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## **Rural Development and Transition in Hungarian Agriculture**

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## **Introduction**

Rurality is an important characteristics of Hungarian society and economy. According to the OECD classification 62 percent of total area of Hungary is rural. Furthermore about of 74 percent of population live in rural area. Despite of these facts the importance of rural development is recognised only limited way. The purpose of this paper is to present a general description of economic dimension of rural development with special emphasis on agriculture. The first section of the paper briefly reviews the role of rural development in Hungarian policy arena. This is followed by a short account of the development in Hungarian agriculture during transition. The third section deal with the regional aspects of transition. Final section outlines some important issues from the EU accession point of view.

### **The role of rural development in Hungarian policy arena<sup>1</sup>**

Rural development in Hungary became a commonly used expression only a few years ago. Before that any type of spatial development was called spatial planning regional development later on. With the setting up of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development in 1990, regional development policies gained a separate institutional system. A Regional Development Fund (RDF) was also created. Next important step was in 1996 the adaptation of the 'Law on Regional Development and Physical Planning'. a new era started for regional development in Hungary. This legislation was assessed by the EU as the most progressive one in CEE, which is based on the most important principles of EU regulations (such as decentralisation, subsidiarity, additionality, partnership, etc.) and fulfils the requirements for accession (Commission 1997/2). This development was 'rewarded' by

the EU, through the 1996 Phare Budget, with a ECU 10 million fund, to help the development of regional (NUTS II) institutions and also regional identities through pilot programmes. Main objectives of the Act were (MERP 1996):

?? the moderation of the negative effects of the developing market economy in every regions, to improve economic conditions and the quality of life;

?? to create the conditions for self-sustaining development;

?? to reduce adverse differences between the Capital and the rest of the country, towns and villages, developed and disadvantaged regions;

?? to encourage initiatives by regional and local communities.

On the general election of June 1998 a new government was elected into the power. As a result of political negotiations the system of regional development was reformed. The leader of the smaller party of the coalition (Independent Smallholders' Party) became the Minister of Agriculture. At the same time overall responsibility for the resources and the co-ordination of regional development was given to this department. Its name was changed to *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)*. However, this is only the Hungarian name for it, the official English translation of the name of the department is *Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development*. This department is responsible for the preparation of strategic development plans on national, regional and county level as well. It is also responsible for the co-ordination of different ministerial departments concerning rural and regional development. Another important development was the creation of the position of the Minister without portfolio responsible for the co-ordination of Phare support for Hungary. In short, rural development became a part of agricultural policy.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is based on Ferto-Nemes (1999)

In 1990 the new conservative government faced the task of, simultaneously, coping with the crisis, the liquidating the socialist system of agriculture and building up a new agricultural system that would be able to adjust to the various market conditions. The official aims of agricultural policy were:

- ?? security of the high level of the food availability and development its quality,
- ?? sustaining and increasing export performance and production efficiency,
- ?? establishing mixed type farm structure and developing private farms.

From 1994 to 1998 was socialist-liberal government in Hungary, their main agricultural policy objectives were following:

- ?? developing agricultural export performance,
- ?? security of food availability at reasonable prices,
- ?? to ensure reasonable and foreseeable farm income,
- ?? to develop environmental friendly and healthy production technologies.

In 1997 government has begun to work out the new agricultural policy i.e. 'The Principles of National Agricultural Programme' (NAP). The first official version of the NAP was published in may by Ministry of Agriculture. The main aims of NAP were following.

- ?? the contribution of rural progress and hindering of depopulation process with coordination of regional development policy,
- ?? producing an ample supply of food at reasonable prices with good quality,
- ?? provision of competitive food export supply due to solving of balance of payment issues,
- ?? creating of chance to income parity for agricultural producers,

?? conservation and preservation of resources within framework of environmental policy.

