LAND GRABBING
IN ROMANIA

Fact finding mission report

grabbing farmland | speculation | forests | rural social impact

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Cover photo by Eco Ruralis
Tulcea region, Romania. 2014
Exemplification of industrial farming landscape in Romania. Dobrogea region.

© Foto: Dr. Peter Lengyel. Exemplification of industrial farming landscape in Romania. Dobrogea region.
Exemplification of peasant family farming landscape in Romania. Dobrogea region (photo left - up) and Maramureș region (photos right - up and down).
Eco Ruralis was founded in April of 2009 by small farmers from several regions of Romania. It is a grassroots association made up of small farmers who practice organic and traditional farming based on environmentally-conscious principles.

Eco Ruralis stands for farmers’ rights to practice non-industrialized sustainable agriculture. This includes the right to land, genetic resources, seeds (without genetically-modified organisms), the preservation of food sovereignty in Romania and respect for consumer health.

VISION: We envision a society that is environmentally sustainable, economically fair and socially just where peasants are the central part of our food system.

MISSION: Our mission is to support agroecology and promote small-scale family farming as the dominant, preferable method of agriculture in Romania. We will aid the capacity of peasants to collectively defend themselves against unfair and unequal actions taken by corporations and governments. We wish to actively support a movement of young farmers that will preserve traditional farming practices and assert their control over food production and land rights.

Eco Ruralis is a member of the European Coordination Via Campesina.
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ABBREVIATIONS

CAP Common Agricultural Policy
EU European Union
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization
FIAN FoodFirst Information and Action Network
GMO Genetically Modified Organisms
LSLA Large Scale Land Acquisitions
LVC La Via Campesina
NMS New Member State (of the European Union)
NRDP National Rural Development Plan
INS National Institute of Statistics of Romania
SAPARD Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
TNI Transnational Institute
UAA Utilized Agricultural Area
UN United Nations
VGLT Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest
The report „Land grabbing in Romania“ has been elaborated by Eco Ruralis, a Romanian peasant association which was founded in April 2009 in Cluj Napoca, Romania.

The word “peasant” is used in all sorts of ways to mean different things by many groups of people across the world. We support the general definition of Via Campesina according which a peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, relying above all on family labor and other small scale forms of organizing labor. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and they take care of local landscapes and of agro-ecological systems.

In the „Land Rights Campaign“ Eco Ruralis exposes the impact of land grabbing in Romania regarding large-scale land investments through documentation and analysis. This work contributes to awareness rising about this problem across the entire society.

First of all, we aim to disseminate the information to our members – Romanian peasants – and strengthen their capacity to defend themselves against unjust land deals. Secondly, Eco Ruralis calls upon all citizens and media representatives to stand up for for traditional and agroecological practices and peasant farming. Last but not least the association demands from the Romanian political leaders to take responsibility for implementation of appropriate policies regarding peasant family farming.

At the beginning of the report you will find an introduction to the issue of land grabbing (Chapter 1), what are the conditions under which land grabbing occurs in Romania and who is actually involved in this process (Chapter 2). The following part points out the impacts of land grabbing in Romania; socio-economic, socio-cultural, political as well as environmental aspects are listed there (Chapter 3). An important part of the report is capped by Chapter 4 which presents four factsheets on land grabbing and two factsheets on forest grabbing in Romania. At the end of the report, Eco Ruralis suggests ways the issue of land grabbing should be dealt with and outlines concrete policy recommendations (Chapter 5). Concluding remarks are included in Chapter 6.

With this report we aim to draw attention on increasing land concentration in Romania and hope to mobilize a stronger critical voice against it!
1. Introduction. What is land grabbing?

The term “land grabbing” is generally used to describe the purchasing or leasing of large extensions of land, both from public and private owners. Transferring large portions of land from local communities to corporate interests, land grabbing is becoming a global danger. It threatens the existence of the affected communities and the environment in general. Food sovereignty itself and biodiversity are at risk through the enforcing of intensive agriculture (which establishes monocultures fed with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides), uncontrolled deforestation, and land “artificialisation”[1], for instance; all common practices within Large Scale Land Acquisitions (LSLAs).

Nowadays, global land grabbing involves millions of hectares, the equivalent of a surface as large as Spain; and continues to spread without control. The phenomenon can be witnessed all over the world, especially in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania. Many times it is being conducted using national and international legal and policy loopholes, rather than being considered an illegal or illegitimate practice.

However, this matter should not be underestimated in Europe, either. The report published by the Transnational Institute in 2013 [2] highlights that land consolidation is a critical issue in most parts of Europe, especially in Eastern Europe. The investigations carried out in eleven countries demonstrate how land grabbing pushed the control of over 50% of the total agricultural surface of Europe in the hands of just 3% of land owners. Land consolidation drove many thousands of small-scale farmers out from the rural areas in Western Europe in previous decades. This ongoing process is nowadays expanding towards the New European Member States, generating similar trends in Eastern Europe, region with a strong rural representation until very recently. The future of these rural societies remain therefore uncertain.

Apart from the acquisition of an arable land, “forest grabbing” - standing for purchases or long term leases of woodland - is also an issue this report is devoted to. Forests remain crucial for their multifunctional character: beside forests’ rich biodiversity and an important role in environmental protection, forests are the basis for economic diversification in rural communities.

However, deforestation and forestland grabs related to the expansion of agriculture into forest land, aiming to satisfy global need for agricultural products and bio-fuels, have become a real threat worldwide. Illegal logging and enormous profits from wood business boost this trend especially in countries with weak governance of the land sector.

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[1] The term land “artificialisation” refers to the practice of withdrawing agriculture in agricultural lands and transforming it for other uses such as real estate investments, touristic attractions or mining, for example.

2. Land grabbing in Romania

Context

Romania has a total area of 238,000 km² and a population of 19,041 million inhabitants. According to the Romanian legislation, in 2011, rural Romania covered 87.1% of the country, comprising 47.2% of the population, meaning 8.98 million inhabitants [3]. The methodology of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for the concept of rurality lead to different figures, but also allows comparisons with other EU Member States. Thus it appears that according to OECD’s definition, 59.8% of Romania is rural, 39.4% is represented by intermediary areas and only 0.8% is urban (Eurostat 2012).

Land use. Having a utilized agricultural area of 13.3 million hectares (representing 55.8% of Romania) in 2010, Romania is one of the most significant agriculture countries in the EU.

Most of the utilized agricultural area is arable (8.3 million hectares), followed by pastures and hay fields (4.5 million hectares), permanent crops (0.3 million hectares) and family gardens (0.2 million hectares). In 2010, the size of the unused agricultural land, including units that did not meet the conditions to be considered farms / exploitations, was of 896,000 hectares, while the surface of uncultivated agricultural area (resting) was of 953,000 hectares.[4]

Transfer of land property in Romania is difficult, due to the lack of a Land Registry. The authors of this report consider that this is also an impediment for land grabbers. According to the Romanian Ministry for Agriculture, over 50% of the land is not registered in the Land Registry.[5] Land fragmentation is very high, the average size of a parcel being of 0.45 ha, while every farmer owns in average 4.8 parcels.

