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The 1921 Agrarian Reform in Transylvania and its Reflection in the Considerations of the Members of the Bucharest School of Sociology



Abstract The 1921 agrarian reform aimed to be a significant step towards Romania's agricultural development. The main motive of this reform – at least on a declarative level – was a socially oriented one: to expropriate a part of the big landowners' estates, and to distribute in among the poverty-stricken people, with a special concern towards the First World War veterans, or their widows. At the same time, the agrarian reform recognised the differences in development between the different regions of the newly-formed Greater Romania, and as such there were two different laws regulating the reform processes in the Old Kingdom and in the newly annexed territories.

The members of the Bucharest School of Sociology, based on the scarce data available to them to the time, approached the economically questionable results of this reform in a critical manner. József Venczel, who had acquired the bases of his professional knowledge at the same school, also proves, with regard to the Transylvanian land reform, that this had a second, national policy oriented goal, and its implementation was also ethnically biased.

Keywords Venczel József, agrarian reform, 1921, Transylvania, Bucharest School of Sociology, economic history.

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The context of Venczel's orientation towards the analysis of the Romanian agrarian reform

The new geo-political context, as modified by the second dictate of Vienna from August 30. 1940, based on which Northern Transylvania became, once more, part of Hungary, brought on an abundance of institutional changes. These changes unavoidably touched the scientific institutions as well, together with the people who have been activating in this domain.

This period has also brought significant changes upon József Venczel's life, statute, and institutional affiliation. He became a professor at the *Erdélyi Tudományos Intézet* [Transylvanian Scientific Institute], and at the same time, he was appointed the chief of the *Statisztikai és Birtokpolitikai Ügyosztály* [Bureau for Statistics and Land Policy] within the *Erdélyi Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület* [Hungarian Economic Association from Transylvania] based in Kolozsvár.¹ This institution was responsible for the assessment of the economical and agrarian situation of post-1940 Transylvania, and the Bureau led by Venczel was directly responsible for collecting the data pertinent to the situation of the properties in Northern Transylvania. As a result, Venczel had direct access to all the data necessary to render an objective interpretation of the 1921 agrarian reform.

Concerning Venczel's scientific background and intellectual capacity to undertake this assignment, it can be stated that he had a twofold scientific formation, these complementing each other in carrying out the job. Firstly, he had a law degree at the *Universitatea „Regele Ferdinand I”* [“King Ferdinand I” University], where he studied in Romanian language and where, in 1939, also obtained the Doctor of Laws title. Therefore, he possessed the knowledge and skills necessary to construe a certain law. On the other hand, he also benefitted from a second professionalization due to his unyielding interest in village work, his years of writing on the subject, and also due to his subsequent connections with the *Școala Sociologică de la București* [Bucharest School of Sociology], materialized in a semester of “internship” at this school in Bucharest. During this internship, he attended professor Gusti's lectures, had access to the archives of the *Institutul Social Român* [Romanian Social Institute]; participated in the *Muzeului Satului* [Village Museum] inventory process and in the second monographic campaign of Șanț village. These experiences had a marked contribution to József Venczel's scientific orientation, where the focus of his professional interest was ensnared by the operationalization of the biological frame and the economic manifestation,² in the spirit of the positivist-quantitative paradigm, which analysis became a central theme of his research.

The Romanian agrarian reform in the perspective of the members of the Bucharest School of Sociology

Here I would like to present three works, belonging to members of the Bucharest School of Sociology which, both by their content and conclusions may have influenced Vencel's perspective in his critical analysis of the agrarian reform. The first is Mircea Vulcănescu's work published

¹ Nowadays Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

² According to the paradigm developed by Dimitrie Gusti, the social reality can be defined correctly along four frames (natural/cosmological, biological, historical and psychological) and four manifestations (economical, spiritual, legal and political) which, according to the principle of parallelism, have a cause-effect relationship with each other while none of them has the priority over the others. For more information regarding Gusti's paradigm, please refer to Rostás (Rostás 2000, 2001) and Pászka (Pászka 2008, 2009).

in *Sociologie Românească* [Romanian Sociology], entitled *Excedentul Populației Agricole și Perspectivele Gospodăriei Țărănești* [The excess of the agrarian population and the perspectives of the peasant smallholdings].