NAP deal with rural development and agricultural employment in separate part. The aims of rural development policy are following. Improving of job opportunities and living conditions in rural areas. Preserving and maintaining of agricultural resources and development of conditions for sustainable agriculture. Preserving of cohesion of rural society and traditions of landscape and rural culture. The last version of NAP has decreased the role of rural development. There are two reason. First, large-scale agricultural lobby fears that owing of subsidies for rural development will decrease the direct agricultural support. Second, bureaucrats in agricultural ministry fear own positions for new institutional structure of ministry as well. Consequently in foreseeable future the role of rural development within framework of agricultural policy will be minimal.

In 1997 'The Law on the Development of Agriculture' was passed, which based on NAP. According to this law the aims of agricultural policy are:

- ?? increasing of production efficiency in interest of security of food availability
- ?? creating of proportional factor income parity in agriculture
- ?? contributing of improvement of rural progress
- ?? coordination between production and sustainable development in agriculture
- ?? development of human capital
- ?? to help agricultural innovation

The new conservative government in 1998 set similar agricultural policy objectives:

- ?? to increase of production and competitiveness

- ?? to help family farms
- ?? to propagate environmental friendly production technologies
- ?? to increase agricultural export performance
- ?? to develop R&D and education
- ?? rural development.

Comparing the agricultural policy objectives of different governments can be seen continuities and changes as well. The increase of export performance, food security and developing of production efficiency were important goals for all Hungarian governments after 1990. The main difference between conservative governments and socialist-liberal government was in the case of farm structure. The former one has preferred the family farms, latter one preferred the large-scale farms. The rural development in the framework of agricultural policy appeared only in 1997 in debate of the NAP. However, within agricultural policy rural development plays only limited role. In short, rural development is a relatively new and 'remote' topic in the Hungarian policy arena.

### **The development of Hungarian agriculture during transformation**

Simultaneously with political and economic changes in Hungary, the transformation of agriculture also began. The agricultural policy reforms were a part of a stabilisation programme. The agricultural policy reforms contained three main elements: price liberalisation and the cutting of agricultural subsidies; liberalisation of foreign trade; and land reforms. The period from 1990 to 1999 can be divided into two phases: the first was the time of transformation (1990-1993) and the second, one of consolidation and solid recovery (1994-1999). The experience of agricultural policy during the transformation

phase centered on building up the legal and institutional framework for the market economy.

The second, consolidation phase of agricultural policy has focused on three main problems. First, governments have tried to accelerate or to complete land reforms, and have attempted to consolidate land ownership relations, by amending land laws and co-operation laws. Second, they have stabilised the domestic agricultural market, by establishing a market regulation office, improving the activity of such institutions, and increasing production supports. Finally, steps have begun to harmonise the legal environment of agriculture to that of the EU.