Number and dimension of registered agricultural exploitations in Romania (2010):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Year 2002</th>
<th>Year 2007</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total agricultural exploitations (farms)</td>
<td>4 485 000</td>
<td>3 931 000</td>
<td>3 859 000</td>
<td>Agricultural exploitations (farms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies (with juridical personality)</td>
<td>23 000</td>
<td>17 000</td>
<td>31 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People (without juridical personality)</td>
<td>4 462 000</td>
<td>3 914 000</td>
<td>3 828 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total size of agriculture land used by farms</td>
<td>15 708 000</td>
<td>15 265 000</td>
<td>15 867 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies (with juridical personality)</td>
<td>7 254 000</td>
<td>5 674 000</td>
<td>7 379 000</td>
<td>Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People (without juridical personality)</td>
<td>8 454 000</td>
<td>9 591 000</td>
<td>8 488 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total utilized agriculture area by farms</td>
<td>13 931 000</td>
<td>13 753 000</td>
<td>13 306 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies (with juridical personality)</td>
<td>6 222 000</td>
<td>4 787 000</td>
<td>5 856 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People (without juridical personality)</td>
<td>7 709 000</td>
<td>8 966 000</td>
<td>7 450 000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average utilized agriculture area / farm</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies (with juridical personality)</td>
<td>274.4</td>
<td>270.4</td>
<td>190.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People (without juridical personality)</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Land grabbing

But across the whole country, natural resources have become the object of speculation and massive investments. Regardless of the exploited resource, the land owned by Romanian peasants, who are still almost 4 million people [7], is being grabbed and transformed, with far reaching effects. Small-scale farms are rapidly vanishing. Statistics of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INS) show that between 2002-2010, 150,000 small farms disappeared while large farming increased by 3% [8]. The intended sectors are various – agriculture, forestry, mining, energy, tourism, and ultimately speculation – and the process is weakening rural economies and hampering the development of a dynamic rural sector.

Therefore, currently Romania’s agriculture is represented by a dual character [9]. On one hand the Romanian landscape is defined by the (semi)subsistence and small-farming agriculture. Namely, 71% of the agricultural holdings are less than 1 hectare in size, and 27% are between 1-10 hectares. These numbers represent the inheritance from the land devolution reform of 1990, after the long period of communist land collectivization.

Land fragmentation has been consistently blamed and pointed out as the cause of the low efficiency of the agricultural sector of Romania. However, these farms are estimated as producing 25-30% of national food consumption [10]. Market economies have not replaced subsistence agriculture yet, in 2010 only around 10% of the raw agricultural products were entering the controlled market chain, whereas in the EU, the percentage amounts to 90% [11]. On the other hand, large agribusinesses are exceedingly being promoted in certain areas.

Only 12,000 farms over 100 hectares (0.3% of Romanian holdings) represent 34% of the Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) of the country and are involved in commercial operations. The “top 100” of these holdings control more than 500,000 hectares of the country’s agricultural land. Many of them are subsidiaries of multinational companies and international investment funds (see Annex 1).

In fact, the Romanian Government is pushing on with the development of agro-industry and making substantial efforts to attract foreign investments. The Government’s Programme for the period 2013-2016 clearly states its wishes to move towards very large scale, export-oriented agriculture and authorities must take “measures for merging and reducing the number of agricultural exploitations”.[12]

The Land Moratorium that Romania implemented when the country became a new member state of the EU did not allow foreign companies to buy Romanian land up until 2014, in order to avoid the indiscriminate direct selling of land to foreign companies [13]. But this law had several loopholes which permitted European companies to merge with a Romanian partner and thus invest their capital in land. In addition, the law stipulated that if one partner decides to cease operations and withdraws from the commercial registry, the remaining partners inherit the portfolio. Hence, there was always a possibility operate under the cover of a Romanian company. Furthermore, the end of the moratorium in 2014 meant that foreigners were permitted to deal with Romanian agricultural land within the same bases as nationals. Therefore, land grabbing has had the doors fully open to take off.

In 2011, already 96,000 ha of the total Romanian woodland surface (which amounts 6.7 million ha) have been held by foreign companies. Namely, the price of the Romanian forest per hectare is much

lower than elsewhere, even if they have risen continuously in the last years. In addition, the wood processing industry from Romania is, by far, controlled by few foreign companies such as Tornator and Holzindustrie Schweighofer. Breakdown of local wood economies, irreversible damage to forest’s ecosystems and reinforcement of corruption on the timber market are just some of the negative consequences of forest grabs in Romania. The recent study of Greenpeace has showed that in Romania over 3 hectares of forest disappear every hour [14].

2.1. Factors driving land grabbing in Romania

Romania is a favorable country for large-scale land acquisitions, especially the East, South and South-West: good fertile soils, permissive legislation, outlet for products in Constanta harbor and consequences of communism regarding the cadastre and land redistribution, all this make it a target for investors.

Soil fertility: Romanian chernoziom or “Black Gold” is a specific type of very fertile and appreciated soil which is typically found in the country. It is suitable for any kind of cultivation [15].

Cheap land market: The average price per hectare of land in Romania ranges from €2,000 to €5,000, showing a growth of 300 percent in the last ten years [16]. Furthermore, the prices are estimated to grow another 500 percent in the next ten years. Nevertheless, the prices are still much lower than in Western European countries. For instance, in the Netherlands, the price of farmland goes up to 80,000 per hectare [17]. Hence, Romania remains an attractive country for foreign agricultural investments.

Permissive legislation: As long as companies, regardless of the source of the capital, are registered in the Romanian commercial registry; which has been done through the domestic companies as mentioned above; there are no restrictions on the purchase of agricultural and forest land. Since 2014, Romania has opened up its land market according to its EU Accession Agreement. According to the Law No. 17/2014, European companies as well as physical persons are able to compete under the same conditions as nationals, difference making a set of preemptive rights applied at the moment of the sell.

Land leasers, Romanian or foreign, also benefit from the favorable legislation as under the new Romanian Civil Code compensation is not guaranteed and is based on a bilateral negotiation between the owner and the tenant. In practice, the parties are unequal. Since the tenant prepares the contract this confers a stronger bargaining power. In addition, many owners of land are older people who are unfamiliar with administrative procedures, often signing contracts without reading them.

Political Support: The government is openly oriented towards the development of the agro-industry. Romanian agriculture must ‘increase its competitiveness in order to compete with European and international markets’ and within this strategy, land consolidation is very much on the agenda of the Romanian Government. Even the Rural Development Funds (Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy) tend to boost the selling or long term leasing of lands owned by smallholders [18].

European subsidies: Being a member state of the European Union, Romania benefits from the direct payments to the farmers arising from the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. Any agricultural holding might be eligible and have a chance to access them. Based on the reform of CAP 2014-2020, the amount of direct payments for agricultural farms in Romania has even increased [19]. Subsidies are a highly attracting factor for land grabbers.

2.2. Who is buying the land?

It is estimated that the above mentioned factors are driving the deviation of about one million hectares (10% of Romania’s farmland) controlled by foreign/multinational capital [20]. According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2012, foreign-owned agricultural land was about 700,000 hectares (8.5% of arable land) [21].

Romanian law appeared to restrict the purchase of land by foreign companies during the 2007-2014 Moratorium on land sales. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this did not prevent international investors to gain their “piece” of land. Through establishing domestic companies, this obstacle has been overtaken.

The main identified entities controlling land in Romania, to what we should add several hundreds of thousands of hectares owned by domestic companies [22], are the following:

Rural socio-economic underdevelopment: In general, small-scale farmers do not have sufficient funds of their own, nor do they have access to bank loans to pay their share in the costs of modernization. Given that banks are reluctant to lend money, the investment capacity of peasants remains to be low. It is often impossible to acquire equipment to improve efficiency or to achieve up-to-code standards. Therefore, local populations are further diminished and neglected within the agricultural sphere, not meaning any obstacle to multinationals and land grabbing.

