

ACADEMIE SERBE DES SCIENCES ET DES ARTS

COMITE INTERACADEMIQUE DE BALKANOLOGIE
DU CONSEIL DES ACADEMIES DES SCIENCES ET DES ARTS
DE LA R.S.F.Y.

INSTITUT DES ETUDES BALKANIQUES

BALCANICA

ANNUAIRE DE L'INSTITUT DES ETUDES BALKANIQUES

XIII - XIV

RECUEIL DES TRAVAUX A L'HOMMAGE
DU PROFESSEUR RADOVAN SAMARDŽIĆ,
MEMBRE CORRESPONDANT DE L'ACADEMIE SERBE
DES SCIENCES ET DES ARTS, A L'OCCASION
DE SON SOIXANTIEME ANNIVERSAIRE

BELGRADE 1982—1983.



DIMITRIJE DJORDJEVIC
 University of California
 Santa Barbara

AGRARIAN REFORMS IN POST WORLD WAR ONE BALKANS
 — A COMPARATIVE STUDY —

In the Balkans the end of World War I brought about the application of two revolutionary principles: self-determination of peoples and radical redistribution of land. The first shaped the new political map of South-Eastern Europe. The second aimed to return the land to those who tilled it. These accomplishments resulted from the war, and were stamped by historical legacy. They both influenced after the war, in a positive and negative way, the issues taken in the national and agrarian questions.

The war heritage was tragic for all Balkan countries, both the victors and the defeated. Serbia suffered a loss of one-fourth of her population, which accounted for two and a half times casualties that France suffered in the war.¹ Rumania suffered some 800,000 casualties and two thirds of her fertile land were exploited by the enemy.² Greece continued fighting after the war's conclusion until 1923. The tragic result was the unsuccessful campaign in Asia Minor. Bulgaria lost some 100,000 soldiers and had 300,000 wounded.³ Albania was invaded by all the belligerent parties in World War I. The Balkan battle-field was exposed to the looting by invading armies, loss of manpower, and economic and financial collapse.⁴

¹ J. Lampe, *Unifying the Yugoslav Economy 1918—1921: Misery and Early Misunderstanding*, D. Djordjević ed., *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914—1918*, Santa Barbara — Oxford 1990, 139—152; Srpski Centralni Komitet, *Srbija po imovnom pogledu pre, za vreme i posle svetskog rata*, Geneva 1918.

² D. Mitrany, *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania, The War and the Agrarian Reform 1917—21*, New York 2nd ed., 1968, 308.

³ J. D. Bell, *Peasants in Power, Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian National Union 1899—1923*, Princeton 1977, 122—123.

⁴ D. A. Dana, *Agriculture in Eastern Europe*, Quarterly Journal of Economics XXXVI, 1922, 122. For the general consequences of the war see: D. Mitrany, *The Effects of the War in South Eastern Europe*, New Haven 1936.

The establishment of new frontiers caused a massive resettlement of population. During and after the 1912—13 Balkan wars some 280,000 people crossed the new borders. The process continued throughout the 1914—18 war when some 400,000 people left their homes. Finally, after the Lausanne Peace Treaty 1,000,000 Greeks from Asia Minor flooded the Greek mainland and 400,000 Turks left for Turkey. It is estimated that during a single decade some 2.5 million people, or about 4% of the total Balkan population, was shifted to new surroundings.⁵ The war itself had multiple effects on peasantry. The peasants made up the bulk of Balkan armies and carried the main burden of the war. The killing and suffering radicalized the peasant masses. Slogans from the victorious October Revolution in Russia, promising the land to the soil-tiller echoed among the Balkan peasantry.⁶ The dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy created a power vacuum in central Europe and the disappearance of the State establishment stimulated the revolutionary atmosphere of bitterness and disillusionment.

The unsettled situation frightened the governments of Balkan States. The only way to confront the situation was to introduce agrarian reforms and satisfy peasant thirst for land. The limitation of private property was already imposed by the needs of the war industry and the army's expropriation of food supplies. Extolled as a hero during the war, the peasant asked for his reward, especially those who were volunteers.

The settlement of refugees imposed a redistribution of land. The reform was facilitated by the fact that a good part of the estates in the former Habsburg and Ottoman States belonged to foreign aristocracy. Political incentives prevailed over the economic ones — a factor which had to determine to a large extent the issue of the Balkan agrarian question.

Besides the direct consequences of the war, the historical legacy was expressed in the variety of agrarian systems and characteristics of land tenure in the Balkans. This imposed the need to obtain a uniform system in new national states, but complicated practical issues by regional differences. In this regard, three large zones can be distinguished. In Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria prevailed a small and middle sized peasant land ownership which resulted from the successful national and agrarian revolutions in the nineteenth century. In the former Habsburg Monarchy (with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as in Bessarabia and the Old Rumanian Kingdom, a dichotomy of land ownership existed

⁵ L. Stavrianos. *The Balkans 1453*, Dryden Press Hinsdale Illinois 1958, 590. See also: J. Cambel — P. Sherard, *Modern Greece*, London 1968, 138—144; J. A. Lusacs. *The Great Powers and the Eastern question*, New York 1953, 32—33; Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact on Greece*, Paris and Hague 1962.