### **The role of Hungarian agriculture in the economy**

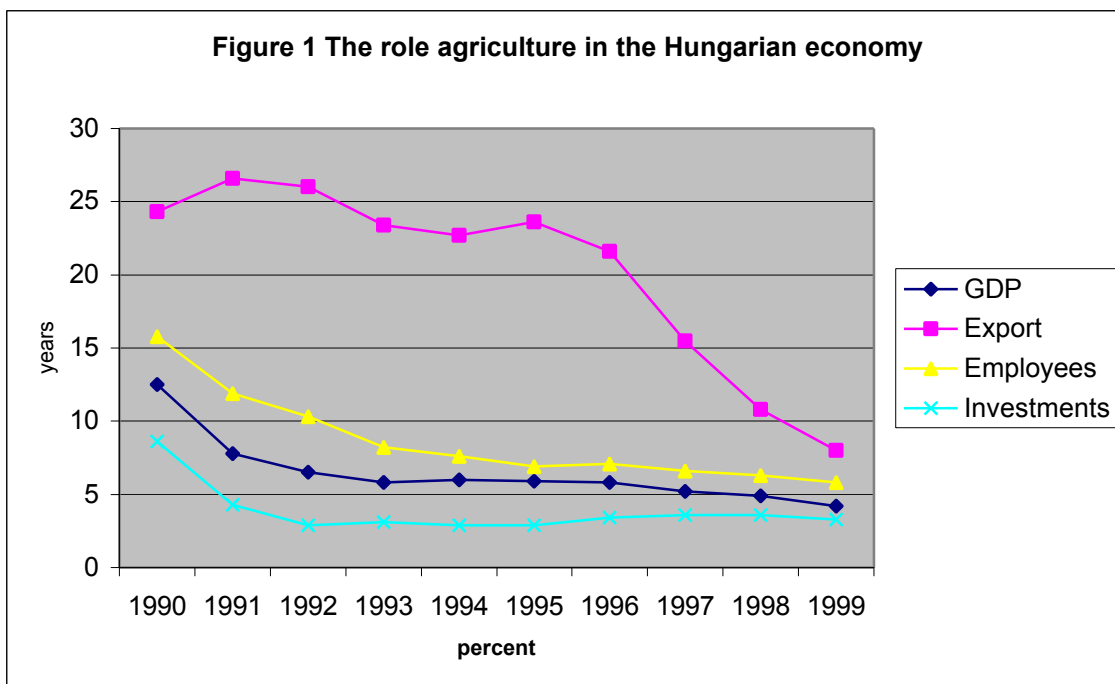
Before 1989, agriculture in Hungary, like other Eastern European countries, was characterised essentially by different types of distortions (Brooks et al., 1991). The structure of agricultural production exhibited extreme duality. The first group consisted of large scale farms: agricultural production co-operatives and state farms. In 1989 in Hungary there were about 1500 large-scale farms, which used 85 percent of the arable land. The average size of the area of large-scale farms was about 5000 hectares. These each employed on average, 540 persons. At the other extreme were the small-scale private farms. The average area of the 1.4 million private farms was 0.62 of a hectare. The efficiency of this agricultural system, was poor relative to industrial countries. The food processing, distribution and input supply was highly concentrated, characterised by pervasive state monopolies.

Simultaneously with political and economic changes in Hungary, the transformation of agriculture also began. As a consequence of it, Hungarian agriculture is not significant already in the national economy, its role has gradually been decreasing since 1986. The

performance of agriculture decreased, as shown by various economic indicators. Figure 1 shows the share of agriculture in GDP sharply declined between 1990-1993, then the reduction was only by 2 percent.

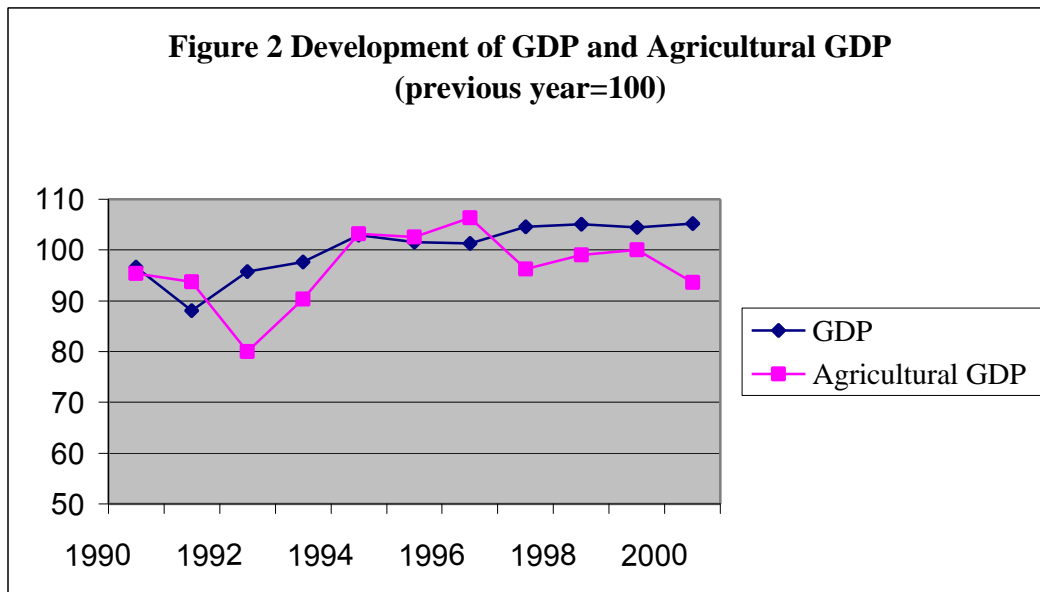
It is paradoxical that the proportion of agri-food export in total export was able to remain above 20 percent during first part of this period, and moreover was actually enhanced in the critical years (1991-1992). In 1993 a smaller share of agricultural production reached exports, and since then the performance of agricultural export gradually has declined. After 1995 the role of agricultural exports have decreased significantly. It can be explained by rapid growth in total export with stagnant agricultural exports.