Vulcănescu's analysis is based on country-level aggregated data, both concerning the data related to the agrarian properties, and the demographical data, related to the population's birth rate. In his analysis, Vulcănescu perceives the Malthusian problem as being very much of actuality in the rural areas of Romania, where the increase of the population, unaccompanied by a significant development in the agricultural production would lead to a further fragmentation of the properties and inherently, to an even bigger decrease of the production levels. Therefore, Vulcănescu sustains – for the above-presented reasons – that the beneficial effects of the agrarian reform may disappear entirely without a major change in the agrarian production methods, where, under these conditions, the winners of this transition would be the middle land-owners, the so-called “kulaks” (VULCĂNESCU 1937. 96–97.). As such, M. Vulcănescu arrives to a first critical observation on the agrarian reform: “[t]hough, socially speaking, it made the Romanian peasant the master of his own exploitation, thus consolidating, at least for a generation, the social peace of the country, from the economic point of view, it is far from being an indisputable success” (VULCĂNESCU 1937. 97.).

Following this, Vulcănescu's study focuses on the economical facet of the analysis of the agrarian reform's effects, lining up, step by step, the arguments sustaining the presented hypothesis. His argumentation starts with the fact that Romania's agricultural production remained centred on cereals, which yield a significant output only when cultivated extensively (at least at that time), stating that the “productivity of the agrarian cultivation has decidedly decreased” (VULCĂNESCU 1937. 97.). This argument is sustained by the agrarian statistical data, which shows that the production level before World War I was higher before the war than in the after-war period. Hence, this decrease in production is the unintended effect of the agrarian reform, due to the fact that the land redistribution was carried out without adequate agricultural know-how. In addition, regarding the peasants' mentality, Vulcănescu quotes Cijaianov, according to whom “this never pursues the maximal profitability, as the capitalist entrepreneur, but always the optimum efficiency, this being the perfect balance between his effort and the gain obtained out of it” (VULCĂNESCU 1937. 99.).

Vulcănescu arrives to the final conclusion that, although the agrarian reform was beneficial – at least on short term – from the social standpoint, seems that – from the economic point of view – it was a major failure.

In the last part of his study, following the Gustist model of social intervention after the detection of the problems, Vulcănescu lays forward a few recommendations which would remedy, in his opinion, the described situation.



In the same spirit was written Nicolae Cornățeanu's study, who asserts, same as Vulcănescu, that the Romanian agrarian reforms have followed the logic of politics, instead of the economics, which led to big mistakes in the conception of the agrarian reforms between 1864 and 1918 (CORNĂȚEANU 1937. 100–101). Therefore, the author suggests a recommendation complementary to the ones forwarded by Vulcănescu, arguing that a law that would warrant the indivisibility of the properties of less than 3 hectares would put an end to the agrarian land fragmentation process, a phenomenon described by Vulcănescu as well (CORNĂȚEANU 1937. 101–102).

In the same issue, no. 2-3 from 1937 of the *Sociologie Românească* journal, there was another study, closely related to the agrarian life in Romania. This was signed by Roman Cresin, and entitled *Care Este Structura Proprietății Agrare din România?* [What is the structure of the agrarian property in Romania?].