⁶ F. Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra u jugoslovenskim krajevima*, Zagreb 1957; B. Hrabak, *Oktobarska revolucija i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, Pregled 11—12, Sarajevo 1967, 419—438.

with the large land estate prevailing. Finally, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the Southern Balkans (southern Albania, northern Epyrus, Thessaly, Macedonia and Thrace) the old Ottoman feudal system still survived. The Church and the State owned a good portion of land in Greece.

Different structures of land tenure determined the scope and issues of agrarian reforms. In Serbia, where the average property per household was 3.7 ha and where the larger estates made only 0.02% of the land (in 1905), no agrarian reform was necessary.⁷ However, this fact facilitated the ability of the Serbian dominated governments to approach the agrarian reform in other parts of the newly formed State, especially when directed against the foreign German, Hungarian and Moslem landlords. A similar situation existed in Bulgaria after the 1879 agrarian upheaval. During the following decades until 1914 a dichotomy in land tenure appeared. Although the small peasant lot (0.5—15 ha) still made 95% of total holdings or 74.8% of the land, some 618 Bulgarian landowners with properties over 100 hectares possessed 4% of the total arable land.⁸ Insignificant by Western standards, this emerging dichotomy aggravated the revolutionary atmosphere created by the war defeat and the loss of fertile lands in Dobrudja, which were assigned to Rumania.

A completely different picture was presented by the land structure of the former Habsburg Monarchy. The old order was incompatible with national emancipation. A flagrant dichotomy existed between the latifundia and the pauperized peasantry.⁹

In Carniola 332 farms over 100 ha covered one-fourth of all pastures and almost a third of all forests.¹⁰ In Croatia proper and Slavonia the estates over 500 ha possessed 22.5% of the total arable land. Small peasant lots (from 1—5 ha), which made 31% of all holdings, participated only with 7% in the ownership of the total arable land.¹¹ In Vojvodina the dichotomy was even larger. In southern Hungary owners of small lots (up to 2.6 ha) possessed 5.85% of land, while 3,768 latifundia (or 0.16% of all farms) had 32.3% of the land.¹² In Dalmatia the *kolonat* survived the 1848 abolishment of feudal relations.¹³ In 1910 there were still more than 10,000 *begs*

⁷ M. Mirković, *The Land Question in Yugoslavia*, The Slavonic and East European Review XIV, London 1935—6, 393.

⁸ J. Bell, *op. cit.*, 13, 69.

⁹ I. L. Evans, *Agrarian Reform in the Danubian Countries*, Slavonic Review VII, London 1928—1929, 604.

¹⁰ J. Tomashevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*. Stanford 1955, 208.

¹¹ D. Djordjevic, *Die Serben, Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848—1918. Die Volker des Reiches*, III/1, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1980, 754. — Some 8,42% of large farms controlled 27,6% of the total land.

¹² Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 205.

¹³ A. Suppan, *Die Croaten, Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848—1918*, III/1 671. — At the beginning of the century 42,5% of the total land was under the *kolonat* system.

and *agas* in Bosnia and Hercegovina, with 444,832 serfs and tenants, of whom 333,714 were Serbs.¹⁴

A very similar situation existed in Rumania in 1918. In the province of Bukovina holdings over 2000 ha occupied 30.2% of the entire land and belonged to 63 persons. In the meantime 180,677 small owners (holdings under 5 ha) possessed 18.06% of the entire land.¹⁵ Large land estates prevailed in Transylvania also. Some 55% of Rumanian peasants, with holdings up to 10 ha, faced a situation in which the Magyar estates predominated.¹⁶ In the former Russian province of Bessarabia, the 1906 Stolypin agrarian reform left 43% of land in large estates and 8.2% in the hands of the Church and the State.¹⁷ In the Old Rumanian Kingdom, the domestic aristocracy, with estates over 100 ha covered 48.62% of the total arable land.¹⁸

In the south of the Balkans the remnants of Ottoman rule were still present. At the beginning of the century land in Macedonia was owned by Turkish and Albanian lords. Peasant dues amounted to 22.5% of total earnings.¹⁹ When Greece obtained Thessaly in 1881 most of this land passed to wealthy Greeks from Constantinople, Smyrna and Alexandria. Although peasant ownership was extending, the large estate survived in Northern Greece, where it occupied half of the total territory. Among 2,259 large estates, 818 were located in Macedonia, 584 in Thessaly, 410 in Epyrus, 84 in Western Greece and 363 in the old Greek territory. A similar situation existed in Southern Albania. As a contrast and an addition to the mosaic of land tenure, small farms up to 7 stremmas prevailed in Southern Greece.²⁰

With the exception of the Old Rumanian Kingdom, large estates in the Balkans belonged to foreign Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian aristocracy. Thirteen families of counts and barons in Croatia and Slavonia owned thirty estates over 10,000 joch, or 8% of the total land.²¹ Only 209 Rumanians were among 8,435 proprietors of large estates on territories joined to the Old Kingdom in 1918.

