the socialization of land. The February decree went further than the November decree in that it also abolished individual peasant ownership of land. The land became the property of the whole society to be managed by local councils of delegates. They allotted the land to be used by farmers, but only those who actually worked the land personally. Violation of the obligation to work the land resulted in a loss of the allotment and temporary failure to do it (for instance, in the case of military service) in a temporary suspension of the allotment. Peasants were deprived of any right to dispose of the land, including its inheritance. The size of the allotment depended on the ability to work of a given family. Men over 60 and women over 50 as well as children under 12 were relieved from work. The basic labour unit was the work of a 16–60-year old man. The work of a woman was calculated as 0.8, of 16–18-year old boys as 0.75, while the work of 12–16-year old boys and 12–18-year old girls as 0.5. The actual agrarian reform which resulted from this policy was entirely abandoned after 1929, under the collectivisation reform which abolished peasant property, not only formally but also in practice.

In **Finland**, the large landed estates were overwhelmingly in the hands of Swedish gentry. Although Swedish gentry had Finnish national awareness, similarly, to some extent, as Polish gentry in Lithuania, which identified themselves with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, knowledge of the Finnish language rarely followed. Finnish nationalists perceived that gentry as a nationally-foreign element, which accounted for the radical character of the Finnish agrarian reform. On the verge of independence, approximately 835 of the population of Finland lived in the country and worked in agriculture. There was a well-developed system of land tenancy, with land lease paid frequently either in kind or in work. What functioned in Finland were in fact elements of feudalism and serfdom disguised as the capitalist form of legal tenancy. Already during the German occupation, in October 1918, a law was passed encouraging tenants to buy out the land they leased at a state-fixed price. As a rule, it was based on the 1914 price, thus being much lower than the then-current market prices. The repayment was state-guaranteed and spread over long years. The law of 1922 initiated the process of parcelling the land belonging to the Church. The following law, also issued in 1922, which took effect two years later, came to be known as *Lex*

Kallio, after the then prime minister. It provided for the reform to cover landholdings of over 200 ha and in the north, in the Oulu province, of 400 ha. Only surpluses over the limit set were taken away, poorly cultivated land being mostly involved. The law regulated the creation of new farms, the size of which depended on the region. The allotment of 20 ha of arable land and 20 ha of forest prevailed practically everywhere. In Lapland, the forest area was increased to 75 ha. What the law also foresaw was the creation of small farms not sufficient to sustain a family, which were meant to allow people not working in agriculture to build a house. Apart from guaranteeing the repayment of compensations for the former owners, the state granted easy credits to the new owners, the repayment of which were to begin once they had settled in. As the result of the reform, approximately 90% of tenants became rightful owners. The number of landed estates dropped by 25%. In 1950, only as few as 223 landed estates exceeded 250 ha, while the total number of farms amounted to 350 000.<sup>6</sup>

In **Estonia**, social divisions in the country overlapped ethnic divisions – the big German landed estates and the Estonian peasants. During their short rule in Estonia, at the turn of 1917 and 1918, the Bolsheviks tried to carry out their style reform. Once the independence was proclaimed towards the end of 1918, big landholdings were placed under the compulsory supervision of local community councils.<sup>7</sup> The Estonian reform,<sup>8</sup> passed finally on 10 October 1919,<sup>9</sup> was one of the most radical in Europe. Over 1000 landed estates (97%) were expropriated fully and without compensation, with only communal and cloister land as well as cemeteries being excluded. Land became the property of the state. Forests and swamps remained in state hands, while arable land was sold by the state to farmers. Over 50,000 new farms were created, the number of the latter thus doubling. Categories such as tenants and landless peasants were almost completely liquidated. A new category emerged – the settlers. The war-for-independence combatants were privileged – they were given priority in the allotment of land and reductions in its price. Independence Cross Knights and foreign volunteers in the war received land free of charge. Others signed six-year tenancy contracts with the state. If they fulfilled them, they became rightful owners of the land. What contributed to the success of the reform was the good harvest of 1921. The Maapank Bank, especially established for the purpose, was in charge of the credit service of the whole enterprise.

<sup>6</sup> T. Cieślak, *Historia Finlandii*, Ossolineum, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk – Łódź 1983, pp. 237–238; *Land Reform in Finland 1922. Official Statement*, Helsinki 1923.

