A FOOD SECURITY ANALYSIS IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT

O ANALIZĂ A SECURITĂȚII ALIMENTARE DIN ROMÂNIA ÎN CONTEXT EUROPEAN

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Abstract: *The paper attempts to approach the complex issue of food security for the population in Romania, in the present context, that is characterized by many challenges, both at European and global level. It is underlined that although the food security of the EU countries has no longer been a problem with regard to food availability, this became a strategic concern and priority under the future Common Agricultural Policy. The paper also evaluates the food security from Romania both from the perspective of available domestic agricultural supply and from the perspective of population's access to food, which is conditioned by incomes as well as by prices. The main conclusion of the paper is that in Romania there are social categories with high food insecurity risk, as a result of the very low purchasing power of the families with many members, with many children in particular and of the increased social polarization.*

Key words*: food security, Romania*
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INTRODUCTION

The population's food security is a complex socio-economic concept. It depends both on the agricultural sectoral policies and on the general macro-economic framework, on the income distribution policies, on the social, fiscal, commercial, price policies, etc. Food security presupposes the availability of the agri-food supply, on one hand, which is conditioned by the domestic agricultural production, by the conjuncture of world markets, by prices and commercial policies, by the option to import foodstuffs and by the existence of financial resource for this. In the second place, ensuring food security for the population implies ensuring access to

food, on a permanent basis and for all the population, which presupposes the existence of purchasing power or on other words of incomes, mainly for the poor population, with high nutritional risk. The third factor that influences the food security refers to the individual behaviour with regard to buying food and food consumption, as food security is a problem of families and individuals in the last instance. While governments, by the economic, social and food policies they promote, ensure the general conditions for the population to have available foodstuffs and the necessary incomes to buy them (availability and access), this problem is however approached at the level of families and at individual level. In this respect, there are frequent situations when, even in the richest countries, where food security has been no longer a problem for a long time, there are communities and people subject to food insecurity or to high nutritional risk.

The most representative indicator for the evaluation of food security at global level is food production per capita, which is generally expressed by kcal/capita and represents the daily food consumption per capita expressed in nutritive terms. This indicator practically reflects food availability at global level. Any deterioration of food availability, generated by the insufficient agricultural supply or by the utilization of agricultural raw materials for other purposes than food, as well as the increase of prices and their high volatility can produce disequilibria, with negative effects upon the food situation, mainly in the poor countries of the world. Food insecurity exists when the access to the basic foodstuffs cannot be achieved without a significant material sacrifice. In quantitative terms, the minimum food consumption recommended by FAO is 2000 kcal/capita/day for women and 2500 kcal/capita/day for men, but these minimum consumptions are quite different depending on the geographical area, the type of activity, the consumers' age, etc.

METHODOLOGY

The study identifies the representative indicators for the evaluation of the main dimensions of the population's food security and contains concrete quantifications of the food security at European level and in Romania, with reference to the different socio-economic categories of the population in our country.

The domestic agricultural production capacity to ensure sufficient food quantities to cover the population's consumption needs is evaluated by calculating the food self-sufficiency at EU level and in Romania. According to the statistical methodology Eurostat, the food self-sufficiency (Gapr) is calculated for the main agricultural products, for a reference period (usually one year), according to the formula:

Gapr = Pint/Da *100

Da = Availability of supply

Da = Pint + I – E – (Vs)

I = Import, E = Export, Pint = Domestic production,

Vs = Stock at the end of the year – Stock at the beginning of the year

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. European food security framework

