

UDC 323.233:316.334.55(497.5)  
Conference paper

## Articulation of the Croatian Farmers Interests Through Protests

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**SUMMARY** Since early 90s, the Croatian peasantry has undergone significant changes caused by the processes of erosion of the family farms reproductive ability which started earlier but were then intensified by war and transition from socialist to capitalist economy. The effect of these changes was essentially worsened peasants' social status and quality of life. The first attempt of the organized farmers' activity through the Farmers' Association of Croatia did not have any significant success. The Croatian Farmers' Association, founded in February 1999 upon the initiative of the Croatian Peasant Party, has been the most successful in articulation of farmers' interests. It has organized a number of farmers' protests out of which the one held at the end of June and the beginning of July 1999 attracted the greatest media's attention.

In this paper<sup>1</sup> the authors examine the results of the research in the farmers' attitude towards the protests comparing them with the students of agronomy and agricultural experts' opinions on this issue. The research results show that unlike students of agronomy and agricultural experts, the farmers approve the blocking of roads as a method of protest. There is, however, almost unanimous consent of all three groups of respondents about highly unfavourable economic position of Croatian farmers, and in particular their reputation in society, about the fact that the farmers' position is getting relatively worse and that there has been a general dissatisfaction with the current agricultural policy. And more, the government hasn't provided motivative instrumentary adequate to the farmers current position and the internationally open market of agricultural products and food. The authors have also established that the farmers' economic and social position and the current agricultural policy has been more favourably judged by the farmers who had completed secondary school or junior college and who earn more than by those with

<sup>1</sup> This paper is partially prepared version presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference 2003, *Work, Leisure and Development in Rural Europe Today*, Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland, 18.-22. August 2003.

lower education and lower income. Or more accurately, the present research has confirmed the connection between the family farm reproductive ability and its head's attitudes – along with the family farms reproductive ability increases the rate of their heads who consider the farmers' economic position and social reputation better.

*Key words:* farmers' protest, farmer organizing, status of farmers, Croatia.

*Received on:* 29<sup>th</sup> of October, 2004

*Accepted on:* 19<sup>th</sup> of November, 2004

## 1. Introduction

Since early 90s, during the period of transition, the Croatian agriculture has undergone significant changes. Three key events affected the rate, scope, and content of the changes. Firstly, the transition from socialist to capitalist economy; secondly, gaining sovereignty from the legal, political and economic system of the former Yugoslavia; and thirdly, the 1991-1995 war which incurred enormous human and physical damage and slowed down the necessary changes. At the end of the war, Croatian farmers who were affected by war damage more than other social groups, confronted with numerous problems such as unfair competition, lacking quality market infrastructure, no adequate credit and incentive instruments.

Unlike some other transition European countries, Croatia had private family farms although the so called socially-owned sector of agriculture accounted for more than half of the national product from agriculture already in mid-eighties (Žimbrek, Brkić and Kolega, 1990). The family farms were, however, integrated in the sector through their cooperation with agri-businesses, processing industry, and cooperatives. Being a peripheral social and political group, pushed to the margins in different ways although they ideologically belonged to the proletariat and had an alliance with the workers, the farmers were treated as objects rather than subjects and equal partners.

The 1995 Croatian Agriculture Development Strategy gives family farming a primary role in development of agriculture. The »socially-owned« land that belonged to the state-owned farms and agri-businesses became a state property in 1991. It was offered to the former agri-businesses and family farms for concession or lease. Numerous attempts to privatize and transform large agri-businesses into successful companies have not given adequate results. The struggle between the remaining workers in agri-businesses and the farmers became bitter.<sup>2</sup> In such a struggle, not even the basic rules are observed. The Croatian farmers do not re-

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<sup>2</sup> During the last ten years of the last century, number of employees in the socially-owned agricultural sector decreased from forty thousand to only thirteen thousand.

member that they have ever been in such a difficult situation. Insufficiently organized and inadequately represented, they express their dissatisfaction in different ways, even by blocking the roads to exert pressure and thus initiate resolving of their problems.

During this period of transition, Croatian farmers started to organize and create their collective identity that gives them a collective power, which is of particular importance for articulation of their interests (Brkić, 1999; Brkić, Tratnik and Bobanac, 2001). Self-confidence must come from the inside. An individual is becoming a subject in his own life. »People must become aware of their power and their contribution to the society which should result in confidence and improved self-image« (Pettersen and Soldbakken, 1998: 322). »Protests are vent for frustration of oppressed social groups and first of all they are exterior pressure on the public opinion and authorities« (Berlan, 1986: 289). Although frequent tractor road blocks have a considerable impact on the traffic, the farmers have a right to express »their dissatisfaction« and it is up to the other side to eliminate the causes of disorders« (Milinković, 2000). The farmers expressed their dissatisfaction in the largest numbers late in June and early July in 1999 when about 100,000 farmers with 35,000 tractors blocked the roads in the Slavonia region for a couple of days.<sup>3</sup> The events were carefully covered by the media. The protests were referred to as the farmers' rebellion, peasants' uprising, and the like. The farmers' riots were linked to the difficult situation in agriculture and dissatisfaction of people earning their daily bread in this sector.<sup>4</sup> These protests have certainly significantly helped the opposition to win the elections by winning over the rural electorate that has earlier been strongly supporting the ruling Croatian Democratic Union.