<sup>7</sup> A. Rose, *Reformy rolne w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej*. Publishing House of the Ministry of Agrarian Reforms, Warszawa 1925, p. 172 and the following.

<sup>8</sup> H. Krause, *Die Ararreform in Lettland und Estland*, Berlin 1927.

<sup>9</sup> J. Lewandowski, *Estonia*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 2001, pp. 84–85.

The reform solved the majority of the social problems of rural areas. Its only drawback was too large a fragmentation of agriculture.

Similar radical solutions were adopted in **Latvia**. The process of reforms<sup>10</sup> began here already in June 1918 with the decree of Marshal Hindenburg who obliged landowners in Courland whose properties exceeded 360 ha to allot 1/3 of the land for parcelling.<sup>11</sup> Hindenburg had no social purposes in mind. At the time of German triumph in Easter Europe, after the signature of the treaty of Brest, Hindenburg's decision to parcel the land was intended to open the way for German settlement. Once Latvia regained independence, the country implemented a fairly radical variant of agrarian reform. It proceeded gradually, with the adoption of several subsequent laws between the years 1920 and 1924. The bill of 16 September 1920 created a state-owned stock of land. It was to proceed from taking over properties belonging hitherto to the crown, knights and gentry.<sup>12</sup> Excluded from the reform were lands remaining in church, self-government and private hands provided that they did not exceed 100 ha and had been purchased prior to April 1915. What the hitherto owners could retain from their property was 'an area of a medium-sized farm' but they could not demand that the latter included its hitherto centre (e.g. palace). Those who had turned against the Latvian state were immediately deprived of any compensation, the same as those who 'reached for the compensation themselves', for instance, by logging a forest. The question of compensations for the others was left suspended. The second law of 22 December 1922 specified the rules for creating new farms. They could not exceed 22 ha of arable land and 5 ha of forest. Priority in access to the land was to be given to owners of undersized farms, in particular, where they bordered with the land being parcelled and the landless. Latvian citizenship was required. The third law of May 1922 raised the maximum size of the farm, subject to special permission of the authorities, to 50 ha, but introduced a ban on the future concentration of land above this limit by one owner. The law of April 1924 ruled finally that former owners, without any exceptions, received no compensation whatsoever. Finally, the last law of September 1924 established executive bodies which were to implement the reform in the form of the three tiers of the Commission for Agrarian Arrangements: communal, district and central.

The reform in **Lithuania** was introduced through two laws:<sup>13</sup> of March 1920 and February 1922. In accordance with the former, the reform was to embrace landed

<sup>10</sup> A. Schwabe, *Histoire agraire de la Lettonie*, Riga 1929.

<sup>11</sup> A. Rose, *op.cit.*, p. 149 and the following.

<sup>12</sup> These categories were introduced by the so-called Baltic Civil Code of 1864.

<sup>13</sup> P. Łosowski, *Lithuania*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 2001, pp. 95–96; A. Rose, *op.cit.*, p. 161 and the following.

estates above 80 ha (only the surpluses) and, wholly, landed estates which had been allotted by Russian authorities after the post-uprising confiscations or which used to belong to Russian Banks – the Gentry Bank and the Peasant Bank – allotted later for the purpose of Russification, as well as properties of people the family members of whose fought in Russian-state enemy armies. The latter referred in particular to Polish landowners which held 80% of the large landholdings in Lithuania. The law of 1922 regulated the principles of parcelling and introduced a ban on the sale of land obtained as the result of the reform. Compensations for the former owners were based on the estimated market value for the years 1910–1914. Deprived of any compensation were those who lost total landed estates for the reasons listed above. Land was allotted in return for a charge distributed over 36 years. New parcels averaged from 8 to 20 ha. Simultaneously, it was prohibited that farms could be divided into parts smaller than 8 ha in the country and 1 ha in the suburban areas. By virtue of another, separate and earlier bill, landowners had to surrender, free of charge, a specific percentage of their land for military settlement and all those who volunteered to join the army prior to the introduction of the universal duty of military service received land free of charge.