Official statistics may sound dull and dry, but they express the hard and frugal conditions under which the Balkan peasant lived. Burdened with overpopulation, hampered with low productivity

¹⁴ Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 208; Suppan, *op. cit.*, 666 — From 1907—1909. 56,000 complaints were submitted by the *begs* against peasants who avoided payments of their dues — D. Djordjevic, *Die Serben*, 765.

¹⁵ K. Hitchins, *Die Rumänen, Die Habsburger Monarchie*. III/1, 619.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 608.

¹⁷ D. Mátrany, *op. cit.* 201.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁹ *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, Institut za nacionalna istorija II, Skopje 1969. 148—152.

²⁰ L. Stavrianos, *op. cit.*, 478. See also: G. Servakis and C. Pertounzi, *The Agricultural Policy in Greece*, in: O. S. Morgan, *Agricultural Systems of Middle Europe*, New York 1969, 2nd ed., 148—152.

²¹ A. Suppan, *Die Croaten*, 870.— Among them were Graf Karlo Eltz, Graf Heinrich Khuen and Baron Gustav Prandau.

caused by the limited capacity of the small holding, pressured by the aristocratic landowners, the Balkan peasant was poor, ignorant and primitive. The assumption that the Balkans was the grain basket of Central Europe was incorrect. The emphasis on agricultural exports resulted not from wealth, but poverty. It cut deeply into peasant living standards. Such phenomena can be found today in the non-developed countries of the Third World.

Agrarian reforms already were promised during the war. On February 20, 1917 the Serbian government made the formal promise to all volunteers joining the army, to supply each of them with 5 ha of land after the end of the hostilities. The peasants in Habsburg territories started occupying land and estates during the last days of the Monarchy. On November 14, 1918 the National Council in Zagreb published a message promising enough land to every family in the new Yugoslav State. Two days later all feudal bondages and privileges were abolished. On January 6, 1919 the regent Alexander issued a Manifesto proclaiming the intention to »immediately begin with a just solution of the agrarian question«. The land was to be »distributed among poor peasants« in order that »every Serb, Croat and Slovene would become full owner of his land«. The reform was finally introduced by the Interim Decree on the Preparation of the Agrarian Reform, which was made public on February 25, 1919. The wording of the Decree was radical and expressed the principle »the land belongs to those who till it«. Serfdom was abolished, and former serfs proclaimed owners of the land they worked (Art. 1—2). Large estates were expropriated and subjected to distribution (Art. 9). The Decree promised indemnity to owners except to those who were members of the Habsburg dynasty or obtained land through services rendered to the Habsburgs (Art. 12). Large forests became State property (Art. 17).²² Decrees issued between 1920 and 1930, further elaborated details in the implementation of the reform.²³

²² The Decree failed to define exactly the large estate, J. Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 344—347. See also: N. Stoykovich, *The Economic Position and Future Agriculture in Yugoslavia* in: O. S. Morgan. *op. cit.*, 361.

²³ The agrarian reform in Yugoslavia was thoroughly studied in domestic and foreign historiography. See: J. Tomashevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*, 344—382; J. Matl, *Die Agrarreform in Jugoslawien*, Berlin 1927; O. von Frangsch, *Die sozialökonomische Struktur der jugoslawischen Wirtschaft*, Berlin 1937; M. Erić, *Agrarna reforma u Jugoslaviji 1918—1941*, Sarajevo 1958; N. Gačeša, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Bačkoj 1918—1941*, Novi Sad 1969; Idem, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Banatu 1919—1941*, Novi Sad 1972; Idem, *Položaj vojvodanskih Rumuna u agrarnoj reformi i kolonizaciji između dva svetska rata*, Savremeno obrazovanje 3, 1970, 108—129. M. Gaković, *Riješavanje agrarnog pitanja u Bosni i Hercegovini 1918—1941*, Prilozi 6. Sarajevo 1970, 9—117; O. Jakša, *Agrarna reforma u Sloveniji med obema vojnama*, *Zgodovinski časopis* 18, 1965, 173—189.