## 2. Level of Croatian Farmers' Organization

The peasants rebelled frequently in the past. The reasons for those rebellions were mostly connected with various forms of payment and rents which they had to give to landlords and church (Adamček, 1980; Gross, 1981; Mendras, 1984). The history of Croatian peasantry was particularly burdened with farmers' revolts and rebellions, like the most famous ones the Peasants' rebellion of Matija Gubec and Peasants' uprising of Matija Ivanić.

Paradoxally the causes for farmers' rebellions recently were connected with government's debts towards them and with the measures of agricultural policy. Through prices and various forms of subventions, the state endeavored to strengthen farmers competitiveness and to reduce disparity income between farm and non-farm labor.

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<sup>3</sup> The data reported at the press conference of the Croatian Farmers' Association on July 7, 1999, acc. to the Croatian Radio, July 7, 1999, news at 5 p.m.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Ivan Perić, *Hrvatska ljevica* journal, vol. VI, no. 9/1999, p. 7.

During the last ten years numerous political, professional and union organizations, associations, and societies have been organized in Croatia. In 1998, powerful specialized producers had over 320 professional agricultural organizations although »a part of these organizations exist rather formally than actively« (Žutinić, Svrznjak, 1999.).

The Farmers' Association of Croatia (*Savez seljaka Hrvatske*) was founded already in 1988. Its name was changed into the Croatian Farmers' Society (*Udruženje hrvatskih seljaka*) in 1990, and it has worked more or less successfully ever since. Early in 1990, the Croatian Farmers' Association (*Hrvatski seljački savez*) was founded under the auspices of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka – HSS*). The Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica – HDZ*) has organized its Stjepan Sulimanac Rural Society (*Zajednica sela »Stjepan Sulimanac«*). Since early 2000, the Federation of the Slavonia and Baranja Farmers' Associations (*Zajednica udruga seljaka Slavonije i Baranje*) has been active within the Democratic Center party (*Demokratski centar – DC*). The Sociodemocratic Party of Croatia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske – SDP*) has its Rural Forum (*Forum sela SDP*). The Association of the Family Farms of the Đakovo Region is also active today. The Croatian Citizen-Peasant Party's (*Hrvatska građanska seljačka stranka*) program is also focusing on farming population and agricultural issues, but its influence is rather marginal.

There have been numerous attempts of the farmers to organize a united farmers' association that would advocate their interests. When the Croatian Farmers' Association was founded, that was set up as an objective, but the Association never departed from the framework of the Croatian Peasant Party activities.<sup>5</sup> On the eve of the parliamentary elections of January 3, 2000, the president of the Croatian Farmers' Association Ivan Kolar offered support to a coalition of four parties (Croatian Peasant Party, Liberal Party, Croatian People's Party and Istrian Democratic Parliament) and the Croatian Workers' Association.<sup>6</sup> In these elections, Kolar was put on the top of the joint list of the four parties in the second electoral district and elected member of the Croatian Parliament.

### 3. Research Subject and Objective

Today, it is customary that somebody is protesting and organizing strikes in Croatia. The strikes and protests are organized by the unemployed, metal workers, farmers, merchants, teachers, doctors, journalists, university lecturers, and others. Usually, workers demand higher salaries, better work conditions, payment

<sup>5</sup> A survey conducted among the agricultural experts indicates that they prefer three forms of farmer organizing towards achieving their interests, i.e.: farmer associations (28.6%), cooperatives (21.4%) and single farmers association (20.6%).

<sup>6</sup> *Vjesnik* daily, November 19, 1999, p. 6

of earned unpaid salary and farmers demand higher prices for their products, embargo on food import, assignation of state land, payment of subsidies, favourable loans, cheaper petroleum, buying off products etc.

Among the farmers' protests that attracted most attention were those organized in the summer 1999 when the farmers from central and eastern part of Croatia blocked the roads during main tourist season.

In this paper we analyzed the attitudes of Croatian farmers towards protests and compared them with the students' of agriculture and agricultural experts' attitudes. The basic presumption is that current agricultural policy has no support of the farmers and does not correspond with their basic interests. The paper also makes analysis of the respondent's opinion on blocking of public roads as a method of protest, their views of social and economic position of the farmers, protest motivation and their satisfaction with the current agricultural policy.