The proportion of agricultural employment in total employment during this time also declined. The reduction of employment's share in agriculture was dramatic between 1990-1993, after that the proportion of employment has declined relatively slightly. At the end of the period agriculture's role in total active employment decreased below 6 percent, which ratio is close to the level of developed countries. The decrease however can be explained partly by the change of the methods in recording.



Sources: Agricultural Yearbook 2000, Central Statistical Office, 2001. Budapest

In the behind of the process described above a similar change in agricultural production can be found. Agricultural GDP between 1990-1993 continuously declined by about 28 percent. The reduction of agricultural production exceeded the decrease of GDP. From 1994 to 1996 however there was larger increase in agricultural production than in total economy. After 1996 the growth of agricultural GDP has stopped, whereas the GDP has continued to grow.



Source: Statistical Yearbook 2000, Central Statistical Office, 2001. Budapest

The numbers in agricultural employment also declined dramatically, especially in the first years of transition. More than 700 thousand people were out of agriculture. In 2000 there were 252 thousand people worked in agriculture which amounts to about 26 percent of the 1990 level. The number of active earners has started to increase recent years, but the decline of number in agricultural employees has continued slightly.

The value of agricultural trade fluctuated between 2 and 3 billions US dollar, and it was rather stagnant last years. However, after 1995 total exports has increased dynamically, consequently the share of agri-food export in total exports sharply decreased. Hungary signed an Association Agreement with European Union. Contrary to the expectation of trade theory, the share of the EU in total agricultural trade has fallen. But Hungary has a positive trade balance with EU, although it varies sharply from year to year. The trend of trade balance is decreasing in the nineties, but in every years exceeded 0.6 billion dollars. It must be noted that Hungary is only one country among Eastern European countries, which had positive agricultural trade balance continuously in the nineties.

## **The change of agricultural structure**

The number and distribution of registered corporations in agriculture changed radically in the period under scrutiny. Until 1989 the agricultural company system was characterised by a predominance of state farms and co-operatives. From 1990 to 2000, the total number of registered corporations grew by about six-fold. The corporation number raised at the different rates in the various company categories.

The category of (state) enterprise disappeared from 1996 owing to privatisation. The most dynamic growth was shown by business association forms, absent from agriculture before, such as limited liability and joint stock companies, making up about 40 percent of all agricultural corporations. The number of co-operatives increased continuously until 1995, but in the second half of decade their number fell by about 10 percent. Owing to the change of statistical accounting system the data about non-legal entity company are available only from 1995. During the last six years the number of non-legal entities company enhanced by about 27 percent. At the end of period analysed the share of limited liability and non-legal entity companies has reached about 72 percent of the all registered companies. These types of company probably are mainly small- or medium scale farms.

