

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis we mentioned that the problem that we wanted to address was that of the agricultural sector of the new Member States of the European Union (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia). Their agriculture has suffered a lot because of their historical background, which has left them many economic, political, and social consequences; some of those are obstacles in their way to success. It is true that the European Union has provided with the conditions necessary in order to help these countries break with that past and to secure their agricultural future, but there is still much to be done. It is hard to know why Eastern Europe has always been backward in comparison with Western Europe, because it has suffered the consequence of being labeled as not having efficient economy, or because the communist influence for more than 40 years affected these countries deeply, or because of the weather and geographical conditions or maybe there is nothing specific.

The challenge then comes from both sides: the Eastern European Members and the European Union. “The Common Agricultural Policy has been the biggest, the most contentious and the one with the largest budget of all the Union’s policy areas. The EU has more power in agricultural policy than it has in any other policy area and it has passed more legislation on agriculture than in any other single policy area” (Unknown Author I).

The number of farmers and the cultivated area of the European Union have grown a lot with the accession of the ten new Member States. The European Union now includes some 11 million farmers that are given the opportunity to benefit from all of what the CAP offers them. It is true that they will have to work a lot, even more than they were used to in order to be able to compete and not be left apart, they will have to

put more attention to the quality of their job in order to be able to offer good products that can compete in the free market of the European Union. These countries have been helped since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and now it is their turn to use all the tools that are given to them and work hard for the improvement of their own future and standards of living, which is what the CAP seeks for their farmers.

Considering the situation described, we demonstrated the following hypothesis: The Eastern European countries that were admitted into the European Union in 2004 are not ready to compete with the other European Union countries in the agricultural sector, because of their inefficient socio-economic structure; however, in the long term and with special assistance from the institutions of the European Union they will be able to have similar agricultural standards.

To demonstrate that hypothesis, in the first chapter we did a recount of the historical events that have shaped those countries until the present days. We talked about communism and how it affected and influenced these countries in such a way that the legacy is still present. We talked about Eastern Europe as a region with special characteristics, languages, religions, geography and history. We also mentioned the different leaders that influenced that period of time and how the communist regimes affected the lives of the people, making them fearful and insecure. We made reference to the oppression and lack of liberties the people suffered; nevertheless, we also mentioned the good things that the communist offered and that those are things some people feel nostalgic for.

In the third part of the first chapter we talked about the fall of the communism, how it happened and what came after it. The transition phase began thanks to the people's complaints, Gorbachev's reforms, Yeltsin's takeover and the influence of personalities like Pope John Paul II and Lech Wallesia. Many reforms happened fast in

order to change the politics and economy of the communist regimes to new capitalist democracies. The transition period for some of the citizens of these countries was hard, but for some others it was something that they were expecting for a long time.

On the last part of the first chapter we mentioned the big role the Agriculture has in these countries, since they are predominantly rural and because their agriculture suffered a lot during the communist years as a result of the collectivization process that started with Stalin. We also talked about the difference there exists between a farmer of Western Europe and a Peasant of Eastern and Central Europe, the importance these peasants give to their land and their job and what it represents to their families. At last, we made reference to the agricultural conditions in the past and the expectations for the future.

In the second chapter we make reference to the Common Agricultural Policy that is the part of the European Union that corresponds to agriculture. We talked about how the CAP first started and why and also how it works and the reforms it has had. We now know that the CAP first started because of the bad situation that all the countries of Europe suffered from at the end of World War II, especially in the matter of food shortages. The idea was never to suffer from food scarcity again, and the only way to avoid that was through cooperation and opening of the markets. Once those countries realized they needed the CAP, they also knew that the member countries needed to offer their farmers better standards of living, as well as economic aid to encourage them to keep working the land in despite of the bad conditions that predominated in this area. The CAP came into existence in 1962, and it is nowadays the area that absorbs most of the European Union budget. We also mentioned the articles that make reference to the agricultural policy as they were first introduced in the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

The second part of chapter two described the way in which the CAP works: which are the main political bodies in charge of it, and how they function. On the third part of this chapter we talked about the recent reforms that the CAP has had, and why they had them. At the end of this chapter we talked about the recent enlargement the European Union and how they prepared for it. In this section we mentioned the help these countries received in order to be ready to accede to the European Union. We also talked about the problems that agriculture faces in those countries, which have become a challenge for the future.

On the last chapter of this thesis we talked about the challenge of the enlargement in the agricultural sector, all the good things and bad things that it represents for these countries and for the European Union. We specified one by one, the pros and cons of becoming part of the European Union and on what things either the European Union or the new Member States would have to work harder and pay more attention to. With all the data given in this last chapter, the reader had the chance of making conclusions and consider if our hypothesis was proved or not.

We also mentioned the role of the farmers and governments and how aid will be given; this, in order to analyze if it is going to be used in a good way. We also asked the question of the capabilities of these farmers in order to compete with their counterparts and the will to do it. Also, we mentioned the backwardness these countries suffer in their agricultural sector specifying which areas are most affected. It must be mentioned that not everything represents a challenge; there are also many good things that were mentioned and that are already visible in these countries.

The topic of this thesis is very recent, and for some of the uncertainties about the matter, time will give the answer. What we wanted to show are the agricultural

conditions all these countries have at this moment, as well as the aid being given to them, so that we could show what we think will be the perspectives for the future.

After all, we concluded that the arguments that are given throughout this thesis show that our hypothesis has been proved because, even though this enlargement brings with it many benefits for both parts, it also represents many challenges that as has been shown, will not be that easy to overcome. Their history is a heavy weight they still carry over their shoulders, and the transition period was so intense that it will take them at least another 10 years to recover and be completely confident about their democracies and their capitalist ideology. As we mentioned in the first chapter, maybe the fall of the communist regimes did happen, but not all the legacies disappeared with it. Some of these countries, as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, that were once part of the Soviet Union, did not only had to deal with the recovery of their identity, but they also had to deal with the new type of external influence over them that is now the European Union.

It is amazing to see how fast they accomplished to enter the European Union, and even though we know they did it thanks to the big support it has been given to them, we also know they have done a really good work and they are still doing it. A study made by the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture called “Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy – medium-term prospects for agricultural markets and income in the European Union: 2003-2010” that was made in December 2003 gives as a conclusion that a medium-term perspective for agricultural sector as a whole in these countries is positive. Sector income should rise around 35% by 2010 (Unknown Author XIV).

What these countries need to do is to focus on what they want to accomplish, they have now entered the free market of the European Union and that means they will have to compete with other 7 million farmers (there are 11 million farmers in the

enlarged European Union). The European Union is giving them the tools to help themselves and improve their food quality standards, their animal health issues and their environmental problems. If the agricultural sector of these countries makes the decision to use those tools, they can end up enjoying the opportunities the European Union is offering them.

They will have to cooperate and coordinate themselves since one of their main problems is that the land is divided in so many little pieces of land that the sizes of the land that each farmer has sometimes is not big enough to raise crops for anyone else than for themselves. They also have to improve their farming techniques and let the technology in. If they want to be able to compete in a capitalist free market they will have to see their land as a mean of work and business, and not as something that is inherited and that has more sentimental than monetary meaning.

We conclude this thesis by saying that, if these countries keep the track they have been following, it will just be a matter of time before they reach the same level as the other European Union members. The way in which they make good use of the transition time and take advantage of the opportunities given will show them the way to success. Their history, as we already mentioned, will always be there, the idea is not letting it be an obstacle for a successful future.