The paper is aimed at collecting information about the current economic and social problems of the farmers and learning of their basic motivation for setting up of the protests. Unfortunately, the sample of respondents was too small for detailed discriminative analysis.

#### 4. Methodology

The research was conducted in August and September 2001.<sup>7</sup> The selected settlements were primarily those where the farmers used their tractors to block public roads. The survey included 201 respondent from Vrbovec (45), Bjelovar (40), Slavonski Brod (40), Đakovo (53), and Osijek (23). Among them, 95 farmers participated in the protests one time or more.

The paper also makes analysis of two researches that covered the same topic, carried out somewhat earlier on a sample of the students of agriculture (N = 217) and among the agricultural experts (N = 64).<sup>8</sup> All of the above mentioned groups are in a way connected to agriculture alongside with numerous problems and difficulties it has faced throughout these transitional times.

The questionnaire included about fifty closed questions identical for all groups and three open questions for farmers and eight for experts in which they could elaborate their reasons. However, the respondents also added their opinions and suggestions in answers to the closed questions. Some have even left their ad-

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<sup>7</sup> The authors thank all assistants who helped to carry out survey, as well as all respondents. Special thanks to Nenad Brkić who made the input and the basic data process.

<sup>8</sup> The research among the students was conducted in December 2000, and the agricultural experts in February 2001.

dresses and asked from us to resolve their problems (product sales and the like). After the questionnaires were reviewed, the code lists made and the responses coded, the obtained data were entered into the computer and tabulated in basic tables. The interrelations were determined between the variables by chi-square test and contingency coefficient.

## 5. Research Results

### 5.1. Basic characteristics of the respondents

The respondents were mainly younger males (94.5%), i.e. seven out of ten were under the age of fifty. Thus, this group significantly differs from an average age structure of the family farm heads. Married accounted for 88.5%, unmarried for 9%, while share of widowers and divorcees was insignificant (2.5%). On average, the respondents had 9.7 years of schooling, which is considerably below the Croatian average. Educational structure of the respondents and their spouses was as shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1  
Respondents' education (in %)

Education	Husbands	Wives
Incomplete primary	11.5	12.2
Primary	34.8	47.2
Secondary (11-12 years)	47.2	37.8
Junior college	5.0	1.1
University college	1.5	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Over four fifths of the respondents were active or retired farmers (73.6%) living exclusively or mostly from farming, and the remaining fifth are those working on the farm on a part-time basis. On average, their families have five members (4.87), of which 2.52 members are working (55.1%). Women account for 45.6% of working members, which is 1.15 working female members per surveyed farm on average.

Almost three fourths of respondents answered that the work on the farm is being done by the members of the family, and sometimes with the relatives helping out. Only 3.5% of families commonly engage farmhands, and 24% employ the farmhands only occasionally. Before the nineties of the last century, full-time employment of farmhands was an unknown category on the Croatian family farms.

Over three fifths of the respondents lease the land, which was also an infrequent practice in the past. The farmer-owned land and leased land combined gives an average used land size of 24.9 hectares. This all points to significant structural changes the Croatian family farms are undergoing, although this is not a representative sample and the obtained data refer neither to average nor to exclusive groups. The sample was primarily determined by the protestors group that constitutes almost half of our respondents. Among them 41.5% are the members of political parties and 31.7% the members of farmer associations. Most of them sympathize the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) (39.3%) which is being connected to the fact that the demonstrations were organised by this party.

### 5.2. Socio-economic status of farmers

The Croatian farmers are almost always placed at the very bottom of the social scale. The top is reserved for political and entrepreneurship elite (about 5–10% of the Croatian population) that includes politicians, capitalists and managers with secret contracts. The middle class, accounting for about 15–20% of the population, encompasses small entrepreneurs and craftsmen and higher and lower positioned professionals. The lower class encompasses about 70–80% of the population, including qualified workers, medium and large farmers, farmers/workers, pensioners, unemployed and beggars, tramps and homeless.<sup>9</sup>

When asked how would they evaluate economic situation in their household and/or farm in comparison with others, almost three quarters of the respondents (72.6%) have expressed their conviction that their situation is not different from that of others, therefore average. The share of those who consider that their economic situation is above average (13.9%) and below average (13.4%) is similar. Generally speaking, this group considers itself to be just somewhat above an average farmer (weighted arithmetic mean is 2.885). The respondents that lease land consider their economic status more favorably than the others do ( $\chi^2 = 12.829$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ,  $C = 0.245$ ), same as the respondents from the extended families ( $\chi^2 = 6.873$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ,  $C = 0.196$ ). The households with larger number of members lease land more frequently, earn higher income, and this reflects on their economic status.