The food security concerns of the European Union became more and more frequent during the debates on the future Common Agricultural Policy in the horizon 2014-2020 and they are used as an argument in favour of maintaining CAP as a strong and integrated policy. In this respect, the European Commission's Communication from June 2011 with the title "The CAP towards 2020: meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future" establishes that food security for the population must represent the most important CAP objective. Placing the food security issue in the foreground and its transformation into a "hot" issue took place as a result of agricultural world markets volatility and apparently uncontrollable increase of food prices. Food security in EU-27 regards both the availability of the agricultural and food supply and the population's access to food in different regions and social categories. The problem of food availability was not a core issue for the European Union as aggregate, not even at the moment when the Union was established, in early '60s. In the meantime, the Union became one of the great agricultural powers in the world, with top positions on the cereal markets (mainly in wheat), in meat and dairy products, wines, fruit, etc. The agricultural resources of the European Union are also important, and in the case of a food crisis, additional agricultural resources could be mobilized that should lead to food

self-sufficiency. In the last 50 years, the food consumption per capita constantly increased in the EU member states, the share of foodstuffs in the population's consumption expenses decreased, and the medium-term forecasts indicate that agricultural production will constantly increase, even though the financial package for direct payment subsidies decreases. The relative food prices are low if we compare them to the population's incomes, and the average share of food expenses in the consumption expenses is about 16% in the European Union. At the same time, the Union's dependence on the extra-Community agricultural imports is relatively low. The extra-Community trade with agricultural products has a relatively low share in the agricultural supply of EU-27. In total agricultural production value in current prices, the imports represented about 22% and the exports 19% in the year 2009. The European Union is self-sufficient in most foodstuffs necessary for its population's consumption and we shall next present some information on the self-sufficiency level of the Union in Table 1.

Table 1

The European Union's self-sufficiency level for the main agricultural products (%)

	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Wheat	103.5	100.4	101.8	119.3
Barley	110.0	106.8	111.7	120.5
Maize	102.1	92.3	75.4	104.3
Rice	71.9	68.2	65.4	65.4
Sugar	115.7	104.8	92.9	84.7
Sunflower	80.0	103.0	104.0	97.0
Soy bean	6.0	8.0	5.0	5.0
Wine	128.9	111.7	117.5	114.7
Pork	107.0	108.6	107.2	108.3
Beef/baby beef	96.2	96.7	95.4	98.5
Chicken meat	102.9	103.1	100.5	101.2
Sheep/goat meat	78.5	77.7	80.0	78.9

Source: Agriculture in the EU – Statistical and Economic Information Report 2010, CE Agriculture and Rural Development

Among the investigated products, we found that soybean has the lowest self-sufficiency level, which results in high imports in the case of this product (oilcakes and other concentrated feed included). At the same time, we can notice relatively systematic deficits in the sheep and goat meat, beef and rice, yet not significant. Hence apparently there are no problems, the European Union has no problems in ensuring the necessary foodstuffs for its population, it has a high quality agricultural potential, supported by strict environmental policies, a relatively stable agricultural production, an agro-processing sector at high quality standards, enough financial resources to be mobilized for food imports in case of crisis.

2. Food security in Romania

The food security issue was a permanent concern in Romania in the last century, even though Romania is one of the European countries with the largest agricultural land areas in Europe, thus having significant agricultural resources. Romania's agricultural land share in EU-27 is significant, i.e. 8% of the EU arable land (5th position after France, Spain, Germany and Poland) and 8% of the area under permanent pastures (also the 5th position after Great Britain, Spain, France and Germany).

In the analysis of food security in Romania, we must differentiate between the objective information and people's subjective perception. Thus, at present, when the nostalgia of the past acquires a particular emphasis, we must underline that in Romania, the population's food situation experienced problems (some of them critical problems) throughout the last century. After the year 2000, once the economic growth was resumed, the incomes have increased each year, and the food consumption increased both in quantity and in quality. Unfortunately, the agro-processing industry was not prepared to satisfy the Romanians' increasingly sophisticated food demand, so that the imports of processed food products increased each year, to reach a maximum in the year 2008 (imports worth over 4 billion euro for food and beverages). In this context, we ask ourselves whether the Romanians' worries in relation to food security are justified by objective reasons or they represent a prolongation of the frustration and fear of the past generations with regard to food procurement. In the present period, when the world is facing strong prices and agricultural markets volatility, and the economic crisis has negatively affected the population's incomes, in Romania

inclusively, the food security issue is again brought to the foreground, and certain studies conducted at world level indicate that our country is one of the countries with a relatively high vulnerability level.