The first critique formulated by Roman Cresin at the address of the involved state institutions is the acute lack of information, more exactly the lack of concrete data, which would make any research seem unfounded, based on assumptions only. This shortcoming is mainly due to the inexistence of a regular agrarian census (CRESIN 1937. 90–91.). In this context, any attempt to draw up an objective analysis is enormously hindered. Nevertheless, as an accomplished intellectual who does not perceive the lack of data as an obstacle due to which one should give up their research, and searches for alternative data to give an adequate answer to the problem, Cresin uses five other data sources to carry out his research, the first being related to the results of the agrarian reform. According to the presentation of the data published by the Ministerul Agriculturii și al Domeniilor [Ministry of Agriculture and Properties], it can be stated from the aggregated data – which clearly conceals significant differences between the different types of properties, based on their sizes – that this reform did not ensue as expected. This suspicion is Cresin’s first conclusion as well, who, presenting the established results, asserts that: “[t]herefore, it can be presumed that the situation of the small and medium-sized properties is even less favourable than the one presented in the A and B tables [the repartition of the properties before and after the agrarian reform]” (CRESIN 1937. 92.). Knowing Cresin’s scientific work, characterized by a statistical, quantitative and positivist methodological rigorousness, the figure of speech “it can be presumed” is very uncharacteristic, and can be construed as a critique of the institutions involved.

Analysing the data from other sources than the above-mentioned publication – such as the statistics of the direct taxes, or the preliminary results of the 1930 agricultural census – Cresin arrives to the conclusion that the differences between the results are significant, which does not contribute to a correct and adequate assessment of the agrarian reform.

At the same time, he advises that the agrarian policy should treat the small, medium-sized and large properties differently, as these follow different logics of operation. But, before all else – in the spirit of the Bucharest School of Sociology – he declares that a research, a detailed census is necessary in order to correctly assess the realities of the Romanian agriculture (CRESIN 1937. 95.).

The fact that both Roman Cresin, as well as the other members of the Bucharest School of Sociology, starting with professor Gusti, felt the need of compiling Romania’s Encyclopaedia, this being the declared end-goal of their intellectual efforts, suggests that the volume of the current scientific knowledge on Romania, at least of the knowledge considered as scientifically funded, from Gusti’s point of view, was scarce. This argument is sustained by professor Gusti himself in the foreword of the *60 sate românești* [60 Romanian villages], where he states: “[i]n this era, of the intense organization of our nation, the research of the Romanian realities is very much needed. Efficient actions demand a thorough documentation. Nowadays, the superficiality and the dilettantism are, more than ever before, a crime against the nation. I am sure that only the diagnoses based on the type of research like the one carried out by the [Royal] teams can insure the documentation necessary to draw up a complete plan of organizing the national life” (GUSTI 1941. 5.). From this perspective, we can state that Venczel was a consummate Gustist, as he had entirely attained the same firm attitude towards those who have tried to formulate quasi-scientific conclusions on untested bases or scientifically unverified premises.

There can be no doubt that József Venczel had knowledge of these works, for several reasons. Firstly, the ideas and critiques presented above can be detected in his own works, adopted to the analysis of the effects of the agrarian reform in Northern Transylvania. On the other hand, he had started his analysis by thoroughly researching the pertinent Romanian literature.

The primary analysis compiled by József Venczel of the documents regarding the Transylvanian situation in the Romanian speciality literature

As a first step of his analysis, József Venczel tried to identify all scientific works written by Romanian authors pertinent to the agrarian reform of 1921. Therefore, after reading this literature, the majority of which was published in the French language, Venczel arrived to the conclusion that, in order to form an advised scientific opinion on the matter at hand, he needed to clarify the premises, namely the database that would serve as a basis for comparing the assessment of the effects.

The conclusions of Venczel regarding the books, works and studies written by Romanian authors in this domain is that these can be divided into two categories. The first category is composed by those works that quote or refer to the data initially presented by Dr. Ioan Iacob at the 1921, 15 July debate on the law regarding the agrarian reform, and in his work entitled *Chestia agrară din Ardeal* [The Transylvanian Agrarian Issue] published in 1924. According to Venczel, an array of authors continued to use Iacob's work as an original data source, quoting and analysing it. The other category is represented by Dr. Ion L. Ciomac, who uses Iacob's data with a certain reserve (VENCZEL 1943. 4.).