When the farmers compare their social position (prestige) with other social strata (classes), they find it less favorable. This particularly regards respect of the Croatian society for the rural population, the farmers. It might be interesting to compare the economic and social status of the farmers with the results of two earlier researches carried out among the students of agriculture and agricultural experts.

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<sup>9</sup> Zoran Malenica: Današnji društveni slojevi (*Today's Classes*), an interview to *Nacional* weekly of December 29, 1999, pp. 21–22, and an interview in the Croatian Television's »Thoughts for the 21<sup>th</sup> Century« broadcast presented by Branimir Bilić of January 29, 2001.

Table 2  
 Respondents evaluation of farmers' economic and social status (weighted arithmetical mean)

Status	Farmers	Students of agriculture	Agricultural experts
Economic status of farmers	3.249	3.986	3.812
Social status of farmers	4.423	4.372	4.125

The status is valuated using the marks from 1 to 5, where 1 designates the highest and 5 the lowest status, and the data clearly indicate that the farmers see their economic status more much more favorable than it is seen by the experts and students. However, the farmers' evaluation of their social status (prestige) is much worst than that given by students and experts.

While every fifth respondent considers that the economic status of the farmers is high or very high, and every third that their position is low or very low, only 0.5% of the respondents considers the social status of the farmers is high or very high, while 87.1% find it low or very low. Only 12.4% of the respondents find that the farmers' image equals that of other classes. This discrepancy in understanding of the economic and social status of the farmers could be in the background of the farmers' protests aimed at changing current situation that flooded Croatia during this period of transition. It is interesting that none of the independent variables in our research has a statistically significant impact on the attitudes regarding the economic and political status of the farmers. The only exception are the tenant farmers whose opinion on the economic status of the farmers is mostly more favorable than that of the non-tenants. This obviously reflects identification with the evaluation of their own status. However, it seems that all agree on the social status of the farmers.

An open question was put on whether the farmers can today influence resolving of agricultural and rural problems – 86% of the respondents answered that they have no influence at all (53.2%) or that their influence is very poor or insignificant (32.8%), while only 4.5% answered the question affirmatively. The farmers who are protest participants and the respondents under 40 years of age, and those from the Osijek region gave more affirmative answers. On the other hand, negative answers were more frequently given by the respondents with poorer education, tenant farmers, natural producers, respondents from the Bjelovar and Đakovo regions, those that participated in the protests two times or more, those 40 to 60 years of age, and those with the highest annual income, but these relations are not significant.

### 5.3. Attitude towards the protests

The respondents were asked for their opinion on blocking of public roads with tractors as a method of farmers' protect and a tool for articulation of their interests. Most farmers consider the tractor roadblocks acceptable (Table 3). This



method is particularly considered acceptable by the respondents from the Slavon-ski Brod region – contrary to those from the Đakovo region, than by the respon-dents under 40 years of age, those with lower annual income, protest participants and members of the political parties. However, a statistically significant difference is only among those with the lowest education level (primary or less) and the re-spondents with higher education level (secondary or more) ( $\chi^2 = 16.533$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $C = 0.276$ ). Further, there is a significant difference between the far-mers and students ( $\chi^2 = 10.721$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ,  $C = 0.158$ ), and particularly between the farmers and agricultural experts ( $\chi^2 = 22.415$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $C = 0.279$ ).

Table 3

Acceptability of road blocks as a method of protest (in %)

Attitude	Farmers	Students of agriculture	Agricultural experts
Completely acceptable	28.0	18.9	10.9
Basically acceptable	23.5	20.3	14.1
Partly acceptable	34.0	37.3	35.9
Basically unacceptable	8.0	16.6	25.0
Completely unacceptable	6.5	6.9	14.1
Total	100.0 (N = 200)	100.0 (N = 217)	100.0 (N = 64)

However, considering the farmers' protests in general, there is almost no differen-ce between the three groups of respondents. The experts are somewhat restrai-ned in their support to the protests, but the difference is not statistically signifi-cant.<sup>10</sup> The protests are supported by 71.1% of farmers, with a statistically signifi-cant difference between the regions in which the respondents live ( $\chi^2 = 18.399$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ,  $C = 0.290$ ). The largest support to the protests came from the Osijek and Slavonski Brod regions, and the lowest from the Đakovo and Bjelovar regions. The protests were strongly supported by the respondents with poorer education.

An attitude of the respondents towards the claim that the farmers' protest caused aversion of other citizens is interesting. A quarter of all the farmer respondents agree with this claim. There is a significant difference between the farmers with market oriented farms and natural producers ( $\chi^2 = 17.763$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.286$ ). The level of disagreement with this claim is more frequently among farmers from the Osijek and Vrbovec regions.

<sup>10</sup> The agreement of the experts is twice lower than that of the farmers (12.5%) and only 16.0% of students support the protests.