The proclamation the Rumanian King made to peasants in April 1917 was more cautious in wording. It read: »Sons of peasants... you have earned the right of being masters in a large measure (underlined D. Dj.) of the soil upon which you fought«, and »the land will be given to you«. ²⁴ The caution resulted from a specific situation in Rumania. Serbian political parties favored the small peasant property existing in pre-war Serbia and, except for some political bargaining with the Moslems in the Constituent Assembly, were capitalizing on the agrarian issue, without having to sacrifice much. ²⁵ The Rumanian agrarian reform, directed against domestic landlords also, was the result of a bargain between the Conservatives and the Liberals. The Conservatives, who represented the interests of landed aristocracy, accepted the reform as an inevitable concession to the revolutionary pressure. For the Liberals, who represented interests of industrialists, business men and small gentry, the reform aimed to challenge the Conservatives and to procure the manpower for the nascent industry. ²⁶ The land question became an issue in the process of unification: the peasant in Bessarabia was reluctant to join the large estates in the Old Kingdom. The bargain between the Conservatives and Liberals in 1917 dealt with the amount of land to be expropriated from the estates: the Liberals asked for 2.5 million hectares, the Conservatives considered 1.8 million hectares enough. Finally, the compromise was set on 2 million hectares. The expropriation was to be applied along a »progressive scale« and compensation to the owners was left to the legislators. ²⁷ The collapse of the Rumanian front annulled these decisions. They were revived at the end of the war, due to the pressures of revolutionary movements. In Bessarabia two-thirds of large estates were already appropriated by the peasantry during the Fall and Winter of 1917. An ad hoc revolutionary committee in Bessarabia passed the Agrarian Law, in November 1918, which was later confirmed in December. In Transylvania, the National Assembly of all Rumanians, summoned in Alba Julia on December 1, 1918 expropriated all large estates and proclaimed the land distribution to peasants. Only in Bukowina the situation was calmer and settled through the parliament after the war. ²⁸ On November 12, 1918 King Ferdinand accepted the fait accomplis and reaffirmed his promise given in 1917, to expropriate 2 million hectares of private land, and the land which belonged to the State, Church and various institutions. Due to differences in timing and ap-

²⁴ D. Mitrany, *op. cit.*, 101.

²⁵ See also the critical approach in T. Milenković, *Stav radikalne stranke prema agrarnoj reformi 1918—1929*, Istorija XX veka, 9, Beograd 1970, 9—120.

²⁶ D. Mitrany, *op. cit.*, 95—96, 121, 332—3. See also H. S. Watson, *The Rumanian Peasantry*, The Fortnightly CLII, 1939, 330—336.

²⁷ Mitrany, *op. cit.*, 102—107.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 164—182.

plication, the Rumanian reform was not uniform for the entire country and obtained specific features in each of her parts.²⁹

The situation in post-war Bulgaria was different. The country defeated in the war was embittered and disillusioned. It had to deal with some 450,000 refugees coming from Greece and Yugoslavia and to accept the unfavorable terms of the Neuilly peace treaty. However, the country had a uniform agrarian system established after 1879 and the reform had to face a redistribution of land, rather than a radical seizure of the land estate. While the reform in other Balkan countries was introduced by middle class parties, Bulgaria was the only one in which the Agrarians themselves initiated and introduced the reform, after the amazing Stamboliski victory in 1919.³⁰ In general, the Agrarians had a specific approach to land tenure. While the middle class parties were compromising with the land as a source of rent, the Agrarians, as Michalache put it in Rumania in 1920, were looking at the land »as a means of employing labor«. The philosophy of Stamboliski's Agrarians was that the land, distributed to the soil tiller, had to become »labor ownership«. It meant direct exploitation of land, agrarian cooperation, compulsory labor service and peasant education. These principles were presented and discussed at the XVth Agrarian Congress in June 1919. The draft legislation was approved on February 17, 1920. The April 1921 Law for Labor Property provided new sources for land distribution.³¹ The entire program demonstrated a fascinating mixture of agrarian ideology, social needs and political tactics.

The agrarian reform was already discussed in Greece before the war. The 1911 Constitution envisaged the expropriation of estates in favor of landless peasantry. However, the Greek reform had to go through three stages caused by the dramatic events between

²⁹ About the agrarian reform in Rumania see: D. Mitrany, *The Land and Peasant in Rumania*; Idem, *The Effects of the War in Southeast Europe*; Idem, *Marx Against the Peasant*, New York 1961; Basilescu N., *La réforme agraire en Roumanie*, Paris 1919; I. L. Evans, *The Agrarian Revolution in Rumania*, Cambridge 1924; H. Frederick, *The Economic Problem of the Danubian State. A Study in Economic Nationalism*, London 1947; Zagoroff et al., *The agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries 1935—1945*, Stanford 1955.

³⁰ The approach of the communist parties to the agrarian reform requires a special study and is not studied in this paper.

³¹ J. Bell, *Peasants in Power*; N. G. Levinton, *Agrarnye otnosheniya Bolgarii nakanune osvobodzheniia i agrarnii perevorot 1877—1879 godov, Osvobodbenie Bolgarii ot tureckotogo iga, Sbornik Statei*, Moskva 1953; *Istoria na Bulgarii*, II, Sofia 1955; Bouroff M. Tz., *La réforme agraire en Bulgarie (1921—1924)*, Paris 1924; R. Daskalov, *Borba za zemja*, Sofija 1923; Y. G. Koratcheff, *Agrarian Reform in Bulgaria*, *International Review of Agriculture*, XXV, 1934, 441—472; A. Velez, *Agrarnia reforma pravitel'stva Zemledelcheskogo sojuza. Actes du Congrès international des études balkaniques et du sud-est européen* V. Athens 1970, 115—125. The general elections held in Bulgaria in August 1919 gave to the Agrarians 85, to the Socialists 40 and to the Communists 47 seats in the Parliament — T. Tchischovsky, *Political Aspects of Bulgaria*, *The Slavonic and East European Review* VII, London 1928—9, 285.