Banking institutions, investment funds, pension/insurance funds [23]: Mostly buying very large tracts of land (ranging from 3000 ha to 40000 ha and even more) for speculative purposes, international banks or investment funds usually register subsidiaries or sister companies in Romania under which they start land acquisitions and land consolidation. Betting on the land price increase, the consolidated plots are planned to be sold in 10-20 years time. Usually the holders do not engage in agricultural exploitations and lease the land to other companies (foreign or domestic). The whole process is highly nontransparent, and it instigates corruption at all levels (leases are many times linked to local public officials, preferential companies).

Examples: Rabobank, Generali (IT) [24], Spearhead International (UK) [24], Black Sea Agriculture (US) [26], Germanagrar (DE) [27], Agrarius AG (DE) [28], Agroyield (DE) [29].

Multinational private companies: This category includes multinational companies especially from Western Europe (but not only) attracted by the investment opportunities presented by the host country (highlighted above). Romania is usually not the only destination of these companies, many of them also investing in African or South-American countries. Their approach can vary – either investing all their destined capital into land acquisitions (and then leasing/selling to third party companies), or leasing the bulk of land and direct their capital into agro-industrial development and exploitation (mechanization, agro-chemical inputs). The latter category is mostly export oriented. Land ownership for these investors can vary from a few thousand hectares to approximately 40 thousand hectares.

[20] It has to be noted, that these estimations are being based on public information regarding subsidy distributions and research done by civil society or real estate companies and the media. There is no official understanding on the dimension of land grabbing in Romania.
[27] The official website of Germanagrar: http://germanagrar.com/
Private investors from abroad: The investors within this category represent physical persons from other EU or non-EU countries which invest their capital into Romania, registering a company in the country, under which they buy/lease land. Many of the companies develop vertically, having businesses also in other sectors of the food chain besides production, or are very export oriented. The investment patterns are mostly the same as for the above mentioned category, but usually these actors own less land (200 – 4000 ha).

Example: Yves Grasa (FR) [37]

Multinational companies trading agricultural commodities (international traders): Highly export oriented companies usually controlling lands through contract farming [41] and working with all the above mentioned actors. Having most of the agricultural storage facilities, they also have a crucial influence and a control over commodity prices in Romania.

Examples: Cargill [42] (20 industrial silos), Bunge (joint venture with Prio Foods – Grupo Martifer [43] in biodiesel plants), Brise Group [44] (farming and storage holding, Romanian ownership, doing business also in Bulgaria and Serbia) [45].

[40] The official website of TCE3 Brazi: http://www.tce3brazibraila.ro/
[41] Contract farming can be defined as agricultural production carried out according to an agreement between a buyer and farmers, which establishes conditions for the production and marketing of a farm product or products. Hence, it is supposed to be beneficial for both parties. (FAO, n.d.): http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/contract-farming/faq/en/#c100443
3. Consequences of land grabbing in Romania

3.1. Socio-economic aspects

Romania is a characteristically agricultural country where farming occupies up to 30% of its population. However, land grabbing drives peoples out of the rural landscape, generating an already well-known trend in the Western countries of rural exodus. If aging population and youth migration were already becoming an issue in the rural areas, land grabbing accelerates the problem even more. When the land is accumulated for agro-industrial purposes, the typical high level of mechanization usually results in a wave of unemployment. Namely, large-scale agricultural investments push people out from the agricultural sector without absorbing their labor elsewhere in the economy. Rural areas are therefore threatened. This fact is of a special concern in Romania, because the industry and services sectors in the country are not as developed as in other regions; hence these sectors might not be able to absorb the whole workforce coming from the countryside (what would mean over 4 million prospective employees). In addition, educational possibilities in the rural areas are sometimes constrained and their inhabitants might not have the needed skills outside the agricultural sphere. On the other side, when rural migrants want to come back to their villages of origin, rural areas are not necessarily able to reabsorb this work force, [46] if the land has meanwhile been sold out.

Land grabbing generates dispossession. Landless peasants, when remaining in the rural areas, are forced to work as employees under unstable and dependent situations. This increases the inequality among rural stakeholders, and even further between those and the urban dwellers. Statistics show that land consolidation and land grabbing are increasing the level of poverty and wealth disparity. Looking at the distribution of income and wealth disparities (so called “Gini” coefficient) through the poverty and land ownership prism, one can observe a well-defined overlay between acute poverty and large land ownership. In 2012, the poverty and social exclusion rate of Romania reached to 42% of its population (the EU average being 25%) [47], on a continuous rise, placing Romania amongst the poorest countries in the EU, after Bulgaria. Statistics also show that the poorest regions of Romania, declared as disadvantaged, are the North-East, South-East and South-West [48] which are also affected by strong agricultural land consolidations and land grabbing [49]. Furthermore, the ownership of land may turn to distant landowners, sometimes not giving use to their properties and others managing them from an inaccurate perspective. Investors are mainly preoccupied how to increase efficiency and how to develop the product. Labor conditions or local economic development do not seem to be of a high importance for transnational companies. They grow vertically usually controlling the full process of production; focusing on export. Multinationals controlling the full process (production and processing) and the prices of commodities, leave the small peasants behind in an uncompetitive position. Small farmers are forced to reduce the price of their products to compete with highly profitable and subsidized businesses. Their possibilities in the countryside draw back this way.

In addition, investors usually produce for international markets rather than for the domestic consumption. Country’s high export rates generate food insecurity, social vulnerability and a dependence

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on imports that people with low incomes cannot afford. The focus on export reflects how Romanian rural needs are neglected. For instance, Daniel Constantin, the Romanian Agricultural Minister, vehemently stresses the ‘economic dimension’ of farms while promoting land consolidations as ‘solution’ to Romanian fragmented agricultural landscape [50].

The power and weight of the big stakeholders is not comparable to that of the peasants. While peasants are dis-empowered, money and influences allow to the large companies (external hands) to rule at their peace: construction, destruction, resource grabbing, etc. Land grabbing not only represents the control over the land areas but also over other resources - as the example of Emiliana West Rom (see the TNI report [51]) proves in terms of water, and relational to the manipulation of the roads and material patrimony of the area without considering local populations. With the land concentration local communities lose access to land and hence to the natural resources that traditionally uphold their livelihoods. Local communities lose representation and independence, and this entire situation generates deprivation.

The rupture of the cultural and historical values with the land is also a direct outcome of land grabbing. We can observe these problems and general confusion in terms of inheritance that the communist period left behind, and we will see it as a consequence of land grabbing, which causes people's disconnection from the land.

The phenomenon of land grabbing also drives to the depauperization and the loss of knowledge and tradition, when values and practices start to resemble to the consumer driven and urban system of production and accumulation.

Land related conflicts are frequent in the rural areas, among their inhabitants and relational to external institutions. However, land tenure changes and land-price fluctuations generate further clashes. Furthermore, prices increase and access to land becomes prohibitive for the small farmers. New agricultural entrants (often young people) have difficulties accessing land nowadays. There is a rupture of the link between new generations and the land.

3.3. Political aspects

Big agricultural holdings tend to receive benefits from the EU funds and the national government. Facilities and subsidies are usually monopolized by the “big boys”, that are often large land owners, because of their potential performance/efficiency and their capacity and knowledge to access them. In Romania, public entities give land concessions to big companies, facilitating further land grabbing. The leasing contracts are prepared by the renting company in its own terms. Contracts are sometimes confusing, not made understandable for the small farmers and at times not even respected [52].