In **Poland**, the agrarian reform threatened the interests of the Polish landed classes and its implementation on the Eastern Borderlands could simply lead to reducing the land held by Poles. Hence, the reluctance and caution of Polish legislators who had, however, to take into account the expectations of Polish peasants. In 1918, the Lublin government of Daszyński announced a radical agrarian reform but it did not proceed any further. In 1919, the Polish parliament adopted a resolution<sup>14</sup> on an agrarian reform. The reform provided for a compulsory buy-out, for a 50% compensation, of land surpluses over 60–400 ha, depending on the region of Poland. In July 1920, at the critical point of the Polish-Russian war, the Polish parliament adopted the act on the execution of the resolution of 1919. Thus, it became law. The law of 1920 was, first and foremost, of propaganda significance. Its aim was to neutralize Russian propaganda addressed to peasants. Once it became clear that not only had Poland won the war but also gained the Eastern Borderlands, and there the agrarian reform meant the transfer of land from Polish to Ukrainian and Belorussian hands, the left-wing forces pushed through an additional law on military settlements.

Priority in receiving land was to be given not to local peasants but to merited soldiers. In this way, under the guise of care for veterans, a solution was introduced which was far from fair and which generated a lot of ill feelings in the Eastern Borderlands.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike a law, a parliamentary resolution is not a legal act but only an expression of the parliament's opinion. Thus, the resolution of 1919 did not create a legal situation.



In 1939, when the Soviet army entered, military settlers were among the first to be expelled. In autumn 1920, the matter seemed to have been solved. However, in March 1921, the March constitution was passed, guaranteeing the inviolability of private property. If any property were to be taken away from anybody, then only with full compensation. In this way, the law of 1920 ceased to be effective as it became non-compliant with the constitution. In May 1923, the right-wing parties and 'Piast' concluded the so-called 'Lanckorona Pact', in which a milder version of the reform was agreed on. The ceiling of landed estates not to be subject to parcelling was raised. The large landholdings were to subdivide by themselves, voluntarily and with full compensation. The annual parcellation target was set at 200,000 ha. The government was to intervene only where the limit was not reached and perform 'compulsory' parcelling of the missing part. The pact constituted grounds for the establishment of the Chjeno-Piast government, but that government did not manage to implement it. The law was finally passed on 28 December 1925, already after the fall of Grabski's government but it was the product of the latter. In the last moment, in connection with the concordat, Church landed estates were excluded from the reform. After the May coup, Piłsudski, seeking political support among the conservatives, promised them that the government would not apply compulsory parcelling even when the limit of 200,000 ha was not reached and that is what the case was.

**Germany** was, from the point of view of parcelling, a very diversified country. Large landholdings (over 100 ha) dominated in Mecklenburg (60%) and in the Prussian provinces: Pommern (51%) and Eastern Pomerania (37%). The indicator for Prussia as a whole was 28%. In Oldenburg, large peasant farmsteads prevailed (20–100 ha – 46%). Further to the south and to the west, the average size of farms decreased. The process of internal colonization was initiated by the law of 1886. The pressure for the agrarian reform intensified during World War I when the Association of Supporters of Agrarian Reform (Bund der Deutschen Bodenreformer) headed by Adolf Damaschko was established. In 1919, a settlement law was passed.<sup>15</sup> The parcelling was to be carried out by a private settlement enterprise (Siedelungsunternehmung). Allotted for settlement purposes were state-owned properties, barren lands (unless the owner pledged to improve the condition of the land) and large properties of over 25 ha put on sale, obtained by virtue of the pre-emption right (with the exception of cases where sale to relatives or co-spouse was involved). In addition, in regions where the share of large landed estates (of over 100 ha) was over 10% (this referred also to state property), Associations of Land Deliverers (Landlieferungsverband) were to be created. The associations were to supply land to settlement

<sup>15</sup> A. Rose, op.cit., p. 40 and the following.



enterprises using pre-emption, direct acquisition or expropriation with compensation. The process was to be continued until the share of large landholdings fell below 10% or decreased by 1/3 in relation to the state for 1907. Expropriation was to cover, in the first place, landed estates purchased during the war, those which had changed hands several times over the past 20 years being sold by their owners, poorly managed landed estates, those whose owner kept away from them for the most part of the year and, finally, very large landed estates. The legal form of fidei commission or ordinance did not protect against expropriation. However, the framework law of the Reich allowed for lowering the limit in individual federal states. Up to 5% of the land allotments was reserved for hitherto farmhands. The expropriated could choose the form of compensation – either a letter of lease or cash. Let us remember that Germany was about to plunge into the period of the great recession. The law of May 1920 introduced the idea of ‘family settlements’ (Heimstaele). Pursuant to the bill, those who benefited from the allotments of settlement enterprises were then expected to obtain their permission when they wanted to change their ownership (through sale or division).