In the next step, Venczel compares the data used by Iacob – these being the result of the 1919 collection of agrarian data, with the statistical data from the Hungarian archives. The results show a significant difference: according to the Romanian data, the territory annexed from Hungary to Romania was of 14.933.841 “cadastre acres”³, while according to the data based on the registries compiled in 1909 by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this territory was of 17.794.643 cadastre acres, Venczel concluding that “this difference of 2.860.802 cadastre acres⁴ doesn't show in a good light the exactness and the validity of the 1919 collection of agrarian data [mandated by the Directory Council of Transylvania]”

Following this conclusion, Venczel's analysis extends over each category of land – both owned by the natural and the legal persons – and presents the differences between the statistical registries of the two countries. Based on these comparisons, Venczel discovers that at the basis of the data used by I. Iacob is not the 1919 data collection, but the “statistical compilation” (VENCZEL 1943. 5.) drafted by Ion and Ioan Enescu. The data used by Enescu and Enescu are called compilations due to the fact that the recalculation of the surfaces of the different areas based on the original data (from 1895) shows significant differences, which can be traced back to the fact that the agrarian register, and the “statistical compilation” include different administrative territories. This conclusion of Venczel is based on the fact that while Enescu and Enescu consider the totality of the Austro-Hungarian counties annexed to Romania, they did not perform the

³ The most accomplished people listed by Venczel as belonging in this category are: Livius Lazăr, Constantinescu Mititza, Valeriu Bercaru, Constantin C. Damian, and David Mitrany (VENCZEL 1943:3).

⁴ Venczel uses the traditional Hungarian “katasztrális hold” unit, which is equal to 5755 m². In the text, for a better fluency, I use “cadastre acres” in reference to this unit.

necessary corrections. The after-Trianon border was not traced along the borders of the existing counties, and as such, the counties of Western Romania after 1919 are not identical with those from 1895 (VENCZEL 1943. 5–6).

Reverting to the comparison of the Transylvanian land structure from the properties size point of view, Venczel discovers that the major differences between Iacob's and the Hungarian authors' works is caused by the different operationalization of the categories: while at Iacob the medium-size exploitations are defined as the ones under 500 cadastre acres, and the big exploitations have over 500 cadastre acres, Venczel – in accordance with the Hungarian statistics – considers the limit between the medium and big exploitation as being at 1000 cadastre acres.



Here I have to mention that Roman Cresin, in his work on the 1941 agrarian census, published in 1945, also defines the biggest agricultural exploitation category as the properties that have over 500 hectares (meaning approximately 870 cadastre acres).

After analysing the exploitations, Venczel moves forward to the analysis of the Transylvanian ethnical statistics, and proves that, in this case as well, the results are mostly erroneous, as they are based either on assumptions, or on obsolete data.

In conclusion, it seems that the last sentence from Venczel's presented work has, scientifically speaking, a universal validity: "[t]he propaganda disguised as science didn't serve, because it couldn't serve the justice" (VENCZEL 1943. 19).

The reflexions of József Venczel on the 1921 Romanian agrarian reform

This process of studying the effects of the reform has started in 1940, and after publishing his results, Venczel also made suggestions with regard to the 1945 agrarian reform, so we can state that this scientific interest was consistent on this issue.

In his works concerning the 1921 agrarian reform from Romania, Venczel aimed to test the main argument called forth by the state authorities, namely that the agrarian reform had as purpose the reorganization of the properties in order to guarantee the people's livelihood.

Firstly, to present the importance of the issue, Venczel gathered all the Romanian bibliographical references dealing with the agrarian reform, arriving to the impressive number of 384 articles (VENCZEL 1942. 3.).

The problem of the 1921 Romanian agrarian reform starts with the fact that we cannot talk about it at singular, as there were two separate laws: one with number 82 from July 17, 1921, which regulated the expropriations from the Romanian Old Kingdom, including Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldavia and Dobruja, and a second law under number 93 from 30 July, 1921, regulating the agrarian reform from Transylvania, the Banat [Bánság], Crişana [Kőrösvidék], and Maramureş [Máramaros].