1917 and 1923.³² In May 1917 the revolutionary government which, under Venizelos, rebelled in Northern Greece, published the first decree of land reform in Greek Macedonia and Epyrus. By the end of 1917 and the victory of Venizelos over King Constantine the reform was extended to the rest of the country. Both State and Church land were subject to expropriation. If this land would not satisfy the needs, private estates over 350—500 stremmas (44—63 ha approx.) were to be expropriated. However, the owners of estates of 50—200 ha directly involved in the cultivation of land were exempted. The 1927 Constitution established a five year dead-line for the accomplishment of the reform. Suddenly, and in the middle of the reform process, the refugees from Asia Minor entered the scene and posed the problem of additional land to be expropriated. The demand caused the radicalization of the reform and enlarged its scope.³³

Once proclaimed the agrarian reforms in Balkan countries were put in motion.

In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes two widely different situations existed in the Northwestern and Southern parts of the country. Bosnia and Hercegovina, in the middle of both, was the easiest area to deal with. Besides its economic aspect, the reform had a national one. Most of the serfs were of Serbian origin. Feudal relations, expressed in land rented to peasants (*beglik*) or small farms held by serfs (*agalik*) were instantly abolished and the land returned for free to former tenants. At the beginning it was transferred to peasant families (*zadruga*), later given to individual holders with a protected minimum homestead. All this process was fast and efficient. The reform affected some 4000 Moslem *begs*, and *agas*. The beneficiaries were to be found among 113,000 households of former serfs who obtained 775,233 ha of land, of which 566,076 ha were under cultivation. Joined to them were the additional 54,728 households of former tenants (*beglučari*). The amount of 400,072 ha of land offered to them is not quite correct, as they were often counted twice, mixed with the first group.³⁴ Some 13,806 families of war

³² For the Greek agrarian reform see: G. Servakis and C. Pertounzi, *The Agricultural Policy in Greece*, in: O. S. Morgan ed., *Agricultural Systems of Middle Europe*, New York 1969, 2nd ed. 137—200. K. Dukas, *Agrarian Reform in Greece*. The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, V. 1, Oct. 1945—6. New York 1960, 79—92. M. Nicos, *Greek and Bulgarian Peasants: Aspect of the Sociopolitical Situation During the Interwar period*, Comparative Studies in Society and History XVIII/1, 1976, 85—105. P. P. Yves, *Modalité et enseignements de la réforme agraire en Grèce*, Revue française d'études politiques méditerranéennes, 7—8, July-August 1975, 47—64.

³³ G. Servakis and C. Pertounzi, *op. cit.* 149. See also Dukas, *op. cit.* 88.

³⁴ J. Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 355.

veterans were also settled on government property. In the South, in Sandžak, Kosovo and Macedonia the situations was complex. While a good number of Turkish lords had already left their lands, the property records were chaotic. The government planned the colonization of war veterans. The February 25, 1919 Decree abolished feudal relations, but the reform dragged on until the early 1930s. At that time 20,457 former *čifčije* families were proclaimed owners of 125,550 ha of land. By the end of 1936 some 350,000 ha were earmarked for colonization. It may be said that in Macedonia finally some 50,000 local families and colonists acquired approximately 290,000 ha of land from 4,700 Turkish landlords and the State property.³⁵

A more difficult settlement presented itself in »northern areas« where the largeness of the estates imposed problems of size and portions to be expropriated, indemnity to be paid to former owners, and the distribution of land to various categories of claimants. The February 1920 Decree put all large estates under State supervision. Some of them were temporarily sequestrated, belonging to foreign aristocracy. However, the landlords were not ready to surrender and opposed the reform as they did in Czechoslovakia and Rumania. They placed their claims on the International Courts.³⁶ The reform had also to affect lands belonging to churches, monasteries, municipalities and private institutions. The size of the estate to be exempted from expropriation was finally determined only in 1931. It varied in different regions: in Dalmatia from 87—174 cadastral yokes, (43—87 ha aproxim.), in Vojvodina and Srem from 521—869 yokes, (261—435 ha aprox.), depending on the quality of land. A supermaximum was allowed to owners of land serving public purposes, for animal-breeding stations, fish farms, grapevine nurseries, etc. Statistics vary concerning the final figure of expropriated land and beneficiaries. It is generally estimated that in Vojvodina, Croatia-Slavonia and Slovenia some 250,000 households, mostly local, but also with colonists settled from other parts, obtained roughly 500,000 ha of land until 1935, at the expense of some 700 large estate owners, among whom 369 were private persons.³⁷ The colonate was abolished in Dalmatia where approximately 97,000 households obtained somewhat more than 53,000 ha of land. The total balance sheet of the agrarian reform in Yugoslavia, in spite of some statistical differences, shows a figure of some 500,000 peasant households as beneficiaries of 2.5 million of hectares of land. Land was obtained from

³⁵ Ibid., 359—361, 368.