In **Austria**, the agrarian reform was very moderate in character.<sup>16</sup> Its aim was not to liquidate or even weaken big landholdings but only to strengthen small landholdings. The reform consisted of two laws: on repeated colonization of 1919 and on the enfranchisement of small tenants of 1921. The first of the laws provided that arable lands which constituted individual farms in 1870 and were then swallowed by larger landed estates could be expropriated and again become independent. ‘Larger landed estates’ were defined as estates exceeding 6 times the size of a farmstead sufficient to sustain a 7-person family. That could imply different sizes in different parts of the country. Expropriation had to be initiated by an application submitted by the persons concerned. District Rural Offices acted as mediators in determining the compensation, which was to be paid directly by the people concerned. The compensation was expected not to thwart the vitality of new farmsteads, on the one hand, and not to make the new buyers enrich themselves at the cost of the hitherto owner, on the other. What must be kept in mind, however, is the fact that the reform was carried out in conditions of high inflation. The newly purchased farms could not be sold for 50 years. The law of 1921 on the enfranchisement of small tenants was based on similar principles. Its beneficiaries included people who had been tenants of the land from at least 1880 and the ban-of-sale period was 20 years. The system was further tightened by the law of December 1919 on the limitation of land trading. Sale of land as well as a tenancy for a period longer than 6 years required the consent of

<sup>16</sup> A. Rose, *op.cit.*, p. 93 and the following.

the Commissions for Land Trading, which, as a rule, denied their consent when the transaction would reduce the pool of small-sized farms.

In **Czechoslovakia**, the social situation was opposite to that in the Polish Republic. In Bohemia and Moravia, large landholdings were German, while the people were Czech. In Slovakia, the large landholdings were Hungarian and the people Slovak.<sup>17</sup> Hence the radical character of the Czechoslovak reform. In April 1919, all landed estates with over 150 ha of arable land or 250 ha of a total surface were 'placed under arrest'.<sup>18</sup> Owners were to continue managing the land, but they were prohibited to trade in land. Several other laws followed: the law of June 1919 on the establishment of a land office, of January 1920 on the allotment of land under arrest, of February 1920 on the development of land covered by the arrest, of March 1920 on credit assistance to settlers, of April 1920 on the state takeover of the land covered by the arrest and on compensations for the former owners and of March 1921 on ensuring means of subsistence to former large landed estate owners. As regards compensations, a rather symbolic solution was finally adopted – 10%–12% of the market value. The aim was to create small farms of a dozen or so hectares. The price at which the new buyers purchased the land was lower than the market price. It should have covered the costs of parcelling and to ensure a 15% surplus for a special parcelling fund from which claims of former workers of large landed estates were to be covered, among others. Priority in the allotment of land was given to veterans and war-disabled people. The radicalism of the Czech reform gave rise to diplomatic protests of England and France. Both empires decided to support and defend the interest of the owners who were their citizens. The reform proceeded at a fast, radical pace till 1926 and then its implementation slowed down. In total, it covered approximately 30% of the country.

In **Hungary**, three laws on agrarian reform were subsequently adopted,<sup>19</sup> which had its roots in the turmoil of the political history of the country. Prior to World War I, the political elites of Hungary realized the necessity of reform but their readiness to embark on it was hampered by the awareness of the fact that in the conditions of the multi-national character of the Crown of St. Stephen, the reform would mean the transfer of land from Hungarian to non-Hungarian hands. After the lost war and a loss of 70% of the old territory, those considerations lost their validity. In February

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<sup>17</sup> Yet, while the Hungarian gentry in Slovakia was definitely for magyarization, the historical Czech gentry, repeatedly supported Czech aspirations in the name of national patriotism – compare J. Tomaszewski, *Czechosłowacja*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 1997, p. 32; *Agrarian Reform in Czechoslovakia*, Praha 1923; L. Textor, *Land Reform in Czechoslovakia*, London 1923.

<sup>18</sup> A. Rose, op.cit., p. 64 and the following.

<sup>19</sup> A. Rose, op.cit., p. 64 and the following.