Additionally, those are so attaching that make almost impossible for the owner to get back their land before the agreed period. There is no assistance or protection of any kind for those in a disadvantaged position. The advantages are taken by the investing companies. This paradigm leaves further space for speculation and corruption. Certain actors and institutions gain from the lack of transparency of these transactions. All this issues, added to the fact that small farmers will always suffer more from the risks of agricultural production than investors, whose livelihood does not depend so directly on the land, constrain local’s possibilities. Regulations and the government are not on the side of the peasants and agro-ecological food producers. Additional to the “legal” deals taking place along the country, within the expropriation processes, usually governments or companies do not compensate for the loss of public or communal properties that land grabbing causes.
3.4. Environmental aspects

The changes on land tenure cause social uncertainty, but also environmental degradation. There is a narrow focus on the economic sphere and the short-term benefits, neglecting social and environmental sustainability and not taking into account the long-term costs of land grabbing. Land consolidation is often related to the establishment of monocultures, therefore causing loss of agrobiodiversity and natural patrimony. However, in Romania there is a lack of awareness about the ecological impacts of the intensified agriculture that land accumulation generates. Although it is broadly known that big exploitations are way more disruptive and less sustainable than small/medium plots, the particular negative outcomes have not been clearly recognized yet. Inputs such as fertilizers or pesticides cause soil depletion, water pollution, destruction of biodiversity and environmental degradation in general, as intensive agriculture is generating worldwide.

The depeasantization generates the abandonment of the agro-ecological approach, which drives to environmental degradation. In addition, the "artificialicialisation" of the land is a long term risk that is not being considered. To put land out of agricultural ends (between 2005 and 2010 it were 113.200ha) threatens country's food sovereignty [53]; unplanned or not inclusive developments may destroy specific ecosystems.

Land accumulation does not ensure the implementation of environmental and land use regulations. Some projects even cause disruption in protected areas and established laws (GMO soy in Botosani region for instance, although it is forbidden in Romania [54]). Forestry deals are not exempt of illicit tricks. In these terms, some companies are trying to pressure politicians to change the legislation so it benefits their businesses; for instance, by reducing the cutting age of the trees from 120 years to 90. Other big owners are avoiding the payment of municipal taxes [55] invoking to the article 137 of the law 46/2008 from the national forestry code. Large forest owners are claiming that since their wood is protected, it is not subject to tax payments. Mining projects, such as the well known case of Rosia Montana, might destroy entire valleys [56]. As we can see, the negative effects of land grabbing are innumerable.

* * *

[53] Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own policies for agriculture, fisheries, consumers, and trade of food as long as these policies are ecological sustainable, contribute to social justice and not restrict the possibilities for others to do the same. (Nyéléni, n.d.): http://www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article48
4. Land grabbing cases in Romania

In the following section, we include several different cases of land grabbing in Romania. Four cases have been selected to exemplify acquisition of agricultural land and two for forestry deals. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that those are just few examples among a great amount of land deals that are taking place in Romania nowadays. In these terms, the Land Matrix database serves as an important source of information regarding several land grabbers worldwide. Particularly in Romania, the peasant association Eco Ruralis is continuously working in uncovering new cases of land grabs.

4.1. Genagricola: 4,460 hectares

Gruppo Assicurazioni Generali, the well-known Italian insurance company, is gazing and controlling farmland in Romania since 2001. The company’s Sustainability Reports clearly express great interest “to gain standing on international markets with strong development potential (…)”, especially the emerging markets of Central and Eastern Europe. These statements may not have been understood literally as a physical “standing”; however, they have been translated into a factual territorial acquisition of more than 4,500 hectares in Western Romania.

“Romania is the European country with the highest percentage of land controlled by foreign companies”, reports Re: Common. Among them, Italian companies are highly representative investors, owning 220,000 hectares of Romanian farmland.

As such, Generali appears again and again in the list of the biggest Italian investors in the country’s agricultural sector. Appealing to the times of the Roman Empire, Generali’s intentions are “justified”. According to their statements, they are resuming land investments in Romanian territory, not initiating them.

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Facts about Genagricola case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year or arrival</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent company</td>
<td>Generali (IT), Insurance Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intendent size</td>
<td>5,500 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land under control</td>
<td>Over 4,500 hectares. Full food chain control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous owners</td>
<td>Communist state farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crops</td>
<td>Vineyards, Wheat, maize, sunflower and soya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Domestic market with further intentions (Eastern Europe and Russia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>50 million € in 2013 (Italy + Romania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Increase on land prices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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[57] http://landmatrix.org/
[58] The official website of Generali: http://www.generali.com
In 2001 the company’s agribusiness saw an opportunity in Romania, and because the Romanian moratorium on land does not allow foreign companies to buy land in the country, Generali had to establish a Romanian subsidiary, S.C Genagricola Romania S.R.L., in December 2001.

The purchasing of land started in 2002. It was of course, not exempt of consequences. The price of the land increased from €800/ hectare to €1200/ hectare in the same year. Although this might not seem a high price compared to the cost of the land in other Western European countries, it is a noticeable increase (which keeps the escalating trend) according to Romanian´s parameters, hindering local's access to land. In 2003 the company’s intention was to buy a total of 5,500 hectares of land in the country.

By 2009, 4,500 ha had been purchased in Sannicolau Mare (Timis county), to what the company added 350 hectares in Pancota (Arad county); both properties were state owned farms, during communism. Nowadays, Genagricola amounts almost 5,000 hectares of farmland in Romania; where wheat, maize, sunflower, soya and wine are being cultivated, stored, processed and commercialized (also to international markets) by this company. Its strong point is the chance to benefit from total control of its production and distribution line. Domestic businesses such as S.C. Aqua Mures and S.C. La Quercia S.R.L. have been absorbed by Genagricola Romania, and others such as Vignadoro S.R.L. (in Pancota) are wholly under its control.

The modernization and capitalization of 4,500 hectares of cash crops in Sannicolau Mare and 350 hectares of vineyards in Minis-Maderat were seen as a must. This was meant to benefit the locals, because these exploitations have been settled in previously abandoned areas.

The group even launched a DVD and released 1000 prints of a book called The Presence of Genagricola in Romania [63], aiming to demonstrate that their agricultural investments in the country were made to "increase the value of the territory and not for a speculative purpose".

The story of how “wastelands” would be put into production for everybody’s benefit is old and popular. Nowadays Generali is using it to set up large agricultural acquisitions in Romania. However, rather than achieving what it promises, it has revealed itself more as a strategy from and for the benefit of the big investor and not for the local populations. 62 job positions for almost 5,000 hectares of land is not such a fantastic deal for Romanians.

But what is the underlying rational for an insurance company to invest on farmland in Romania so far? It is currently being claimed that the pension funds industry (one among several Generali’s services) is investing in agriculture beyond its domestic markets, with profit and speculation purposes.

“These companies are responsible for safeguarding and "growing" people's pension”, says an article by GRAIN [64], "they see long-term pay-offs from the rising value of farmland and the cash flow that will in the meantime come from crop sales, dairy herds or meat production." Agricultural land acquisitions seem to be the “new” profit tool, moving huge amounts of money worldwide. The agricultural holding of Generali, Genagricola [65], was founded in 1974, and today comprises 24 different agricultural enterprises, accounting for more than 14,000 hectares of land in Italy and Romania.

In 2013, Genagricola recorded sales of €50 million, deriving 60% from traditional agricultural production and energy generated from its two biomass power stations, and 40% from wine production, with over 4 million bottles distributed mainly in Italy and in over 30 countries worldwide. The point here is that for the global market to win, local smallholders might be seeing constrained their means to make for a living.