### **Table 1 Development of the Number of Registered Corporations in Agriculture 1990-2000<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Registered corporation: legally existing unit with tax number, figuring in the administrative register. In 1996 the statistical nomenclature changed, since this time data shows the number of active corporations. Active corporation: those enterprises, which had tax reports in the subject year or in preceding year (corporate tax, value added tax etc.) or which were established in the reference year, and the registered budgetary, social security non profit and Employees' Co-ownership Programme organization.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total	2112	2994	3308	4639	5547	9409	9639	10722	11210	11769	12565
o.w. enterprise company	171	150	122	91	36	33	-	-	-	-	-
o.w. ltd.	535	1309	1581	2575	3342	4263	4008	4729	4921	5159	5518
o.w. join-stock company	451	1212	1511	2434	3140	3636	3805	4516	4724	4909	5255
co-operative non-legal entity - company	39	40	41	109	171	186	191	204	197	242	259
	1405	1485	1605	1971	2048	2117	1930	1915	1715	1832	1886
	-	-	-	-	-	2996	3009	3154	3382	3669	3806

Sources: Statistical Monthly Bulletin 1990-1996, The Number of Economic Organisations 1997-1998, Central Statistical Office

The rapid growth of the number of agricultural companies and the radical decline of the number of agricultural workers led to a fundamental transformation in the size structure of agricultural companies. At the end of the eighties, approximately one-half of the agricultural organisations had more than 300 employees. This was mainly due to the fact that co-operatives performed many activities over and above their basic ones. More than 90 percent of the agricultural companies had a staff more than 50.

**Table 2 Distribution of the Agricultural Organisation by Number of Employees 1990-2000<sup>3</sup>**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
-10				1669	2420	3834	7256	8435	8958	9461	10228
11-20	413	1031	1471	991	1012	624	605	576	607	687	701
21-50	106	297	437	730	761	799	743	738	747	773	800
51-300	860	1060	1200	1188	1209	1061	963	906	817	794	760
301-	722	666	378	129	126	95	72	67	81	84	76
Total	2101	3054	3486	4707	5528	6413	9639	10722	11210	11769	12565

\*51-250,\*\*251-

Source: Statistical Monthly Bulletins 1990-1996, The Number of Economic Organisations 1997-1998, Central Statistical Office

By 2000, these proportions had changed. The largest group consists of corporations with a staff below 20, whose relative weight was about 87 percent in 2000 as a result of the more than 230-fold increase registered in this category. The number of 21 to 50 employees corporations also grew, with a share of 6 percent by 2000. The number of large-scale firms with more than 300 employees declined drastically, consequently their proportion became minimal. The share of companies above 50 workers has not reached the level of 7 percent in 2000.

As a consequence of transformation the former extreme duality of the Hungarian agricultural systems has been moderated considerable. One can distinguish three main types

<sup>3</sup> The main sources of the significant data difference for 1995 compare to previous table is that table 7 does not contain non-legal entity companies

of farms. The first there are what might we might call *industrial farms and co-operatives*. They stem from former state farms (currently joint-stock companies), co-operatives, newly established agricultural firms and they are mainly from the break up of co-operatives into smaller units. The most corporations with above 50 employees belong to this category. The important characteristics of these farms are based on hired labour and hierarchical organisational structure. Despite transformation, these corporations have remained predominant in Hungarian agricultural structure. They use about 40 percent of agricultural land and they have more than 100 thousand employees. The average area of these corporations was 1332 hectares in 2000.

The second type is the *private or family farm*. They arise from: (1) the lands from former co-operative members and state-farm employees; (2) beneficiaries by compensation; (3) members seceding from co-operatives with their land; and (4) a combination of the above. These farms are based on family labour (farmers and their family members) and some of them also employ full-time and seasonal hired labour. However it is difficult to determine the exact number of family farms. According to the last Agricultural Census (2000) there were 51 thousand private farms with above 10 hectares agricultural land.

On the other hand the number of registered private farmers is markedly less. In 2000 the number of registered agricultural entrepreneurs was 26.6 thousand. Moreover one can assume that non-legal entity companies are also family farms. Similarly, most of the active corporations below 10 employees can be private farms as well. The number of registered private farms is about 30-32 thousand. The large- and medium size private farms used about 12 percent of the agricultural land in 1998.