After the delimitation of the territories, materialized in the legislative framework as well, Venczel asserts that these approaches were legitimate, as the two territories were characterized by different histories and different evolutions of the agrarian life and economy. Given the geopolitical context in which Venczel analysed the effects of the agrarian reform, in his works he mostly focused on the effects of the second law, regarding Transylvania, the Banat, Crişana, and Maramureş. At the same time, the data that had been at Venczel's disposal granted only the

possibility to analyse the effects generated in those territories which, in 1918–1940, were parts of Romania, and as such felt under the Romanian legislation, and at the moment of the 1941 census were part of Hungary, namely Northern Transylvania.

The analysis of the Transylvanian agrarian reform starts with the comparison of the two laws, and identifies in the following ten points the differences between them, which concern both the circle of persons falling under the incidence of the law, as well as the differences in implementation:

1. The law regarding the agrarian reform in the Old Kingdom has a more narrow scope, it only aims to increase the surfaces of the peasant-owned farms, to create commonage pastures and to meet certain public needs, so, unlike the law regarding Transylvania, it does not have in its purview the expropriation of forests in order to modify certain aspects of the economical balance (such as helping the labourers, functionaries or other categories of people with small means by giving them forest shares). In this respect, the law regarding the Old Kingdom does not exceed the concept of “agrarian reform”.

2. The law regarding the Old Kingdom has certain limits set concerning the minimum surface (100 hectares) of the estates which are subject to expropriation, and to the maximum surface (2,000,000 hectares) that can be expropriated, while the Transylvanian law has no such limits. In Transylvania 2,655 estates having under 100 hectares of agricultural land were expropriated; 74.9 per cent of these were in Hungarian, 13.1 per cent in German, and only 4.7 per cent were in Romanian ownership.

3. There are significant differences between the expropriation of the Crown’s estates and the estates owned by public persons and corporations, institutions, foundations etc. These properties are subject to expropriation in the Old Kingdom only with regards to the cultivable land, and the law provides that the estates under twelve hectares belonging to churches and schools remain untouched, while the Transylvanian law granted fewer such exceptions and established a smaller maximum limit.

4. Venczel observes significant differences between the two laws regarding the maximum surface over which the excess is to be expropriated, in all categories of expropriations (plain, hillside or mountain estates). Venczel sums the differences in the below presented table:

in cadastre acres	Old Kingdom	Transylvania
in case of the estates given in tenure at a certain, specified moment	174	50-100
in case of undividable estates, per owner	174	50
in case of hillside and mountain estates	174	50-100
in case of estates situated in plains		
in case of big apportionment needs	261	200
in case of moderate apportionment needs	348	300
in case of satisfied apportionment needs	434	500

The limit of acreages over which the remained area can be expropriated⁵

5. The above presented limits also show differences in the construction of the two laws, regarding the properties considered as composing one estate. In the Transylvanian law, all the

⁵ Data source: VENCZEL 1942. 22.

properties, even if they were situated in different geographical locations, of the same owner are considered as one estate, so the surface above the mentioned limit is subject to expropriation. In the law regarding the Old Kingdom, only the properties held in the same village or in the nearby villages are considered to sum up an estate, and as such, the expropriation can be applied separately on the different estates held by the same owner.

6. There is also a difference regarding the descendants pursuing agricultural studies. The law concerning the Old Kingdom insures the possibility of withholding 50 hectares of land for each son who is enrolled in a school with agricultural profile. The Transylvanian law allows this option for only one son and also decreases the surface which can be withheld by specifying half of the fathers' non-expropriable property, which in most cases cannot be more than 50 cadastre acres.