1919, a law was adopted on the allotment of land to the working rural population. The law provided for the expropriation of land of over 300 holds (morgs: units of land measure)<sup>20</sup> of private property and 200 holds of Church property. The land thus obtained was intended to be used to create small farms of maximum 20 holds as well as residential settlements of maximum 3 holds. A few days after the adoption of the law, the Hungarian Soviet Republic headed by Bela Kun won and introduced their own reform. The communist reform foresaw land nationalization. However, it did not provide for land parcelling. The confiscated landed estates were to be used to create large (ca. 6,000-hold) state farms (equivalents of the later Soviet sovkhozes) and production cooperatives (equivalents of later Soviet kolkhozes). The fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic put an end to those plans. The final version of the reform (under the name 'on the proper division of land') was adopted in December 1920. The lands which could be transferred for the aims of the reform (with full compensation) included, in the first place, landed estates which changed their owner through a financial transaction during World War I. They were followed by those which had changed their owner within 50 years prior to 1914. The remaining landed estates were not threatened. The conservatism of the Hungarians manifested itself, among others, in the protection of old property. It was even starker in the allotment of land. Evident priority was given to veterans, members of the Order of Heroes 'Vitez' and civil servants. They received approximately 100 holds each, while the landless and the smallholders – 1.9 hold, i.e. ca. 1 ha per head. The reform was underway till 1929, when it was declared finished. It failed to decrease in any significant way the share of large landed estates in the agrarian structure (from 53% in 1920 to 49% in 1929). Neither did it do anything to ease the overpopulation problem in the rural areas. In 1928, György Oláha published the book *Trzy miliony żebraków (Three million beggars)*.<sup>21</sup>

In Rumania, social tensions in rural areas led in 1907 to a peasant uprising. After the end of the war, Rumania, enlarged with Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina, had to address the problem of an agrarian reform immediately. The situation was further complicated by the fact that in the so-called Old Kingdom (i.e. Moldavia and Wallachia) the large landed estates were Rumanian, while in the new provinces – foreign. The situation was regulated with the help of a number of subsequent laws adopted in the years 1918–1921.<sup>22</sup> In the Old Kingdom, the reform covered landed estates of over 500 ha, in Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina of over 100 ha. Compensations were estimated as the 20–40-fold value of the annual land lease. Half of it

<sup>20</sup> The Hungarian 'morga' equalled 0.57 ha.

<sup>21</sup> J. Kochanowski, *Hungary*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 1997, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> A. Rose, op.cit., p. 122 and the following.

was paid by the state in the form of bonds and half by peasants. The real value of the compensations was reduced by inflation. In the years 1932–1934, an action aimed at lowering peasants' debts was conducted. The real value of the compensations was estimated at 6% in the Old Kingdom, 2% in Transylvania and below 1% in Bessarabia. The reform was carried out gradually and the bureaucracy implementing it was corrupt, which allowed for delays and slowdowns. In 1941, 16% of the land which should have been parcelled still remained in the hands of big landholders.<sup>23</sup>

The situation was particularly difficult in the Kingdom of SHS (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), which was later to become Yugoslavia.<sup>24</sup> This was due to the fact that it embraced several historically different parts being on a very different level of development. Slovenia shared the history of Austria, Croatia of Hungary. In Dalmatia and in those parts of the country which had remained under the Turkish rule, a largely feudal system was thriving. In that situation, the agrarian reform passed in February 1919 had to treat individual parts of the country separately. In its classic form – parcellation of large landed estates – the reform was applied only in those parts of Yugoslavia which had previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and even there with exceptions). The reform included landed estates exceeding 75–200 ha in Slovenia, 150–200 ha in Croatia, 200–450 ha in Slavonia and 320–500 ha in Vojvodina. In Dalmatia, the colonate dating back to Roman times was abolished, in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the ownership of land by Begluks was regulated (it was a kind of enfranchisement). Enfranchisement was the latest to come (1931) in Macedonia, Sandžak, Kosovo and new parts of Serbia and Montenegro. What took place there was the enfranchisement of the so-called *čifčijski* lands, thus liquidating double ownership typical of feudalism and feudal lease. Yugoslav reforms can be considered partial. Yet, they did away with completely anachronistic remnants of feudalism.<sup>25</sup>

In **Bulgaria**, the programme of a radical agrarian reform was adopted by the government of Aleksander Stamboliński. The state was to take over landed estates of above 30 ha and allot them on the basis of a buy-out to the landless and the smallholders.<sup>26</sup> After the right-wing coup of 1923, the implementation of the reform slowed down considerably.