The third group is the *part-time farms*, which plays a traditionally significant role in Hungarian agricultural structure. There are two main types of part-time farms. First, the

agricultural households which produce basically for the markets. Some of them have specialised in particular commodities, e.g. pigs, fruits and vegetables. In 1997, 800 thousand people registered as a primary producers. According to last Agricultural Census there were 832 thousand private farms below 10 hectares agricultural land. It can be assumed that they are part-time farms. The most of them produce marketable surplus. The survey's results by Szijjarto (1996) have shown that the 40 percent of part-time farms produce for the market, this proportion was two-third in the case of retired part-time farmers. The second group can be called subsistence part-time farms. They are about 1 million. Their main production goal is reducing of household's expenditure. However, some of subsistence part-time farms sell their products depending on their surplus, seasonally on the local market. The data of Hungarian Households Panel shows that between 1992-1994 the share of subsistence households increased from 34.4 percent to 44.4 percent (Speder, 1994). The growing role of subsistence is confirmed by some regional studies (Speder, 1997). However, a research by Laki (1996) has shown that in particular regions, surprisingly, agricultural production is not a part of survival strategy for rural unemployment.

### **Regional aspects of transition**

The 'shock of late modernity' resulted in a deep crisis of Hungarian rurality. The collapse of heavy industry and the rural 'branch plant economy' put an end to the previously wide spread industrial commuting of rural population. At the same time agricultural output decreased significantly in both large-scale and small size production. All this resulted in the sharp increase of rural unemployment and a decline of possibilities for pluriactivity. Rural areas and rural economy in general was missed out even from the slow recovery of national economy after 1994. As a consequence of it, one can be found significant regional disparity among different regions of Hungary.

The main question for policy makers is: how does government create jobs in remote areas? In general, there are two basic barriers for rural development policy: the level of infrastructure and the level of local people education. To illustrate the importance of these issues we present two examples. A recent study by Kertesi (2000) has shown that transport to the workplace is unsolved for about one-third of rural population. There are 1000-1200 villages, where commute is too much burden for population. However it is not depend on education level of local people. There is evidence that low educated people can get job, if they live in a village with good transport connection.

Last decade Hungary is one of the most important target for FDI in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The country has the highets per capita FDI stock in the region. In 1998 it possessed about 22 percent of total FDI stock of the 14 Central and Eastern European countries. However there is substantial regional concentration of FDI inflows, namely in the capital's region and in some counties of near Budapest and along the Austrian border. Results by Fazekas (2000) suggest that the regional distribution of FDI inflows is sharply influenced by the education level of the local people, the externalities of urban agglomeration and the geographical location of regions. Also, additional advantages are indentified of those region adjoining the Western Slovakian, Austrian and Slovenian borders. Fazekas (2000) has stressed that a self-reinforces process can be observed. FDI is attracted to regions where unemployment is lower due to better education level and geographical advantages, while an increase in FDI in turn creates new job opportunities.

### **Enlargement issues for Hungary**

The EU enlargement can be affected on Hungarian agriculture and rural areas several ways. This section deals with two important policy issues: problems of direct payments and setting up of rural development institutions.

Agenda 2000 does not foresee an increase in agricultural expenditure as a result of enlargement. It follows from this implicitly that direct payments will not be extended to new Member countries. The usual justification of this dual treatment in direct payments is that farmers in the prospective new member countries will not suffer any price declines, but rather price increases, hence no reason why they should receive compensation. This approach has a number of serious shortcomings (Knaster, 1999). First, it is not compatible with the principles of the Single Market. Second, it would result in unfair competition among farmers in the West and East, because they would receive different prices for the same products. Third, it could be attacked on the grounds of experiences in previous enlargements. For example, farmers in the EFTA countries received payments upon accession to the EU. Furthermore, farmers in East Germany also receive direct payments, although their prices increased. Finally, it can be argued that new farmers in the EU are also eligible for direct payments, even if they were not in business at the time of the reform

But the real rationale of the dual treatment is the fear that the expansion of direct payment would strongly increase budget costs of the CAP. This option is based on following arguments. Agricultural prices at the farm gate and the level of agricultural protection are significantly lower in the CEE countries than in the EU. If the CAP instruments including price supports and direct payments were applied in CEE countries at the current (or reform) levels, agricultural supply would sharply rise, while at the same time food demand would fall due to low income in these countries. It would result in large additional surpluses from the new member countries, consequently the costs of the CAP would increase as well, including additional export subsidies.