#### 5.4. Protest motivation

Buying off prices of agricultural products, wheat in particular, brings the farmers' demands into the spotlight almost every year. Protests, as a legitimate means of articulating the farmers' interests, have become regular. Higher prices improve the economic status of the farmers. Money, as Croatian sociologist Josip Županov puts it, »symbolizes social power and reputation (status), it determines position of each profession in social hierarchy or more precisely in social stratification«. <sup>11</sup> Through low prices of agricultural products the Croatian farmers paid for the industrial development, although the workers who could survive on their small wages only if the food was cheap also participated in this process. Today, when farmers demand higher buying off prices, they are criticized for producing the most expensive corn in Europe.

The respondents were asked whether the buying off prices of wheat are the main reason for their protests. The answers were: »buying off prices« 31.5%, »late payments« 7.7% and »more other reasons« 60.8%. The answers indicate that the buying off prices are not the only reason behind the protests. They are only a cause, used to express the dissatisfaction they feel over »lack of national care for agriculture in general«, »general dissatisfaction with the situation in the agricultural sector«, »social status of farmers, difficult living and poverty«, »difficult situation in the rural areas«. Further, the farmers are bothered by »low prices of milk, beef, and all crop farming products«, »high prices of reproduction material, fuel, seed, plant protection preparations and the like«, »imbalance of prices«, »market«, »import«, »purchasers blackmailing the farmers as they wish«, »a kilogram of wheat one Croatia Kuna, and a kilogram of bran one and half Kuna«, »small surfaces of land and low income – one hectare of land yields two to three tons of wheat which is not enough to live on for the entire year«. The respondents also state the causes ensuing from political and party interests of the organizers: »personal profit for the organizing groups«, »personal political interest«, »politicians boosting their popularity«, »brokers looking after their interest and at the same time speaking on behalf of uninformed farmers«, »large producers deeply in debt trying to cheat the state at any expense and fool the small producers«.

There is statistically significant differences between the regions with regard to the question on the causes of the protests ( $\chi^2 = 27.111$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ,  $C = 0.345$ ). The buying off price of wheat is underscored by the respondents from the Đakovo, Slavonski Brod and Vrbovec region. Further, the respondents earning higher income more frequently underscore the wheat price than those with lower income ( $\chi^2 = 9.373$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ,  $C = 0.219$ ).

The respondents were presented a number of claims, and their response was asked in order to learn what are the basic motives behind the farmers' protests.

<sup>11</sup> Josip Županov, *Vjesnik* daily, No. 19839 of February 17, 2003, p. 13, Opinions.

Their answers were calculated and transformed into the weighted arithmetic means for comparison, and the agreement with our claims descends from 1-5 (Table 4).

In level of agreement of particular claims, the farmers significantly differ from the experts and students of agriculture. Among farmers, there are significant differences between those with higher and those with lower level of education regarding the third claim (drop in prices and farmers' reputation;  $\chi^2 = 13.818$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ,  $C = 0.254$ ), and relatively worsened status of the farmers (claim 3;  $\chi^2 = 13.106$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ,  $C = 0.248$ ). This could be explained by correlation between the level of education and standard of living. The respondents with higher level of education have better life and more favourable opinion about their profession.

Table 4  
Respondents attitude towards the protest motives (weighted arithmetical mean)

Claims	Farmers	Students of agriculture	Agricultural experts
1. Prices of reproduction material are growing, prices of agricultural products falling	1.365	1.907	1.838
2. The farmers are most irritated by injustice they suffer	1.385	1.532	2.301
3. The status of farmers has comparatively worsened compared to other groups	1.575	2.930	2.516
4. Drop in prices of their products the farmers feel as worsening of their reputation	1.830	3.097	2.718
5. The higher prices are covering for low productivity	3.815	3.542	2.640

The reasons for the protests certainly include their satisfaction with the current agricultural policy since it somehow aggregates the global situation in the Croatian agriculture and rural areas. The Croatian agricultural policy is valued very unfavorably. As much as 71.1% of farmers, 73.3% of students and 79.7% of agricultural experts find it bad or very bad. Only a small percentage finds it good (1.5% of farmers, 3.1% of experts and 3.7% of student), and nobody considers it as completely good. The farmers with higher level of education value the agricultural policy better than others ( $\chi^2 = 9.541$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ,  $C = 0.213$ ), same as the respondents with higher income ( $\chi^2 = 17.687$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p = 0.039$ ,  $C = 0.285$ ).