7. The laws concerning the Old Kingdom and Transylvania also treat the middle-sided estates differently. The law regarding the Old Kingdom provides that the surfaces expropriated from the hillside and mountain estates, which were under tenure at the moment specified by the law, can be apportioned in parcels of at least twenty-five hectares or more and the surfaces expropriated from the mountain and hillside estates cultivated by the owner can be apportioned in parcels of minimum fifty hectares or more. In Transylvania, the law regarding these estates only provides that these can also be the subject of expropriation if needed. Only in Northern Transylvania, estates under fifty cadastre acres belonging to 1,322 Hungarians, 286 German ethnics and 315 others were subject to expropriation in a proportion of 51.4 per cent, and estates between 50 – 100 cadastre acres belonging to 140 Hungarians, 7 German ethnics and 66 others were subject to expropriation in a proportion of 53.3 per cent.

8. The Old Kingdom and Transylvanian law also differs in the amount and nature of the just compensation given in exchange for certain expropriated areas and also in the amount established as a maximum limit of the state reserve.

9. The agrarian reform laws concerning the Old Kingdom and Transylvania also differ in regard of the price established for the expropriations. While the price for the expropriations in the Old Kingdom is established based on the situation of 1917 and the following five years, in Transylvania this price is established based on the situation from 1913 and the preceding five years. The Transylvanian law also provided a leeway in the price for expropriations by establishing the prices in Romanian lei and the exchange rates with the Hungarian Korona.

10. Finally, Venczel points out the characteristic differences in the composition of the expropriation committees. While the expropriation committees in the Old Kingdom include one representative of the owners and one of the villagers, the Transylvanian law does not provide for the representation of any of these categories (VENCZEL 1942. 19–26.).

Based on the above presented points, Venczel concludes that: “[t]he Transylvanian law is much more radical from every point of view: the law of expropriation is extended of every branch of the agriculture, tampers incomparably more with the traditional property policy processes, mercilessly breaks the secular order of the commonage, constricts the private properties under the minimal level, broadens the sphere of the concept of absenteeism disregarding the international treaties, and doesn't refrain from using such means and methods that lead to an economical degradation, and, leaving the Transylvanian people aside, entrusts the implementation of the democratic reforms to the organs of the authority” (VENCZEL 1942. 27.).

In the third chapter of his analysis, after presenting the differences between the two laws, Venczel proceeds to the comparison of the agricultural and social situation between the two parts of Romania.

Concerning the situation of the Old Kingdom, Venczel appeals to Adolf Gustav Klein's work⁶, according to whom the division of the agricultural properties was the worst possible, as, on one hand there were the big estates, concentrated in the ownership of a handful of people, and then there were the peasant properties, so small that they could not even sustain their owners. There was no such thing as a middle peasantry, but actually, by our construal of the concept, we cannot talk about a peasantry at all – summarizes Klein. In parallel with this situation – continues Venczel, based in continuation on Klein's work, in Transylvania "the percentage of the land owned by the peasants, who also own livestock and tools, is up to seventy percent of the total land in usage even if the properties are not very big, (between 5-15 acres), and the land is not as fertile as in the Old Kingdom, the Transylvanian peasant manages to secure the livelihood of his family" (VENCZEL 1942. 28.).

Another aspect by which the land ownership system differs between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom is the ownership and the function of the medium and big estates. In this respect, those estates which also fulfilled a social function – such as the commonages, which were almost completely absent in the Old Kingdom – fell into the category that was expropriated by the law of the agrarian reform, and as such, the peasants who were dependent on the proceeds of these properties have lost an important source of income. From this point of view – summarizes Venczel – the Transylvanian agrarian reform was more an antisocial, then a social one.

Analysing the legitimacy of the law regulating the agrarian reform, Venczel shows that, if we remove the commonage estates over 100 acres or 50 hectares from the list, we see that in Transylvania the percentage of the estates bigger then this limit was of 15,5%, while in the Old Kingdom this proportion was of 30 % (VENCZEL 1942. 30.).

Another argument forwarded by Venczel in order to present the cardinal differences between the two territories is the fact that while Transylvania did not see any peasant uprising since 1849, in the Old Kingdom there were a string of uprisings and social movements, fuelled by the desperate situation of the peasantry who have been pushed to the brink of subsistence level.