In an era where colonialism is meant to have been overcome, Generali presents itself as the “imperial eagle” and land grabbing (re)appears.

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[65] The official website of Genagricola: http://www.letenutedigenagricola.it/
4.2. Bardeau: over 21 000 hectares

The Austrian count Andreas von Bardeau arrived to Romania in 1999. In the 2000, he started to buy land in Western Romania. By 2002, thanks to several political contacts [66], he had already founded S.C Bardeau Holding Romania S.R.L. As we know, this is not an isolated case. “The Bardeau’s are among a group of western farmers who have established successful farming businesses in the former eastern bloc” [67]. Von Bardeau bought arable land to the point of becoming the 5th largest landowner in Romania, and between the 10 biggest farmers of the country. Group Bardeau is currently formed by 16 companies [68]. The headquarters of the company are settled in Timisoara (Timis County).

All the 21,000 hectares controlled by Bardeau are in operation. The Austrian count purchased 12,000 ha, and leased 5,800 ha from the Romanian Agency of State Domains and another 3,000 ha from private smallholders [69]. The family company has acquired land from some 14,500 smallholders and rents from a further 1,500, requiring a team of seven to manage its purchases and leases. Wheat, barley, rapeseed, sunflower, corn, rice are cultivated [70]. Sheep, goats, cattle, buffaloes [71] and pigs are also breed within the company’s farmland.

Initially, the goal was to access between 26,000 and 27,000 hectares of land in Romania. However, the amassing seems to not have trespassed the 21,000 hectares. Nevertheless, the 5,000 hectares of woodland that Bardeau bought in a joint venture with Count Eszterhazy in 2007 in Arges County, should be also included in the counts. Creating SC Esterhazy Bardeau Silvicultura S.R.L., Bardeau got land in Arad, Timis (Livezile) and Caras Severin counties (Berzovia, Gradinari, Maureni, Berliste, Iertof and Racasdia). The price of the forestry land was about €2.000 and €2.500 per hectare. Conversely, the price that he paid for the arable parcels could not be found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year or arrival</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent company</td>
<td>Bardeau Holding G.m.b.H (AT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intendent size</td>
<td>26.000-27.000 hectares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land under control</td>
<td>21,000 hectares. Full food chain control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous owners</td>
<td>The Romanian Agency of State Domains (ADS). Private small plots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crops</td>
<td>Wheat, barley, rapeseed, sunflower, corn and rice. Sheep, goats, cattle, buffaloes and pigs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>36 million €</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bardeau Holding has its own transport infrastructure and undertakes its own storage, processing and commercialization. It owns modern installations and the oldest rice plantation in the country (built in 1400).

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The company has two cereal warehouses, with capacities of 20,000 tones and 12,000 tons respectively. Up to date, the count has invested €36 millions and has accessed 7 SAPARD projects, which brought him millions of Euros from European agricultural funds.

The count was involved in the cultural life of Timisoara and promoted an opera foundation that has received thousands of Euros in sponsorship. He actually was rewarded with the “Medal of Merit” in 2005 [72].

Nonetheless, in 2012, over 500 court cases were open against Bardeau Holding Romania [73]. The holding used its power to bribe local law magistrates to intervene in these cases. In 2013 they had created 200 job positions, although peasants from Caras-Severin were deprived of their lands. Whether Bardeau can be considered “a friendly investor” or not seems to depend on who you ask.

Since the establishment of Padova Agriculture on the 19 of September of 2004 [77], Giovanni Roncato has invested over 10 million Euros [78] (certain sources talk about even over 15) in order to reactivate the production of rice in Romanian paddies.

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### Facts about Padova Agriculture case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year or arrival</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent company</strong></td>
<td>Roncato Giovanni E Figli SAS (IT) Gibside Holding (DE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intendent size</strong></td>
<td>26,000-27,000 hectares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land under control</strong></td>
<td>4,820 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous owners</strong></td>
<td>Stancuta city hall, Council of Ialomita, Romanian state Conara S.R.L (absorbed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crops</strong></td>
<td>Rice and non-clarified &quot;auxiliary vegetables&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>Italy and Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Profit</strong></td>
<td>4.8 million€ of net benefit in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Increase on land prices EU funds absorption Issues related to tax evasion. 80 employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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http://www.archiva.lumeasatului.ro/921-renasc-orezariile-de-la-stancuta.html  
[75] Hoovers.com website:  
http://www.hoovers.com/company-information/cs/company-profile.RONCATO_GIOVANNI_E_FIGLI_SAS.95e576f4d327a590.html  
[77] Listafirme website:  
http://www.listafirme.ro/  
The company has acquired and leased land, and currently controls almost 5,000 hectares of terrain in Romania. In Braila, in 2004, Padova Agricultura received a concession of 100 ha from Stancuta city hall and 2.614 ha from Romanian public domains. In 2007 Gruppo Roncato purchased Conara SRL and with it its 143 ha of purchased farmland and its 49-years concession of 905 ha. In 2009 the council of Ialomita gave to the company a concession of 1059 ha in Guirgeni area. Little by little the company has gained its space. In total, it amounts 4,821 hectares, from which 4,200 were already being cultivated in 2009 [79].

Padova Agricultura’s official website reflects the importance of the rice sector and its interest on it; rice production is prioritized over all. The company states the relevance of new machinery, technology and a certain use of chemicals in order to improve rice productivity. However, they also consider the significance of biodiversity. For this reason, they cultivate what they call “auxiliary vegetables” as well (although the nature of those is not clarified).

Padova Agricultura accounts with a drying infrastructure with capacity for 20,000 tones, a part from a fleet of tractors and machinery.

Within the company, the activities of harvesting, storage and seed production, and manufacture of other food products are undertaken onsite. This gives employment to 80 people. What is the destination of the product? Italy and Turkey are highlighted. Riso Scotti seems to buy their products as well [80]. The business reports that the average rice yields in their Romanian operations increased from 4,100kg per hectare in 2005 to 8,500kg per hectare in 2009 [81]. In 2013 the firm made a net profit of 4.8 million€ and a benefit of almost 847,000€ [82].

Padova Agricultura appears as the third major beneficiary of agricultural subsidies in Romania, with around €300,000 of grants received in 2013 [83]; which clearly reflects a funds grabbing. Big companies tend to have greater access to public subsidies. They have the information and knowledge to access subsidised programmes; and they tend to be at the focal point of the national governments, for the sake of economic competitiveness. Padova Agricultura has also been related to tax evasion [84]. Furthermore, the price of the land [85] in the company’s area of influence multiplied by 5 in 5 years; from €200 in 2003 to over €1,000 in 2008. The boosting of land prices may tempt peasants to sell out their parcels and hamper the new acquisitions from the part of new entrant small farmers.

4.4. Riso Scotti: 11 000 hectares

“Rice in the Danube Delta” is an ambitious agricultural project initiated by the Italian company Riso Scotti S.P.A. (with headquarters in Pavia) in Romania. Through its Romanian subsidiary Riso Scotti Danubio S.R.L., established on 23 June 2005 and settled in Bucharest, the company controls 11,000 hectares of paddies in the Danube meadows. Originally the idea was to stop buying land at the threshold of 10,000 ha. Nowadays the company’s intention is to grow up to 15,000 ha and even double this area in the longer term. Riso Scotti is the biggest brand within the rice industry in Europe. On the other hand, Romania offers a great potential for rice production in terms of climate, water and soils. Thus, the company believes that this country may become the main rice producer of Europe [86].