And finally, have the farmers reached their goals by protesting? Two thirds of farmers-respondents are of the opinion that the farmers have only partly realized their demands. The attitude of the experts and students significantly differs from that of the farmers. More than half of them consider that the farmers requests ha-

ve mainly not been fulfilled – 62.7% of students and 51.6% of experts. No one of the respondents consider that farmers completely reached their goals.<sup>12</sup>

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

At times of reintroduction of democratic political life to Croatia in the 1990s, Croatian farmers mostly supported two political parties: The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). The formerly founded Farmers' Association of Croatia failed in its attempt to unite all farmers and articulate their interests in an organized way. Unlike Croatia, all the members of the European Union have had a tradition of organizing farmers into professional and syndical organisations, unions and parties on the local as well as on the national level (Kienle, 1986; Michalleti, 1987; Puljiz, 1992; Župančić, 1994; Tipless, 1995 etc.). Even among those countries a difference has to be made between farmers' national societies in the western, northern and middle part of Europe, which are mostly active as uniform organisations on a country level, and those in countries like France, Greece, Italy, Spain or Portugal, where they are strongly connected to political parties (Moyano, 1995).

A new attempt at uniting Croatian farmers into the Croatian Farmers' Association was introduced by the vice-president of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) Božidar Pankretić ten days before the association was founded in the following way: »Farmers must be aware of the fact that only through united forces will they present a real power and a serious partner in negotiations with the government.« At the same time he claimed it to be absurd that the Croatian Democratic Union should found a Rural Society as it »already has institutions which could change the disasterous state of agriculture for the better at its disposal«.<sup>13</sup> After the elections of the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2000, when the Croatian Farmers' Association entered the coalition government, the independent action of the newly founded association was greatly restricted by loyalty to one's own political party. In that sense an open question remains with respect to the inner partnership between the state and organised interest associations of farmers and agricultural employees.

By reason of downfall of socialist agricultural system, Croatian farmers faced up to numerous difficulties and problems concerning buying off and buying off prices, application of value added tax (VAT) and strong pressure of market and

<sup>12</sup> However, media informed about peasants' victory and that the Government accepted their demands (*Jutarnji list*, Zagreb, July, 1, 1999, p. 1). Later, it was shown that the Government apparently accepted farmers' demands due to a fear of wide social disorder, what some journalists predicted (Drago Hedl: *Seljačka buna 1999*, THU, 1<sup>st</sup>. Jul, p. 1-3, Paris, France).

<sup>13</sup> *Vjesnik* daily, Zagreb, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1999, page 5, cited from the conversation of Božidar Pankretić with *Vjesnik* journalist Goran Borković.

globalization processes that ruined protective measures of native agriculture, especially because of Croatia approaching to a membership to World Trade Organisation (WTO) and European Union (EU).

There is a link between that and accumulated discontent which can be recognized in demands that protestors emphasized in preparations for protest: 1) Prohibition on import of agricultural products; 2) Making back payments of the state to the farmers; 3) Implementation of parliament's decision about protests; 4) Wheat price to 1,32 Kuna, and 5) Buying off of all market surplus.<sup>14</sup>

Farmer's dissatisfaction with the current agricultural policy shows that measures undertaken by government are very much in discrepancy with their real problems. Almost three quarters of the respondents negatively evaluated Croatian agricultural policy. It needs to be pointed out that that's not an opinion of farmers, students and agricultural experts. Survey conducted by International Republican Institute (IRI) in March 2003 on sample of 1700 Croatian citizens showed that 72% of respondents were dissatisfied with development of the new agricultural policy, and only 19% is actually satisfied.<sup>15</sup> This fact indicates that coalition government did not manage to change unfavourable judgement about our own agricultural policy.

Inadequate and insufficient efficiency of institutions and the system through which the farmers are expected to articulate their interests made them a particularly vulnerable group, both economically and psychically. Period of transition that brought changes in Croatian agricultural and social policy caused the farmers to feel that individuals are collecting money without work, which makes them doubt in value of their traditional diligence and caused the work to lose its role as an essential standard and value in the farmer's life. Such a situation contributes to frequent expression of dissatisfaction with the current measures of agricultural policy through organized protests aimed at protection of the farmers' interests. Although the primary reason for the mass protests of the farmers with the highest number of participants was the buying off price of the wheat, but the actual background was much more complex, as shown by the results of our research. The primary reason is small influence of the farmers on the focal points of social power and influence dealing with the problems of the agricultural sector and rural areas, which results in low self-esteem and unfavorable economic and social status of the farmers.

Farmers' protests, which reveal their dissatisfaction, drew a huge attention not only of media but also of the political public in Croatia. The fact that farmers pro-

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<sup>14</sup> *Vjesnik* daily, Zagreb, May 18, 1999., p. 5, M. P., and *Vjesnik* daily, May 19, 1999., p. 7, M. P. and R. I.

<sup>15</sup> Zečić, Dada: Najveći hrvatski problem nezaposlenost, *Vjesnik* daily, March 29, 2003, Panorama no. 69, p. 18.

duce the food was always giving them the perception of importance of their work in society.