³⁶ See: Daškovići N., *La réforme agraire en Roumanie et les optants hongrois de Transylvanie devant la Société des nations*, Paris 1924; A. de Lapradelle, *Causes célèbres du droit des gens. La réforme agraire Yugoslave devant la justice internationale*, Paris 1930. — Among 369 expropriated owners of large estates in Yugoslavia there were 126 Hungarians, 142 Austrians, 10 Italians, 8 Czechs, 4 Rumanians, 3 Germans and 17 others. Tomashevich, 366.

³⁷ J. Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 364—6, 368.

10,000—12,000 landlords and various institutional landowners.³⁸ It means that approximately one out of every four peasant families received land.

The Rumanian situation was similar to that in northwestern parts of Yugoslavia. The reform had to go through two land expropriations, the first being short for 450,000 ha from the established target of 2 million hectares to be expropriated from private property in the Old Kingdom. The four laws which applied the reform in each Rumanian province differed: they were more moderate in the Old Kingdom and Bucovina, more radical and expedient in Bessarabia and Transylvania.³⁹ In the Old Kingdom, the minimum which could not be expropriated was 100 ha, but the progressive scale was applied by adding vineyards, plantations, etc., which left estates with 500 ha and more to survive. In Bucovina everything over 250 ha was expropriated, in Bessarabia the limit was placed on 100 ha. In Transylvania, all lands belonging to foreigners were expropriated in full, and a maximum was fixed on 200 jugars.⁴⁰ When the first expropriation missed the expected 2 million hectares, the second expropriation in 1921 made the balance by defining exactly the 500 ha to be exempted in the Old Kingdom. This maximum was now allowed to the individual owner, not to the parts of his estates located in various areas of the country. As the result of the agrarian reform in the Old Kingdom, until September 1927, 2 million hectares were distributed to 630,000 peasants; in Transylvania 310,000 peasants obtained 451,000 ha; in Bucovina, 42,800 ha were distributed among 71,200 peasants and in Bessarabia 357,000 peasants were settled on 1 million hectares of land. In spite of deficiencies, the results were impressive: 1.3 million persons obtained 3.6 million hectares of land. The structure of Rumanian land property was drastically changed. Properties up to 100 ha in all Rumanian provinces before the reform made 57% to 63.0% (and 78% in Bucovina) of all the properties. After the reform their percentage was raised to 91—92%.⁴¹

The land reform in Greece started with the expropriation of 53,700 ha of State land and 48,000 ha of land belonging to the Church. The influx of refugees from Asia Minor dramatically imposed on the revision of expropriation. New additional land had to be found in the land vacated by the departing Turks and new expropriations of Church and private estates were imposed. In 1931, some 1,142,000 ha had been accumulated for colonization. The refugees were divided into two categories, of peasant and urban background. Approxi-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 356, 368. See also: *Yugoslavie par les chiffres*, Ed. Central Press Bureau, Belgrade 1937.

³⁹ D. Mitrany, *Land and Peasant*, 122—123.

⁴⁰ D. Mitrany, *op. cit.* 124—128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 220—221. See also D. C. Giurescu, *Illustrated History of Rumanian People*, Bukuresti 1981, 486.

mately 538,048 peasants were given 839,000 ha of land: 592,000 ha from vacated Turkish and Bulgarian holdings; 53,600 ha from the State land; 48,138 ha from the land belonging to the Church, and 145,136 ha from private estates. The refugees were settled in small rural colonies in Macedonia (1954), Thrace (574) and other districts (373). The State provided to the newcomers 144,000 houses; the rest of 63,800 houses were taken from Turkish and Bulgarian emigrants.⁴² The rest of refugees were settled in the outskirts of Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki. Their problem was not completely settled until the outbreak of World War II. At that time some 30,000 families still lived in barracks and shanties.⁴³ The extent of the reform in Greece is expressed in the fact that the expropriated land made 38% of the country's total arable land.

Less dramatic changes in the structure of land tenure occurred in Bulgaria where the large estates were already limited in number and scope. The maximum of land holding was limited to 30 ha of arable land and 30—50 ha of pastures or forests. The land held by absentee owners was confiscated. The 1921 Law found additional land for distribution in estates held by monasteries and banks. The Agrarian government expected to reach the target of 230,000 ha but attained only the amount of 82,000 ha, until June 1923, when it was overthrown. The land expropriated from private owners participated in round figures with 49,000 ha, village governments gave up 20,000 ha, banks lost 8,200 and monasteries 2,300 ha. Some 110,000 peasant households among dwarfowners and rural laborers applied for land. Of them 94,000 were settled until June 1923 and the end of Stamboliski's rule.⁴⁴