<sup>23</sup> J. Demel, *Historia Rumunii*, Ossolineum Publishing House, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk, Łódź 1986, pp. 369–370; V. Bercaru, *La reforme agraire en Roumanie*, Paris 1928.

<sup>24</sup> W. Walkiewicz, *Jugosławia*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 2000, pp. 50–51.

<sup>25</sup> A detailed survey of Yugoslav reforms – compare W. Szulc, *Przemiany gospodarcze i społeczne w Jugosławii w okresie międzywojennym 1918–1941*, UAM Publishing House, Poznań 1980, pp. 66–119; T. Srebrenko-Dolinski, *La reforme agraire en Yougoslavie*, Paris 1921; J. Malt, *Die Agrarreform in Jugoslawien*, Berlin 1927.

<sup>26</sup> T. Wasilewski, *Historia Bułgarii*, Ossolineum, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk – Łódź 1988, p. 243.

In Greece, already in 1871, a decision was made to parcel 'national lands' that is the former domain of the Turkish state.<sup>27</sup> In 1907, voluntary parcelling of private lands was proclaimed and in 1911, it was transformed into compulsory parcelling in all the regions, apart from Thessaly. The specificity of Thessaly consisted in the fact that the majority of big landed estates in it was in the hands of Greeks (mainly from the diaspora) and peasants were not Greek but Macedonian. This legal status persisted in the interwar period and Thessaly remained a unique reserve of big landed estates.

In Albania, works on regulating agrarian relations began in 1926.<sup>28</sup> The commission for agrarian reform operating there availed itself of the assistance of an Italian professor, G. Lorenzoni. The works of the commission resulted in a law on agrarian reform adopted in May 1930. The implementation of the reform was to last 15 years. It was to be supported by the State Agrarian Bank established in 1937. The reform was rather conservative. Excluded from the reform were vineyards, olive groves, forests, pastures and orchards. As for the remaining grounds, the owners had the right to retain 40 ha plus 5 ha for each family member. The rest was to be taken over by the state for a compensation and then sold to new buyers. Every takeover of grounds of over 100 ha required, however, personal consent of the king. The aim was to create landholdings of 5 ha per family. The state sold arable land at a fixed price of 20 golden francs. It is estimated that in order to satisfy land hunger, the reform should have covered ca. 30,000 ha. In practice, it covered 4,700 ha of private grounds and 3,400 ha of state grounds. It benefited mostly civil servants and refugees from Kosovo. The king treated the reform as an instrument of disciplining Albanian aristocracy.

The only West European country in which an agrarian reform was actually carried out in the interwar period was Spain. The draft reform was prepared in the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic which followed the fall of the monarchy in 1931. In May of that year, the Technical Agrarian Commission was established which prepared the draft reform. It did not cover the whole of Spain but only its southern and central areas where it seemed well justified due to, on the one hand, overpopulation of the rural areas and, on the other, large landholdings.<sup>29</sup> The grounds to be involved were royal properties, uncultivated grounds as well as private landholdings of over 300–400 ha, depending on the type of cultivation. Landed estates exceeding those ceilings were confiscated as a whole. Royal estates were parcelled without compensation. Compensations for private owners were to be paid in state bonds, theoretically

<sup>27</sup> A. Brzeziński, *Greece*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 2002, pp. 42–43, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> A. Koseski, *Albania. Krótki zarys dziejów*, KiW, Warszawa 1988, pp. 71–72.

<sup>29</sup> The reform was to include Andalusia, Extremadura as well as the central provinces of: Ciudad Real, Albaceta and Salamanca, compare B. Gola, F. Ryszka, *Hiszpania*, Trio Publishing House, Warszawa 1999, p. 147.