[R79] Ibid.
[R83] Ibid.
[R84] Ibid.
[R86] Riso Scotti official website: http://www.risoscotti.com/group/history
The project was decided in the early 2000s. Although the company was officially established in 2005, it became operative in 2003, when the true first investment took place. By 2003, 7,000 hectares had been already purchased. The acquired lands are located in the counties of Olt, Ialomita, Braila and Dolj. The company bought the land for between €800 and €1000 per hectare. Even though this amount meant a considerable increase on land prices compared to its value 2 years previous to the purchasing, it is still six times lower than in Italy; still very profitable for Western investors.

In 2006 Riso Scotti bought a factory in Vladeni (Ialomita) with capacity for 150 tons of rice per day [87]. They also own one facility in Bucharest and they plan to open a rice processor in Olt County. In total, the company has invested €40 million in Romania (3 million only in the factory of Ialomita). The company bought land that was under rice production during communism but it had been fragmented and abandoned during the last years. Preparing the land for cultivation is a progressive strategy and requires strong capital injection.

The European and Romanian subsidies for agriculture amount maximum up to €500 per hectare; an amount insufficient to rearrange the well-functioning of the flooded areas, necessary for rice cultivation. The condition of the paddies requires a much stronger capital investment in order to be put under production once again.

Small farmers do not have the economic strength of the big multinationals. Riso Scotti for example had to invest over €1.500 per hectare in order to improve the quality of land, rebuild and expand the extensive network of canals and rehabilitate pumping equipment inherited from the communist era.

Furthermore, the main beneficiaries of agricultural public subsidies are precisely large companies due to the political national interest on developing economies of scale. Therefore, this situation only facilitates the entrance of large companies into agriculture and neglects the peasants.

Through exporting its model of production from Italy to Romania, Riso Scotti’s intentions and expectations were high. Currently, 10,500 hectares are under cultivation. “The initiative is articulated between several specialist companies, focused on certain industrial segments: purchasing of fields, cultivation, processing, and production of the first diversified products such as rice cakes. Each company is independent but connected and complementary to the others” [88]. Riso Scotti Danubio manages to control a complete rice production cycle, from seed variation to storage and full product development to cover the entire rice industry. Riso Scotti wants to create self-sufficiency in rice production for the Romanian market and to develop an efficient export system. Innovation, technology, added value and brand cachet are all edges which the company plans to maximize in the future [89]. They provide to the market with a fair diversity of products, all derived from the rice.

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[88] The ICE-Italian Trade Promotion Agency (n.d.): “Riso Scotti, after the diversification the new challenge is exporting <<the model>> eastwards”. http://www.italtrade.com/spotlight/12569.htm

The company markets its products in South and North America, the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe [90]. From Romania, the production is exported to Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Italy, although there are further expectations to open up the export.

Riso Scotti has convinced many farmers in Romania that they should cultivate rice. The company has, in fact, the interest to promote as many growers in Romania as possible; to make from the country a leader among European producers of rice. It tried to implement the social model that was working in Italy, a kind of contract farming. However as the company clearly claimed, it did not work “Romanians escape agriculture as if it would be something bad to be a farmer”. On the other side of the coin, it can be stated that Romanians are simply unfamiliar with the farming procedures and technology coming from Italy. The common practice of cultivating rice in flooded areas, for instance, was not seen as a necessity by Riso Scotti. In 2013 the company accounted only 48 employees [91].

4.5. Tornator: over 12 000 hectares

Here it is our first forestry example, the Finnish company Tornator Oyj. In Finland, this company is mainly dedicated to wood production and to the sale of cutting rights. In addition, it is also dedicated to buy and sell “high-quality waterfront plots and soil resources, and lease rights of access to [...] land” [92]. Tornator Group was created in 2002, after Stora Enso (still main shareholder of the enterprise) divested its forestlands. Tornator owns over 640.000 hectares of forests: 595.000ha in Finland, 41.000 ha in Estonia and 12.000 ha in Romania. Currently, the company is the first private forest owner in Estonia, the third largest in Finland and among the five major international investors [93] of woodland in Romania.

Tornator’s vision is, as it is stated on its official website, to become “an internationally respected forestry company”; therefore, it should not be surprising its interest to control large amounts of forests beyond their own borders. According to a company’s representative, when the corporation began to look for regions for expansion, it was agreed that Romania offered good conditions in terms of forestry investments. The company established a Romanian subsidiary on 8 May 2008 and settled its headquarters in Brasov. The initial investment intention was to acquire no more and no less than 100.000 hectares [94] of forestland in the country. Already by 2009, the company had purchased 11.500 hectares [95] in Brasov; with this rhythm Tornator was going to achieve its goals pretty fast.

Facts about Tornator case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year or arrival</th>
<th>2008.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent company</td>
<td>Tornator Oyj - Finland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intendent size</td>
<td>100.000 hectares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land under control</td>
<td>12.000 hectares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments in other countries</td>
<td>595.000 ha in Finland 41.000 ha in Estonia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products / services</td>
<td>Timber and consultancy services for forest management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Local domestic market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>Between 40 and 50 million EUR.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[90] The company’s profile of Riso Scotti Danubio: http://ro105264168.fm.alibaba.com/company_profile.html
Nevertheless, only one more purchasing seems to have taken place since then: 500 hectares in Buzau in 2011, according to The Diplomat Newspaper [96]. The largest area ever acquired in Romania by Tornator was 9,000 hectares; the smallest 350-400 hectares [97].

Tornator bought the woodlands during the economic recession of 2008. The price that the company paid, on average €2,500 per hectare, was lower than during the previous years (when prices were among €2,600 and €3,600 per hectare) and way lower than in other European countries. In total, Tornator has already invested around 50 million Euros in Romania. During the first year, the company made about €600,000 profit. It 2013, this quantity amounted €1,600,000 [98], actually beyond the expectations.

Here in Romania, Tornator undertakes wood cutting tasks. Afterwards, the company sells the timber directly to the locals, who transform it; the company does not process the timber and has no plans to build up any sawmill. It also offers consultancy services to other land owners (both public and private) for sustainable forest management. Tornator is interested on exploiting all the resources provided by the forests (even considering bio-energy for the future) but always taking into account regeneration cycles, as they state. The company is carrying on repopulation strategies in order to maintain the level of productivity. As a specific case, Tornator seems to be beneﬁciating to the local communities of Brasov and Buzau. By 2010, €200,000 had been injected for road tracks´ amelioration. By 2013, the company had employed 68 local peoples (30 of them under seasonal bases). Furthermore, 100% of company’s production remains within the domestic market. However, when speaking about land grabbing, we should dig deeper and think about the bigger picture. It might sound good to refurbish roads and give employment to locals.

But why should a foreign company take this responsibility? Why would anybody go to a foreign country and invest in woodland? Of course, the reason lies in the expectations of a high proﬁt rate. Tornator is not an exception. As a company it seeks to grow, and in order to reach this goal it works as an investment fund buying cheap woodland and expecting to resell “high-quality” plots and control the market of cutting rights [99]. It is a matter of speculation, as much as with agricultural land grabbing.

The main problem is probably the fact that this phenomenon is carried on under the veil of “we are making you a favor”. It takes advantage of the Romanian context where there is “high bureaucracy, obligatory administration with high costs and low efﬁciency, poor infrastructure and very limited ability of forest owners to practice their ownership and property rights compared to other EU member states” [100]; trying to offer “solutions” and tempting amounts of money to key actors. Again and again, what at the very first moment might appear as a good deal, in the longer term has proved negative outcomes for the local peoples. Driving to the loss of communal rights, issue that has been observed in communities such as Bodesti [101] (in the centre of the country), forest land grabs might generate locals dispossession in the long term, and serious problems on the level of development of especially vulnerable regions. Without the right to access communal pastures and forests, entrée to natural and necessary resources becomes absolutely constrained and dependent on the new owners and the new prices imposed.