In the remaining Balkan country, Albania, the agrarian reform was never practically introduced. Trying to solve the precarious land situation in the South where Moslem landlords dominated Christian serfs, the Fan Noli government issued in June 1924 a program of reforms. It aimed to uproot feudal relations and ameliorate the conditions of peasants. But the government survived in office only five months and was opposed by both the *begs* and disappointed peasants. Later, on April 17, 1930 Ahmed Zogu proclaimed the Agrarian Reform Law which envisaged the expropriation of one-third of feudal estates. Corruption, cheating and lack of property records impeded the reform: the *begs* preserved the best land for themselves and 40% of Albanian peasants were left without land at all.⁴⁵

The application of agrarian reforms was extended throughout the inter-war period. The length of the process was due to bureauc-

⁴² Servakis and Pertounzi, *op. cit.*, 49—151.

⁴³ J. Cambel — P. Gerard, *Modern Greece*, London 1968, 138—144, L. Stavrianos, *op. cit.* 676.

⁴⁴ J. Bell, *Peasants in Power*, 166—167.

⁴⁵ Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 716, 724, 727. See also: A. Logoreci, *The Albanians*, Boulder Colorado, 1978.

ratic mechanisms, inefficiency of State authorities, political compromises and resistance of landowners who appealed to international courts. An avalanche of laws, decrees and regulations could but complicate the process. The depression which hit Southeastern Europe in the early thirties played an important role in aggravating the agrarian issue.

The implementation of the reform in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was given to a specially organized Ministry for the Agrarian Reform which acted through executive district directorships and their local representatives.⁴⁶ In Rumania the overall control was given to the Ministry of Agriculture. While the reform was carried out in the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia through a number of commissions which acted as State institutions, in Bucovina and Transylvania it was assigned to two banks: the Regional Bank of Černauti and the Agrarian Bank of Cluj.⁴⁷ To assist the new settlers a Central Resettlement Office was organized. In Greece, the reform was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture to which was joined a Council of Colonization and later The Office for the Settlement of the Refugees. In Bulgaria a Directorate of Labor Property and Land was established, as a department of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The expropriation of millions of hectares was an expensive undertaking which imposed a heavy burden on both the shaky post-war finances of Balkan States and the impoverished peasantry. However, the financial consequences were reduced by a number of factors. The former landlords did not obtain the real value of the land. A good portion of land was simply confiscated from foreign aristocracy and absentee owners. The compensation was partially made in State bonds payable for 30 to 50 years, which value deteriorated with the depreciation of money. The outbreak of World War II put an end to payments.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the former serf obtained the land without any charges. The government paid the former Turkish lords 125 million dinars in cash and 635 million dinars in State bonds. In Dalmatia the former *kolon* obtained the land for free, the other beneficiaries shared the expenses with the State, which issued bonds in a value estimated to be 400 million dinars. The same way the *čifčije* in Macedonia were exempted of payment. The government offered to landlords 300 million in 30-year State bonds and a special fund of 100 million dinars was established with the State Mortgage Bank. In the northwestern parts of the country the landlord had a choice either to accept State bonds or an annual cash payment paid by the beneficiary directly over a period of 20 years. In both cases the land of the beneficiary was mortgaged for the amount of the indemnity.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ M. Kosić, *Agrarna reforma*, Enciklopedija Stanoja Stanojevića, Zagreb 1924, I, 9—10.

⁴⁷ D. Mitrany, *Land and Peasant*, 132—133.

⁴⁸ J. Tomashevich, *op. cit.*, 353, 357, 359, 565—6.

In Rumania the total value of the expropriated land was estimated to be about 17 million lei. This value was reduced to approximately 10.8 to 12 billion lei. Until 1929 the State issued bonds in the amount of 7 billion lei. The peasant beneficiaries of the reform were debited for 4 billion lei.⁴⁹ In Greece the value of land subject to expropriation was estimated to be 5.5 million pounds. The indemnity paid to the proprietors amounted to 790 million drachmas of which the State took over 216 million. The rest of 573 million drachmas was charged on peasant cooperatives organized for collective payment. Two big international loans, totalling 13 million pounds helped Greece to settle the refugee problem.⁵⁰

In Bulgaria the compensation was paid on a sliding scale. The Government remunerated in full the first expropriated 10 hectares, paid 90% for the next 20 hectares, 80% for the following 20 hectares, up to 50% for each hectare over 200.⁵¹

The balance sheet of agrarian reforms was impressive. More than 9,8 million hectares were distributed. This constituted in Rumania 21% of the total arable land, in Greece 38%, in Bulgaria 6%. It is difficult to establish the exact number of beneficiaries as some statistics count households, some individual peasants. However, it would be safe to say that approximately 2.6 to 3 million peasants profited from the reform. In Yugoslavia one of every four peasant families obtained land. According to some authors »it was the most radical and democratic measure undertaken in Eastern Europe« which »transformed within a brief period of time the property structure of the rural society.«⁵² However, according to other analysts of the agrarian question, the reforms taken all together did not promise much hope for improvement.⁵³

In evaluating the results of agrarian reforms one has to approach their social, economic and political aspects. They are both positive and negative.