If we investigate the self-sufficiency level for the main agricultural products in our country, we can notice that there are products in which there are systematic deficits, and these have to be covered by imports from foreign markets. As it can be seen from Table 2, in Romania, among the main food products, it is only in milk and dairy products that the self-sufficiency level has relatively constant levels, around 100%. The cereal supply is quite volatile, different from one year to another, from 144% in the year 2004 to 50% in 2007. The other investigated products are constantly under 100%, and the population's consumption needs have to be covered by imports. Among these, we mention the pork and poultry meat, fruit, sugar, in which the deficits are systematic.

Table 2

Romania's self-sufficiency in the main agricultural products (%)

Years	Cereals	Vegetables	Fruit	Dairy	Meat
2003	86.4	96.1	99.3	99.7	84.2
2004	144.7	97.9	96.2	99.8	79.8
2005	114.1	105.4	78.7	100.0	74.6
2006	97.2	92.2	73.9	100.7	67.8
2007	50.8	79.6	73.7	96.9	66.6
2008	123.7	88.2	77.5	95.6	70.7
2009	115.8	93.1	83.6	99.3	72.1

Source: Disponibilităţile de consum alimentar ale populaţiei, INS

The population's possibility to buy food to meet the food demand obviously depends on the population's purchasing power, and it conditions the access to food. As we know, in the period 2004-2008, Romania experienced quite a significant economic growth, and this was also reflected in the population's incomes and consumption. However, beyond the relatively positive effect of the income growth upon food consumption (although incomes began to decrease in the year 2009) we must not overlook the great disparity of incomes in Romania, which has been aggravated in recent years. In the year 2008, GDP per capita at purchasing

power parity represented 29% in the Region North-East and 36% in the Region South-West, compared to the EU average, while in the Region Bucharest –Ilfov it accounted for 113% of the same average. The low incomes generate a high share of food consumption expenses in total consumption expenses, as food consumption is a basic need of people and that is why the food demand responds to the income decreases in an inelastic modality. In the year 2009, the average share of food consumption expenses in the consumption expenses was 44.2% (the highest in the EU), to reach 59% on the farmers' households, these being considered the poorest in Romania according to this criterion. According to the Integrated Household Survey, in the year 2009, the average consumption per capita was 2487 calories, slightly up compared to the previous year. The recommended number of calories would be 2000 calories for women and 2500 for men, but these levels are only orientative, the necessary of calories being much higher in the case of children, pregnant women or under low temperature conditions, etc. If we examine the food consumption expressed in nutritional factors in the families with many children or with low incomes, we can notice that these are quite close to the minimum level. The most dramatic situation is found on the households with many children, where the consumption level gets close to 2000 calories/person and it is obvious that children need much more than this.

CONCLUSIONS

a) At the European Union level, food security is not threatened in the present period, at least because the European agricultural production can ensure its self-sufficiency in most agricultural products. However, if we take into consideration the development gaps, we can notice that there are countries in which food insecurity may become a problem in the years to come, under the background of foreign debt, which limits the capacity to import food products and of the instability of domestic agricultural productions.

b) Following the investigation of food security situation in Romania, we can notice a high vulnerability level. If we analyze the food availabilities of our country, we can find that the domestic agricultural production is subject to

instability and thus may provide reasons to worry both for the population and for the decision-makers.

c) There are also food security vulnerabilities induced by low incomes and absence of purchasing power, for certain social categories, among which the families with many members, with many children or with low incomes, from the areas that are considered poverty poles. The highly unequal distribution of incomes and the amplification of social polarization in recent years have amplified these undesired realities.

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