in full value. In fact, however, their estimate was based on earlier tax declarations. The common practice of underestimating the value of estates thus turned against their owners. The law was passed on 9 September 1932. Earlier certain changes were made to it. The threshold above which landed estates were taken over was raised up to 600–700 ha. In the last moment, the landed estates parcelled without compensation came to include the properties of people hostile to the Republic (a month prior to the adoption of the law, on 10 August 1932, a failed state coup took place) as well as the estates of grands, that is the highest layers of Spanish aristocracy. The latter were 65 people who in total held ca. 500,000 ha.<sup>30</sup> The confiscated land was nationalized and only then allotted to peasants. The process was to be coordinated by the Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto de Reforma Agraria) with an educated agronomist Pacual Carrion at the head. The Spanish reform was a reaction to numerous local peasant revolts. Its moderate character and the long duration of its implementation caused, among others, it to fail to contain the progress of anarchy in rural areas. In practice, it continued till 1934 when the radicalization of the political situation put an end to its implementation. It is estimated that by that time only approximately 13,000 peasant families managed to benefit from it. Perhaps the most lasting evidence of the Spanish agrarian reform is the network of *paradors*, that is not very expensive, elegant state hotels in confiscated feudal castles.

The situation in **Ireland** was also fairly specific. Yet, certain circumstances allow adding the transformations which took place in this country to our survey. The system which was in force in Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century actually, though not formally, resembled relations in Eastern Europe prior to the enfranchisement. Land was the property of English landowners who leased it to the Irish in exchange for a cash rent. Comparing to Eastern Europe prior to the enfranchisement, there were two differences: there were no granges and no socage but the whole situation was described in the legal language characteristic of the capitalist system – as tenancy and not as feudal property divided. In fact, however, social problems resulting from the two systems were similar. In 1903, the British Parliament, in fear of the growing wave of separatism, decided to meet the expectations of the Irish. The Land Purchase Act was adopted, called Wyndham's act after the name of its initiator, the secretary of state for Ireland. Under that regulation, tenants could purchase from the owners the land they leased. The British government covered 12% of the price (100 m pounds sterling was allocated for the purpose) and peasants were given credit for the remainder. The credit was to be repaid over 68.5 years in instalments lower than the hitherto paid

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<sup>30</sup> T. Miłkowski, P. Machcewicz, *Historia Hiszpanii*, Ossolineum, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1977, p. 316.



rent. The reform worked. The Irish who in 1878 held only 5% of the land in their homeland, increased their share up to two thirds by 1914.<sup>31</sup> One of the crucial matters discussed during the independence negotiations in 1921 was the question of the maintenance of the repayment of instalments resulting from the 1903 reform. Ireland did not agree to it. Yet, in 1932, in the face of the great crisis, the Irish government suspended payments. 50% of the outstanding payments were written off, while the remaining 50% the government decided to allocate for the industrialization of the country. The decisions of 1932 provoked retortions on the part of Britain and began a trade war between the two countries, but the British failed to change them.<sup>32</sup>

In **Italy**, there were reasons for agrarian reform, although the problem was not equally distributed from the geographical point of view. It concerned first and foremost the South and the Po river valley. Approximately 20% of arable land belonged to 1,200 rich landowners. The overpopulation of rural areas favoured the emigration of the rural population abroad as well as their migration to towns. During World War I, Italians were promised a solution to the problem but finally, neither the liberal governments before 1922 nor Mussolini's regime had enough determination to undertake an agrarian reform. Sporadic attempts at land parcelling made by veterans were stifled by the army. Mussolini tried to counteract migration by promoting the advantages of the country life and the ban on changing the place of residence by farm workers without a prefect's consent introduced in 1930.<sup>33</sup> In this situation, the reform was carried out after World war II by the government of Alcide de Gasperi in 1950. It was preceded by a wave of spontaneous parcellations, which the police tried to counteract. Under the reform, hitherto owners received full compensation, while peasants were to repay them to the state later. The aim was to create farms of a surface of ca. 10 ha.<sup>34</sup> In spite of its partial character, the reform helped to ease social tensions.

## Conclusion

The agrarian reforms of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were a side effect of the industrial revolution and demographic explosion. The diversity of solutions applied in individual countries was a reflection of the complexity of local problems. By

<sup>31</sup> S. Grzybowski, *Historia Irlandii*, Ossolineum, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1977, p. 316.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 341.

<sup>33</sup> J. Gierowski, *Historia Włoch*, Ossolineum, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk – Łódź 1986, p. 588.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, pp. 646–647.



comparison, the communist reforms introduced after 1945 were driven mainly by ideological considerations and their aim was not so much to solve the actual problems but to break the will to resist and to incapacitate whole societies.

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