There is no doubt that the final abolishment of feudal relations still present in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia and the southern parts of the Peninsula made a significant improvement to the former serf, *kolon* and *čifčija*. The same applies to the, although incomplete, abolishment of large land estates most of which were in possession of foreigners, and the redistribution of their land among landless peasantry. The reform also compensated the war veterans

⁴⁹ Mitrany, *op. cit.* 418—420.

⁵⁰ Servakis, *op. cit.*, 150—151.

⁵¹ J. Bell, *op. cit.*, 165.

⁵² H. S. Watson, *The Rumanian Peasantry*, The Fortnightly, July-Dec. Vol. CXLVI, London 1939, 330.

⁵³ See S. D. Thapur, *Yugoslav Agricultural System*, Eastern Economist

and volunteers who shed blood for the liberation of their respective countries. The land distribution was also used to strengthen the national element in the newly acquired provinces. »We regard the agrarian reform as the most potent instrument in the Rumanization of Transylvania«, was said in the Bucharest parliament.⁵⁴ The same did the Greeks with refugee settlements in Aegean Macedonia, the Bulgarians in Pirin Macedonia and the Serbs in Vojvodina, Kosovo and Macedonia. The distribution of land appeased for a moment the revolutionary movements of the peasant, which was one of the main tasks assigned to the reform by the ruling classes in Balkan states. Combined with the universal male suffrage, introduced for the first time in the former Hungarian provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy, the peasantry became a factor in domestic politics. One could not explain the fascinating, although temporary, success of Michalache and Maniu in Rumania, Stamboliski in Bulgaria and Radić in Croatia without turning to the influence of the agrarian reforms. However, with the exception of the Croatian Peasant Party, which joined the national to the agrarian issue, the success of Balkan Agrarian parties was of short duration. The bureaucratic and military establishments of the Balkan States proved to be efficient in confronting peasant movements. The agrarian leaders, mostly recruited among urban intelligentsia, lived in illusion of peasant cohesiveness.

The critics of the reforms point to the extension of dwarf peasant holdings: the economically more competitive estate was atomized into small and non-productive units. In 1931 the average holding in Yugoslavia was 4.2 ha of arable land and 8.5 ha of cultivated land.⁵⁵ In Rumania in 1930 the property up to 5 ha made 74.9% of all properties.⁵⁶ In Greece in 1929 66% of all holdings had less than three hectares.⁵⁷ The maximum land property in Bulgaria was limited to 30 hectares. However, the critics do not deal with the realities of the situation. Two main factors influenced the issues of agrarian reforms. First, a tremendous village overpopulation which demanded land. Second, the lack of available land to be distributed. It is true that the small holding was traditional in the Balkans and was estimated as »the natural ideal for non-industrialized countries«.

Agrarian reforms only temporarily satisfied the peasant thirst for land. Successful in partially restructuring agricultural property, they could not solve the long-range problems of the village. Further parcelization of already small holdings took place. The expansion of arable land could not satisfy the growing population that li-

⁵¹ J. Bell, *op. cit.*, 165.
May 29, 1964, 1248.

⁵⁴ D. Mitrany, *op. cit.*, 181.

⁵⁵ M. Mirković, *The Land Question*, 394.

⁵⁶ H. S. Watson, *op. cit.*, 331.

⁵⁷ See Doukas, *Agrarian Reform in Greece*, 89—90. Also G. Servakis and C. Partounzi, *The Agricultural Policy in Greece*, 152.

ved off of agriculture.⁵⁸ Some estimates count the rural overpopulation in 1930 in Yugoslavia for 61.5%, Bulgaria 53,0%, Rumania 51.4% and Greece 50.3%.⁵⁹ A vicious circle was created: from overpopulation poverty resulted; from poverty low education originated; low education prevented the application of modern agriculture; this caused non-productivity, poverty and overpopulation.

The post-war agrarian reforms were successful as an important step towards the emancipation and modernization of Balkan peasantry. Agrarian reforms had to establish the framework for the substance to follow. They broke with the old order and opened the door to improvement. However, it might be of interest to read what Oscar Jaszy wrote in 1935: »The agrarian reforms applied after World War I only delayed the coming revolution«. ⁶⁰

⁵⁸ J. Tomashevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change*, 306; I. Sanders, *The Peasant Community and the National Society in South Eastern Europe: An Interpretative Essay*, *Balkanistica*, III, 1976, 30; O. Jaszy, *The Economic Crisis in the Danubian States*, New York 1935, 103. Also: D. Durand, *Agriculture in Eastern Europe*, 172.

⁵⁹ W. E. Moore, *Economic Demography of Eastern and Southeastern Europe*, Geneva 1945, 63—4.

⁶⁰ O. Jaszy, *The Economic Crisis in the Danubian States*, 116.