But if these differences were so sharp, why was an agrarian reform needed in Transylvania? – asks Venczel. He attempts to answer this question once again with the help of A. G. Klein, according to whom there was a thesis in the Romanian policy which also constituted an internal propaganda: "This thesis, which had become the common conviction of both the Romanian people and their leaders, stated that »the expropriation in Transylvania, based on national policy is as much as legitimate as the expropriation abroad (in the Old Kingdom) based on social policy «" (VENCZEL 1942. 31.).

In the next chapter, Venczel proves, based on the data that, at least between 1910-1916, the situation that occurred in Transylvania could have been construed as an agrarian reform realized in a natural manner, in the benefit of the Romanian ethnics. (VENCZEL 1942. 46.).

After presenting the precursory situations, Venczel moves on to actual the analysis of the agrarian reform in Transylvania. Venczel bases his analysis on the data published by Mititza Constantinescu, Gheorghe Ionescu-Șișești and Emil Petrini, who describe the most accurately the effects of the agrarian reform between 1920 and 1940. Based on the data of the 1941 Hungarian census, which thus included Northern Transylvania, Venczel calculates the percentage of the expropriated amount of the estates, broken into categories:

⁶ Klein, Gustav Adolf (1927): Soziale und nationale Probleme der Agrarreform in Siebenbürger in Deutsche Politische Hefte, Sibiu.

micro and small estates under 50 cadastre acres	51.4
small estates between 50 – 100 cadastre acres	53.3
medium sized estates between 100 – 500 cadastre acres	44.3
big estates over 500 cadastre acres	62.6

The percentage of the expropriated areas out of the totality of the estates⁷

By these calculations Venczel disproves the declared anti-feudal character of the Transylvanian agrarian reform, given that the small estates were also subject of expropriation, and in a quite big percentage, especially when compared to the data regarding the big estates.

After analysing the expropriation of the agricultural lands, Venczel continues with the analysis of the wooded properties which were expropriated only in Transylvania, as this regulation was not present in the law pertaining to the Old Kingdom. As a final conclusion, he asserts that only one quarter of this type of land was awarded as apportionment of property, the rest was either given to different institutions, or retained as a state reserve, which does not coincide with the logic of the declared social policy.

Analysing the expropriations and the apportionments of property from the ethnic perspective, also on the basis on the census data, Venczel shows that, among those persons who did not own any property before the agrarian reform were more Hungarians, than Romanians, but the apportionments of property intently favoured the latter category.



Arriving to the analysis of the effects of the agrarian reform in Transylvania, Venczel proves both by analysing the text of the law and by the statistical results that, from the economic standpoint, this was, at least in Transylvania, very unsuccessful. An eloquent example is that one of the most populous categories – consisting of 67.288 people – was apportioned only with 1 cadastre acre parcels (0.58 hectare).

As Venczel presents the dates published by Petrini,⁸ from 1928, it shows the following situation:

receives 1 cadastre acre	67,228	people entitled by the law
receives 2 cadastre acres	83,987	people entitled by the law
receives 3 cadastre acres	68,557	people entitled by the law
receives 4 cadastre acres	43,980	people entitled by the law
receives 5 cadastre acres	14,745	people entitled by the law
receives 6 cadastre acres	999	people entitled by the law
receives 7 cadastre acres	1,183	people entitled by the law

The real effect of the Romanian land reform⁹

Venczel, analysing the volume of the land available through expropriations in Northern Transylvania, and accepting the arguments of Nicolae Cornățeanu, according to whom the minimal amount of land which is worth cultivating in order to insure a limited standard of living for a family is 3 hectares (= 5,2 cadastre acres), reaches the conclusion that, even if the

⁷ Data source: VENCZEL 1942. 54.