The results of our research indicate that there is a major discrepancy in valuation of the economic status and social status of the farmers, which could be a significant factor in the background of the farmers' protests. Also, the research has shown that the level of education is the most important independent variable that determines the attitude of the respondents towards the protests. The higher the level of education, the less radical attitude towards protests and less dissatisfaction with the agricultural policy.

So far, the Croatian farmers have lacked a single influential union, independent from political influences and actors who only address the farmers when they need them as electorate. In articulating and protecting their interests the only »tool« available to the farmers so far are the protests that are making more damage than benefit for the greater community. To gain more important role in all the domains of the social and economic life, the farmers need support from the global society but the mechanism of changes primarily depends on themselves. We can conclude with Henri Mendras's words: »Even submitted to the global society, peasantry is political strength that has a certain weight in the political life of society, and which obligates society to define its politics with respect to it« (Mendras, 1986: 253).

Although this is a first research of protests of Croatian farmers in postsocialist period, because of methodological limitations, descriptive review research, its results are scientifically and socially very indicative.

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Priopćenje na znanstvenom skupu

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## Artikuliranje interesa hrvatskih seljaka kroz prosvjede

### Sažetak

Autori u ovom radu\* analiziraju stavove hrvatskih seljaka prema prosvjedima kao načinu borbe za svoje interese te poboljšanje vlastitog ekonomskog i društvenog položaja i uspoređuju ih sa stavovima studenata agronomije i poljoprivrednih stručnjaka. Oni polaze od toga da su seljački prosvjedi odgovor na bitno pogoršanje njihovog položaja i svojevrсна posebnost na hrvatskoj političkoj sceni. Hrvatsko je seljaštvo, naime, od početka 1990-ih zahvaćeno značajnim promjenama sveukupnog ekonomskog i društvenog položaja. Te su promjene prouzročili procesi erozije reproduktivne sposobnosti obiteljskog gospodarstva otpočeli u socijalističkom razdoblju, a mijene su potencirali veliki teret Domovinskog rata i postsocijalistička tranzicija. Hrvatsko je seljaštvo, primjerice, u odnosu na druge društvene slojeve podnijelo razmjerno najveći teret i stradanja u Hrvatskoj nametnutom ratu. Učinak je bio bitno pogoršanje gospodarskog i društvenog položaja te kvalitete života, jer država nije razvila instrumentarij primjeren za poticanje proizvodnje, ne postoji stimulativan sustav kreditiranja, zajamčen plasman proizvoda, učinkovita zaštita domaćeg tržišta i dr. S druge strane, iako prošlost hrvatskoga seljaštva obiluje brojnim bunama, ustancima i drugim oblicima prosvjeda, sadašnje hrvatsko seljaštvo tih iskustava nije imalo.

Svoje interese seljaci su prvi put u suvremenosti pokušali organizirano artikulirati i zaštititi kroz Seljački savez Hrvatske koji se kasnije prometnuo u Udruženje hrvatskih seljaka, ali bez značajnijeg uspjeha. Najviše uspjeha u artikuliranju interesa seljaka imao je Hrvatski savez seljaka osnovan u veljači 1999. godine inicijativom Hrvatske seljačke stranke. Hrvatski savez seljaka organizirao je niz prosvjeda od kojih je najveću medijsku pozornost imao onaj potkraj lipnja i početkom srpnja 1999. kada su seljaci traktorima zapriječili javne prometnice.

Istraživanje na uzorku seljaka (201 ispitanik) u naseljima u kojima su seljaci traktorima zapriječavali prometnice provedeno je u kolovozu i rujnu 2001. godine, a kako bi što potpunije osvijetlili prosvjede seljaka autori u ovom radu rabe i podatke iz ankete među studentima agronomije u prosincu 2000. (N = 217) i poljoprivrednim stručnjacima u veljači

\* Rad je djelomično prerađeno priopćenje podnijeto na 20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference 2003 »Work, Leisure and Development in Rural Europe Today« u organizaciji European Society for Rural Sociology (Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland, 18.-20. kolovoza 2003.).



2001. (N = 64). Budući da je broj ispitanika premali za multivarijantnu analizu, cilj je rada steći – na više deskriptivnoj razini – uvid u ekonomske i socijalne probleme seljaka i spoznati njihove osnovne motive i uzroke prosvjeda.