Some cases have caused more noise than others - it is not uncommon to hear about corruption within the forestry sector in Romania. Some of these companies are trying to pressure politicians to change the legislation so it beneﬁts their businesses; for instance, by reducing the cutting age of the trees from 120 years to 90. Other big owners

[98] Listaﬁrme website: https://membri.listaﬁrme.ro/tornator-srl-23842024/
[99] The Ofﬁcial website of Tornator: http://www.tornator.fi/en/tornator/company+forests/
[100] Idem 95
are avoiding the payment of municipal taxes [102] invoking to the article 137 of the law 46/ 2008 from the national forestry code. In these terms, large forest owners are claiming that since their woods are protected, those are not subject to tax payments. On the other side, municipalities, in need of the money for public investments, are asking for the normal payments subjected to ordinary land ownership, which refers to the land where the forests are actually located. - At the end of the day, these deals are never a Panacea for the local villagers indeed.

4.6. Schweighofer: over 14 000 hectares

“Tradition meets innovation”. With such an euphoric slogan summarizes 400-year-old Austrian company Holzindustrie Schweighofer its business philosophy. Supposedly, there is mention on the wood manufactury of Schweighofer Family since 1642 [103]. However, the year that matters was 2002, when after selling Schweighofer’s shares of Stora Enso Timber, valued at 70 Mill Euros, new markets in the east became accessible. Gerald Schweighofer, owner of this company, estimated the situation as follows: “In the east man can earn a lot, but loose a lot, too.” The first came true. Illegal logging and large acquisitions of forest land in Romania are the dark side of the deal. The president of Asociatia Composesorala Borsa describes the company as a "cancer" that came to Romania.[104]

The Schweighofer Group is a large European company in the wood processing sector, an industry of over €2.89 Billion per annum [105] with operations in Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Poland. In 2002, Cascade Empire SRL, the local procurement division of the Schweighofer Group in Romania has been established. And the deep roots into Eastern Europe were put. Within couple of years, Cascade Empire took advantage of the favorable trend in Romanian agricultural land prices and purchased thousands of hectares of forestland in different parts of the country. In 2014, Schweighofer Group has already purchased more than 14.000 hectares [106] of forest in Arges, Buzau, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Prahova, Suceava and Valcea [107].

Nevertheless, since the beginning of Schweighofer’s involvement in Romania, arrangements of legislative

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[105] Ibid.


conditions for massive exploitation of forests were put on place through the emergency decree 71/2002 proposed by Filip Georgescu. This emergency decree states that Regia Națională a Pădurilor Romsilva (National Forest Administration Romsilva) (...) is authorized to conclude long-term contracts to ensure the sale of standing timber with operators that work wood processing into finished products (...). On the basis of this emergency, Holzindustrie Schweighofer has completed three contracts with Romsilva for a period of 10 years and gained thus the right to operate about one million cubic meters annually [108]. In addition, Holzindustrie Schweighofer laid eyes on 130 hectares of an arable land in the village of Satu Mare, which the Romanian businessman Gabriel Constantin Babiuc acquired stepwise from its owners in order to resell it later to the Austrians [109].

Nowadays Holzindustrie Schweighofer runs five woodworking factories in following Romanian cities: Rădăuți, Sebeș, Siret, Comănești and Reci. Despite the fact that local communities protested against the decision of Covasna's Council allowing Holzindustrie Schweighofer to build a new plant in Reci [110], the fabric has been launched in February 2015. This plant was enabled through the investment flow of €150 million, and is supposed to have an annual cutting capacity of 800,000 cubic meters [111]. About 80% of Schweighofer’s production in Romania is exported to more than 60 countries around the world. In case of Reci, most of the produced lumber will be transported to Constanta, on the Black Sea coast, and from there shipped to the Japanese market.

The Federation of Forest and Grassland Owners in Romania – Nostra Silva pointed out that Schweighofer’s dominant, almost monopoly position, will have negative impacts not only on Romanian forestry but also on local economies related to the wood industry: „Wood is one of the few resources of the mountain area and wood processing is among the activities that keep the workforce in rural areas – raising cattle, grazing, manually mowed hay.” [112]

Moreover, Holzindustrie Schweighofer has on its account even illegal logging in Retezat National Park as in 2014 the Agent Green team investigated [113]. This irresponsible and irreversible exploitation of the Retezat’s forests has been a deep scar into the rich biodiversity of this highly protected area.

With regards to all the information mentioned above, Romanian representatives seemed to have a sense for satire when they rewarded Holzindustrie Schweighofer as the investor of the year 2014 [114]. Nonetheless, it provides a clear evidence for the knotty politic-economical network which shapes the Romanian forestry sector.

** * **.

[109] Ibid.
5. Solutions / Policy Recommendations against land grabbing

In order to reduce land grabbing and its negative outcomes, Eco Ruralis proposes several steps to be followed. We support the implementation of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGLT) [115], which include multiple soft policy proposals addressed to reinforce land governance and minimize exploitative land deals. According to the general problematic related to land issues in Romania, different articles among the ones defined in the VGLT have been specifically selected, in order to offer precise solutions. Overall, five aspects have been highlighted, and with them a bunch of suggestions which should be taken into consideration:

1) There is a remarkable uncertainty about the tenure of land in Romania. One can observe deficiencies on the land registries, insecurity on maintaining the land rights given back with the land reform of 1990, doubts about inheritance regulations, unclear land contracts. More broadly the lack of transparency, accessible documents and formal arrangements prevail. Some of the proposals to control this would be to have a regularized, systematized and accessible land registry. Fair contracts and regulations for inheritance, which also respect customary inheritance, should go hand in hand with their implementation.

2) Governmental advocacy of an agro-business model for agricultural growth constantly neglect small-scale farmers’ position. Corruptibility of the state officials facilitates land grabbing. The Romanian state should pursue principles of the rule of law, provide its citizens with judicial protection as well as guarantee property rights. Agricultural investments must not threaten livelihood of the affected communities and exposed them to the risks of poverty. Governments should greatly consider implementation of taxes to foreign investors in order to deter the indiscriminate acquisition of land. In the case of the loss of public or communal properties, affected people must be properly compensated (amongst other alternative solutions offered). The states should offer support to their citizens and facilitate access to court in problematic cases.

3) Lack of information - at the side of local communities as well as at the side of administrators. Transparency should be a guiding rule. There is an alarming need for information about the intended land purchase or long-term leases, fairly accessible and understandable. Agricultural investments should be done in order to bring necessary resources to the local communities and to be advantageous for both parties. Hence, training workshops offered to the administrators is a must. Assistance should be provided during the deal transactions in order to ensure fairness and understanding of what is being signed, and it must be found at local level. Registries must be up-to date and publicly accessible.

4) Large-scale land acquisitions by large corporations take place in the name of economic growth. Negative social and environmental consequences are ignored. Eco Ruralis takes the debate from the “market-based mechanisms” towards the “human rights and social justice” perspective. The VGLT emphasize the relevance of environmental and social aspects as much as the economic dimension within land transactions is needed to be taken into account. Environmental regulations must be respected through governmental reinforcement and social security must be ensured for all affected people. Qualitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change in the concrete territory should be considered, too.