⁸ PETRINI, EMIL: *Reforma agrară*. Transilvania, Banatul, Crișana și Maramureșul 1918–1928. p.310

⁹ Data source: VENCZEL 1942. 67.

total available land was to be expropriated (regardless if this was farmland or pasture), it still would not be sufficient for everyone entitled. Convergent to this reasoning, Venczel reminds of Vasile C. Osvada's protest regarding the project of the law concerning Transylvania, and for the economic analysis he mentions Paul Nițescu's work, who characterizes the agrarian reform as a pulverization of the wealth, as the arithmetical mean of the parcels appropriated to the entitled persons was of 2.06 cadastre acres. It is understandable that at this point Venczel quotes a phrase of N. Cornățeanu, who characterized the situation of the time by the idea of "peasants made equal in misery".



After analysing the local data, Venczel – as expected from a researcher socialized at the Bucharest School of Sociology – switches to the international level and compares the data regarding Transylvania and the Old Kingdom with several European countries. From this comparison, he determines that, compared to the 1904–13 period, in the 1930–38 period the agricultural output of the Old Kingdom and of Transylvania has suffered a significant decrease – the only exception being the rye in the Old Kingdom – trend that cannot be detected in most of the European countries. These data also support the conclusion that the Romanian agricultural situation was better before the implementation of the agricultural reform than afterwards. In this respect, Venczel also quotes A. Frunzănescu's study, who qualifies the period after the First World War as the "regressive period of the Romanian agriculture" (VENCZEL 1942. 81.). Even if, quoting G. Ionescu-Șișești's work from the Romanian Encyclopaedia, Venczel concedes that these negative results are not entirely due to the agrarian reform, he still asserts very strongly that this reform has been carried out in a most unprofessional and – in the case of Transylvania – ethnically biased manner. At the end, he also states that "[t]his isn't only a national or political problem, but we are talking about the science of building a nation" (VENCZEL 1942. 81.).

This last remark can be interpreted as a critique towards the former political leadership of Romania who seem to have neglected – at least in the case of the Transylvanian agricultural reform – the social and economic realities of this area, making its decisions based exclusively on political arguments. Even more, this argument can be conceived as a nod to Dimitrie Gusti and the Bucharest School of Sociology (at a time of them being citizens of different countries, holding several opposite interests) who, by his "science of nation" established the scientific groundwork of constructing a nation based on the social and economic realities.

Following the changes underwent after 1940, materialized in a territorial adjustment of several countries, the censuses became an effective tool of procuring information regarding the demographic and economic realities of the newly-formed countries. As such, in parallel with Hungary, an agricultural census also took place in the 1941's Romania – that is, without the territories annexed to other countries from the Greater Romania: Northern Transylvania, Bessarabia and Southern Dobruja. The technical leadership of Romania's General Census was entrusted to Dr. D. C. Georgescu and the works of the Agrarian census to Mr. Roman Cresin.

This pair of Gustist disciples, engaged in key positions of the census, guaranteed its correct and professional execution. This census also had the aim – which it successfully completed – to provide data about (quoting I. Butoi's title) "The interwar Romanian village, a »Terra Incognita«". (BUTOI 2011.).

Although the publication of this data was only a compilation of provisory data, it managed to provide a detailed image concerning the situation of 1941 Romanian agriculture. In this respect,

it is an informative work, and as such it lacks the remarks, interpretations and explanations.

The late publishing of this work – in 1945 – did not take away much of its value and actuality, as in 1945 a new agrarian reform was about to be implemented, by the new pro-communist government which took over the power in Romania.

From the works presented above, it can be seen that the authors belonging to the Bucharest School of Sociology have unanimously criticised this reform as being an unprepared, scarcely documented and unprofessionally carried out endeavour. They all agree on the fact that the small size of the appropriations caused a significant hindrance in the agricultural production. The one significant difference is that, while the Romanian authors recognize the social legitimacy of this reform, on the Hungarian part, namely in József Venczel's opinion, it was perceived as a socially unjust and ethnically biased enterprise. *

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