Rezultati istraživanja, ponajprije, pokazuju da su u prosvjedima sudjelovali seljaci u napunu snage koji su se u prosjeku školovali 10 godina (završili su osnovnu školu i dva razreda srednje) i koriste prosječno 24,9 hektara zemljišta, u čemu zakupljeno zemljište čini 14,6 hektara, te koji su pretežito pristaše Hrvatske seljačke stranke (potonje je samorazumljivo jer je prosvjed ta stranka i organizirala). Činjenica da gotovo dvije trećine ispitanika uzima zemlju u zakup govori o značajnim strukturnim promjenama u hrvatskoj obiteljskoj poljoprivredi. Drugo, utvrđeno je da seljaci prihvaćaju blokadu prometnica kao metodu prosvjedovanja, za razliku od studenata agronomije i poljoprivrednih stručnjaka. Međutim, postoji gotovo potpuna suglasnost svih triju skupina ispitanika oko toga da je ekonomski položaj seljaka, a poglavito njihov ugled u društvu veoma nepovoljan, da se položaj seljaka relativno pogoršava, kao što rašireno opće nezadovoljstvo s aktualnom agrarnom politikom. Štoviše, Hrvatska nema ruralne nego samo poljoprivrednu politiku, a i u tom pristupu nije razvila ni poticajan ni zaštitni instrumentarij primjeren aktualnom položaju seljaka i međunarodno otvorenom tržištu poljoprivrednih i prehrambenih proizvoda. Treće, autori su ustanovili da voditelji vitalnih obiteljskih gospodarstava, odnosno seljaci sa srednjom i višom školskom naobrazbom, većim posjedom i višim dohotkom povoljnije ocjenjuju ekonomski i društveni položaj seljaka i postojeću agrarnu politiku, nego seljaci s nižim obrazovanjem i nižim dohotkom. Razlog je jednostavan: vitalna obiteljska gospodarstva posjeduju reproduktivnu sposobnost.

*Cljučne riječi:* prosvjedi seljaka, organiziranost seljaka, status seljaka, Hrvatska.

*Primljeno:* 29. listopada 2004.

*Prihvaćeno:* 19. studenoga 2004.

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## L'articulation des intérêts des paysans croates par des protestations

### Résumé

Dans cette étude\*, les auteurs analysent les points de vue des paysans croates à l'égard des protestations comme moyen de lutte pour leurs intérêts et l'amélioration de leur propre position sociale et économique, et ils les comparent avec les résultats des recherches faites sur les points de vue des étudiants en agronomie et des spécialistes en agriculture. Ils partent du point de vue que les protestations des paysans sont une réponse à la dégradation essentielle de leur propre position et une spécificité en son genre sur la scène politique croate. En effet, depuis le début des années 1990, la paysannerie croate est englobée dans le cadre d'importants changements de la situation économique et sociale dans son ensemble. Ces changements avaient été provoqués à l'époque du socialisme par les débuts des processus d'érosion des capacités de reproduction des exploitations agricoles familiales; ceci fut aggravé par la lourde charge imposée par la Guerre patriotique de Croatie et par la transition post-socialiste. Par exemple, par rapport aux autres couches sociales, la paysannerie croate a supporté proportionnellement la plus lourde charge et souffrances dues à la guerre de Croatie. Le résultat fut une détérioration essentielle de leur position sociale et économique et de la qualité de la vie, car l'Etat n'a pas mis au point d'instrument approprié en vue de stimuler la production; il n'existe pas de système stimulant d'attribution de crédit, de placement garanti des produits, de protection efficace du marché intérieur, etc. La première tentative en vue de l'articulation et de la protection organisées de leurs intérêts a été tentée par les paysans par le biais de la Fédération des Paysans de Croatie, mais sans succès notable. Le plus grand succès en matière d'articulation des intérêts des paysans a été remporté par la Fédération Croate des Paysans, fondée en février 1999 à l'initiative du Parti Paysan Croate. La Fédération Croate des Paysans a organisé plusieurs protestations de paysans; celle organisée fin juin et début juillet 1999 a attiré la plus grande attention des médias.

Les résultats des recherches indiquent que les paysans acceptent le blocage des voies de communication comme méthode de protestation, à la différence des étudiants en agronomie et des spécialistes en agriculture. Il existe cependant une conformité quasi totale des trois groupes d'interrogés, à savoir que la situation économique des paysans, notam-

\* L'étude est la communication partiellement remaniée présentée à la 20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference 2003 *Work, Leisure and Development in Rural Europe Today*, organisée par European Society for Rural Sociology (Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland, 18 au 20 août 2003).

ment leur respect social est très défavorable, que la position des paysans se détériore relativement et qu'il existe un mécontentement général au sujet de la politique agricole actuelle. Qui plus est, la Croatie n'a pas assuré d'instrument de stimulation approprié à la situation actuelle des paysans et au marché international ouvert des produits agricoles et alimentaires. Les auteurs ont aussi constaté que ceux qui dirigent les exploitations agricoles familiales vitales, à savoir les paysans ayant terminé des études secondaires et supérieures et ayant des revenus plus élevés estiment plus favorablement la position sociale et économique des paysans et la politique agricole actuelle que les paysans ayant un niveau d'éducation inférieur et des revenus inférieurs.

*Mots-clés:* protestations des paysans, organisation des paysans, statut des paysans, Croatie.

*Reçu:* 29 octobre 2004

*Accepté:* 19 novembre 2004