5) Artificialisation and the risks of indiscriminate selling of land are usually disregarded. There is a necessity to undertake territorial planning programs; to rethink natural and social relevance of a specific territory before selling/leasing or starting a new development. At the local level the livelihood consequences of land deals need to be assessed. Subsistence farming is fairly widespread in Romania, hence, food security must be ensured. Preservation of the land for agricultural purposes should be prioritized.

Apart from already mentioned suggestions, Eco Ruralis would like to highlight the following proposals:

**Promotion of a land sovereignty movement:** Land sovereignty is the right of working people to have effective access to, use of, and control over land and the benefits of its use and occupation; where land is understood as a resource, territory and landscape. Simply put, land sovereignty is the realization of the working peoples’ human right to land. It is allying itself and intrinsically linked with the growing global movement for “food sovereignty”. Thus, Romanian rural space has to be reconsidered so that it attracts active population. Local authorities, the Government and the European authorities must stop land grabbing, and they must encourage small scale, diverse family farming; the only viable option for rural development based on environmentally responsible principles [116]. However, land grabbing is an expression of the dominant development model based on sustained, increased and unequal consumption of both finite and “renewable” natural resources. Land grabbing is the chronic manifestation of an industrial pattern of agro-commodities and energy production and consumption controlled by transnational corporations under a world trade and investment system where financial capital reigns. A strong sovereignty movement across the borders is a way how to face to land grabbing.

**Raising awareness regarding to the land concentration within the Romanian society.** For this purpose, Eco Ruralis undertakes research to the specific land grabbing cases in Romania and make visible these processes to the civil society.

**Promoting a bottom-up approach, starting from the needs and aspirations of rural communities.**

**Advocating for a revival of state interest in land investments along with enabling small-farmers investments (opposed to just enabling agro-industrial investments).**

**Advocating for a paradigm shift - from agroindustry to agroecology.** Upon the recommendations of high level experts from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization - World Committee on Food Security: “governments should prioritize investments in the small farm sector and in alternative food systems that are socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, using the principles of agro-ecology”.

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**6. Final remarks**

The dimensions of land grabbing are not fully acknowledged yet; it is an ongoing and non-transparent process shrouded in secrecy. In addition, the long-term effects on this kind of land consolidation are still to be seen. The lack of knowledge about the consequences of these deals deters from acknowledging its relevance. These factors make from land grabbing a quite accepted business by a big portion of the population. Both, the corporative sector and civil society seem to do not oppose these deals in Romania, as far as they are legitimated by monetary exchanges. For ones it is the way to pursue the logic of agro-business accumulation and gain profits. For the others it is the way out of the obsolete countryside, fact that is driven by the global capitalist system. However, we should take into account that ultimately, land grabbing is a new way of colonialism; a charming way to put the land in a few hands dispossessing the majority of their means of living. Then, maybe we would understand that people are leaving their lives in the hands of third persons, and will therefore be dependent on the interests of others. How dangerous and exploitative this has proved to be throughout history? Land is a natural, finite resource and resources are life.

[116] “The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development”:
7. Annexes

7.1. Maps of Romania pinpointing the land grabbing case studies:
(the maps indicate the departments where land grabbers control land, not the exact locations and size)

**Generali / Geneagricola** (point 4.1 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Generali controls land:
Arad, Timiș

**Total:**
4,640 hectares of farmland

**Bardeau** (point 4.2 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Bardeau controls land:
Arad, Timiș, Caraș Severin, Argeș

**Total:**
21,000 hectares of farmland
+ 5,000 hectares of forest (joint venture)

**Padova Agricultura** (point 4.3 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Padova Agricultura controls land:
Brâila, Ialomița

**Total:**
4,820 hectares of farmland (paddies)
Riso Scotti
(point 4.4 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Riso Scotti controls land:
Olt, Dolj, Ialomiţa, Braşila

Total:
11,000 hectares of farmland

Tornator
(point 4.5 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Tornator controls land:
Braşov, Buzău

Total:
12,000 hectares of forest

Schweighofer
(point 4.6 from the report)

Regions in Romania, where Schweighofer controls land:
Argeş, Buzău, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Prahova, Suceava, Vâlcea

Total:
14,299 hectares of forest
### 7.2. The TOP 100 Recipients of agricultural subsidies in Romania:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>County / Department</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Foreign administrators</th>
<th>Foreign shareholders</th>
<th>Foreign parent company</th>
<th>Agricultural Land - ha - 2011 (2014)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brăila</td>
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<td></td>
<td>55539,62 (65000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vaslui</td>
<td>S.C. Comcereal S.A.</td>
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<td>27747,56 (47000)</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>S.C. InterAgro SRL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>19932,87 (55000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ilfov</td>
<td>Ajcoctc Baraganu Ialomita</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11120,79</td>
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<td>LU: Fri El International Holding SA</td>
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Georg Arnold

Austria: Hopfgartner
Christoph Franz | Austria: Kulterer
Stefan | Austria: Kulterer
Stefan | 3797,70 |
| 65 | Călărași | S.C. Mecaind Ulmeni SA | 3772,97 |
| 66 | Constanța | SC Argonaut SRL | 3684,70 |
| 67 | Prahova | SC Semina SA Albesti | 3662,52 |
| 68 | Vaslui | SA Agroind Berezeni | 3650,17 |
| 69 | Buzău | S.C. Afiliu Trans SRL | 3646,65 |
| 70 | Argeș | Kampo Nova SRL | Germany: Stahl Johannes
Germany: Becher Miriam | Germany: Becher Miriam | 3642,75 |
| 71 | Brașov | SC Carmolimp SRL | 3639,81 |
| 72 | Ilfov | SC Agrichim SRL Fetesti | 3546,01 |
| 73 | Alba | SC Transavía SA | 3505,53 |
| 74 | Iași | S.C. Agrocomplex Lunca Pascani SA | 3500,13 |
| 75 | Călărași | SC Agroserv Mariuta SRL | 3484,68 |
| 76 | Călărași | SC Agromixt Buciumeni SRL | 3484,30 |
| 77 | Dolj | S.C. Agrifarm S.R.L | Germany: Friedmann Andrea Lavislav
Germany: Famhra Beteiligungssellschaft GmbH

Czech Republic: Almos Agrar Handel Spol s.r.o. | 3471,17 |
| 78 | Argeș | SC Spicul Turcin SRL | 3462,03 |
| 79 | Neamț | SC Agri Farm SRL | Germany: Mosel Minnegard Constanze

Germany: Mosel Alfons Hermann

Germany: Almos Alfons Mosel Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH | 3355,72 |
| 80 | Teleorman | SC Agrotel 001 SA | 3263,68 |
| 81 | Tulcea | SC Anglo Rom Agriculture SRL | Italy: Gostner Thomas

Luxembourg: Fri El International Holding SA | Luxembourg: Fri El International Holding SA | 3232,00 |
| 82 | Timiș | SC Exim Agro Ovis M.P.S. SRL | 3252,80 |
| 83 | Timiș | SC Banat Beet SRL | Denmark: Werner Georg

Denmark: Aktiva Beteiligungs AG | 3232,00 |
| 84 | Galați | S.A. Dealul Covurlui | 3225,95 |
| 85 | Călărași | S.C. Gut SRL | Lebanon: Daher G. Gerges
Lebanon: Daher Hanna Edmond | 3191,64 |
<p>| 86 | Iași | SC Agrocom Strunga | 3190,93 |
| 87 | Bihor | SC Sadelli Prodcom SRL | 3190,69 |
| 88 | Buzău | SC Vis Agri SRL | 3175,60 |</p>
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Land is a natural, finite resource and resources are life!

A report by Eco Ruralis association in support of peasant farming