This argument is built upon certain critical assumptions. First, that agricultural supply in CEE countries is highly price elastic. Second, that price gaps between the EU and the CEE countries would remain considerable until accession. Third, that applying price support and

direct payment would result in simultaneous changes in producer prices and consumer prices. Finally, this approach presumes homogenous producers.

However, these assumptions are not necessarily valid for Hungary's agriculture<sup>4</sup>. Recent development of Hungarian agriculture indicates that the price elasticity of supply is not as high as it is usually assumed in various studies. Furthermore, the price gaps between the EU and Hungary have decreased significantly in the nineties; in fact, they have disappeared for some products. Price transmissions among different stages within the food supply chain are also imperfect. Increases in producer prices do not lead automatically to similar changes in consumer prices. This price behaviour is reinforced by imperfect market structures in the food industry and in food retailing which developed in recent years. Consequently, integration of Hungary's agriculture into the CAP will not necessarily result in significant price increases at producer and consumer levels.

The impacts of the CAP will be different on various producer groups. The results of various studies about the competitiveness of Hungarian agriculture suggest that crop production will probably remain internationally competitive, especially in the case of larger farming companies and co-operatives. However, animal husbandry will be worse off, but private farms over 15 hectares might be competitive.

The effects of the eastern enlargement of the EU on Hungarian agriculture depend strongly on whether Hungarian farmers will receive compensatory payments. Impact studies often assume that extending the CAP fully to Hungary would prompt much larger agricultural surpluses, but this is by no means certain.

Hungary should prepare the institutional system and Hungarian rurality in general for the absorption of EU policies and financial help expected in the future. However, it is not clear how will the EU rural development policy develop.

First option is that the country can become a lagging follower of trends in EU development policies. This means the building of a quite centralised institutional system, the introduction of previous and current EU objectives and models of development together with their shortcomings. The requirement of additionality would tie the national resources also to the objectives projected by the EU. Most of proposed measures for regional development in CEE aim institution and infrastructure building. These policies, besides helping local economic development, open up CEE markets for the export of goods and capital of the current EU15, therefore they are in the straight economic interest of the core countries of the EU. At the same time, according to previous experiences, the limitations of EU budget for structural policies barely allow the compensation of distortions caused by the common market. For the significant reduction of the development gap between core and periphery a much higher proportion of redistribution of GDP would be needed<sup>5</sup>. Although the general economic state of Hungary would probably advance as a result of EU structural operations, it can be accompanied with increasing regional differences within the country. This would probably have the worst effects on the most lagging rural areas.

An alternative scenario could be to go ahead of the present EU system on the path of recent progressive trends of philosophy (bottom up approach). On this way CEE could become a testing ground of integrated development policies. This would allow a more efficient use of endogenous and exogenous resources and a more balanced development of the country. This outcome, giving a legitimate basis for a European wide spread of these policies, could turn out advantageous for all the rural areas of the enlarged EU and for an integrated rural development approach in general. However, to reach such an outcome, a lot of conditions should be fulfilled. Clear strategic thinking and a strong co-operation between experts and representatives of different sectors and different countries of Central and Eastern Europe would be an essential precondition, for example. Although, there are intentions for co-

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<sup>4</sup> More detailed argument see Fertó (2001)

operation between CEE countries concerning EU enlargement, such an approach does not seem very probable in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>5</sup> As it was made clear in Agenda 2000, the EU do not assume full responsibility for the modernisation of the applicant countries.

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