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Edited by
Danilo Tomić
Miladin M. Ševarlić

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COMPARATIVE RESEARCH OF FOOD CONSUMPTION IN SERBIA AND ITS EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Milan R. Milanović[1], Milutin Đorović[2], Simo Stevanović[2]

1. STRUCTURAL POSITIONING OF AGRO-FOOD COMPLEX IN THE ECONOMY IN GENERAL

Europe as a whole, even the EU itself, represents a very heterogeneous socio-economic area.

This has been confirmed by the specific indicators of the economic and the agrarian structure in particular, namely, by major differences in terms of level of GDP per capita, and general human development index. The region of the South-Eastern Europe has been officially divided according to the status the countries have attained in the enlargement process (i.e. member states, applicant countries and the countries whose status has yet to be defined). Due to this fact the already existing diversity of the region was intensified. The differences in the general socio-economic structure of the European countries were significantly increased and unexpectedly deepened in the agrarian sector. It refers both to the scope and the structure of the production, and especially to the consumption of the most important products.

The heterogeneous nature of the agrarian market of the European countries can be observed in accordance with following three aspects: (1) as a relationship between production and consumption of specific products at the national level, that is, as a level of self-sufficiency; (2) as a degree of average annual per capita consumption of the most important products, and (3) as a share of food costs in general family budgets.

2. PRODUCTION-MARKET SELF-SUFICIENCY

The level of self-sufficiency in most important products, according to the data of the Eurostat for 2003/04 (tab 1.), due to the different agro-ecological conditions and long term agricultural development policy, as well as relevant consumer habits and possibilities for the acquisition of non-domicile products, has an extremely wide diapason (from 0% to even 200%), relating to the countries and the products as well.

[1] Milan R. Milanović, Ph.D., Megatrend University, Belgrade, Serbia
[2] Milutin Đorović, Ph.D., Simo Stevanović, Ph.D., Faculty of Agriculture, Belgrade, Serbia

Production-market surplus, that is production-market deficit, is the characteristic feature of two groups of products: cereals and meat. Market surplus of cereals is indicative for the countries of the moderate continental climate belt (France – 202%, Hungary – 139%, Germany – 112%) and as regards meat, mainly for the countries of the Northern climate belt. If the comparative method is applied in the analysis of the situation in individual countries, in average, the highest production-market surplus is recorded in Denmark (pork meat– 455%, powdered milk – 2050%, cheese – 247%), France (wheat – 194%, barley – 251%, sugar – 231%) and Hungary (wheat – 151%, corn – 142%, vegetable oil – 117%). Deficit is mainly registered in Greece (except for rice), Italy (except for rice and poultry) and the Baltic countries.

3. PER-CAPITA CONSUMPTION

Per-capita consumption of basic agricultural products, according to the Eurostat 2003/04 data (tab 2), indicates major differences by country and by product.

Average consumption in Serbia, when compared with the European average, indicates considerable differences in consumption of different products: as far as vegetable products are concerned, especially bread cereals, is moving around the limits of the European average consumption; animal products, especially meat, is moving around or below the lowest European average consumption. At the same time, the range between the highest and the lowest per capita consumption in Europe (2003/04) is determined in the proportion 1:2,5 and it not so rarely, reaches the ratio of 1:5, and even 1:15. The range** in wheat consumption comes to 1:4 (the highest is in Greece -164 kg, and the lowest is in Finland 42 kg); and in meat consumption around 1:2 (the highest is in Spain -134 kg, and the lowest is in the UK 68 kg), and as regards the consumption of fats, it comes to around 1:14 (the highest is in Italy -35 kg, and the lowest is in Sweden – 2.5 kg),

At the same time, the wheat consumption in Serbia, as estimated, amounts to around 149 kg, meat consumption to around 54 kg, and fats to around 19 kg per capita respectively, which is close to the average consumption recorded in the neighbouring new EU member states.

Table 1 Human consumption of certain agricultural products

	Serbia	EU-25	Max EU 25	Min EU 25	EU-15	Bulgar.	Roman.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2003/04							
Cereals, Total (without rice)	179	:	165,9/GR	63,2/NL	:	162,5	159,7
of which: - wheat[1])	149	:	163,6/GR	41,9/FIN	:	140,4	129,8
- Rye[1])		5,8	26,3/POL	0,0/IT	3,5	0,3	0,2
- Grain/maize[1])		5,2	16,0/IRL	0,5/FR	5,6	21,9	29,6
Potatoes	38	:	156,1/LAT	43,7/ITL	:	44,2	91,6
Sugar[3])	28	:	68,2/MAL	25,1/LIT	:	30,5	24,3
2003							
Milk products							
- Fresh products	105	:	186,4/IRL	71,1/ITL	106,3	:	:
- Cheese	11	:	6,8/FIL	0,8/GR	:	:	:
- Butter[2])	1	:	24,9/FR	6,4/IRL	17,6	:	:
- Margarine (fat)		:	15,4/MAL	1,1/ITL	:	:	:
Eggs	180	:	252/ESP	126/POR	:	:	:
Meat, Total (without offal)	54	:	134,2/ESP	68,3/UK	:	:	:
Of which: - Total beef/veal	14	:	27,2/DAN	12,5/D	:	:	:
- Pigmeat		:	74,4/DAN	16,1/UK	:	:	:
- Poultry meat		:	34,1/E	10,0/D	:	:	:
- Sheep and goat meat		:	13,0/GR	0,4/FIN	:	:	:
Oils and fats, Total	19	:	34,8/ITL	2,5/S	:	:	:
of which: - Vegetable	12	:	30,3/ITL	2,5/S	:	:	:
- Of land animals		:	17,5/H	0,0/FIN	:	:	:

[1]) Flour equivalent.
[2]) Expressed in product weight.
[3]) White sugar equivalent.
[6]) Litres/head.
[7]) Including cutting-room fat.

Source: European Commission (Eurostat).

4. FOOD EXPENSES IN FAMILY BUDGETS

Structural position and the importance of agriculture and the agrarian market in the general national economy, along with the significance of agriculture in the creation of GDP and general employment, is estimated through the food expenses in family budgets. Here we do not consider levels of prices of different agricultural products, or the purchasing power of national currencies in comparison with EURO, but merely the relative share of expenses out of the general expenses of families in certain countries.

Table 2 Changes of the allocations for food, drinks and tobacco in family budgets according to the household categories in FRY/SCG

in % (total =100)

		1985[1)]	1990	1993	1996	1999[2)]	2000[2)]	2001[2)]	2002[2)]	2005[3]
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
I	All households									
1.	Food	37,8	36,0	54,3	45,2	47,0	47,1	50,9	41,2	37,1*
2.	Drinks	3,9	3,7	3,9	3,6	3,9	4,2	3,8	4,3	4,6
3.	Tobacco	2,3	2,3	3,0	3,9	3,4	3,7	3,3	3,6	
4.	All (1+2+3)	41,9	42,0	61,2	52,7	54,3	55,0	58,0	49,1	41,7
II	Agricultural households									
1.	Food	36,6	42,3	55,6	51,6	47,0	49,6	51,5	46,3	40,8
2.	Drinks	3,3	4,7	4,4	3,9	4,0	5,9	4,5	4,6	5,2
3.	Tobacco	1,7	1,7	1,3	2,5	2,2	3,0	2,2	2,9	
4.	All (1+2+3)	39,9	48,7	61,3	58,0	53,2	58,5	58,2	53,8	46,0
III	Mixed households									
1.	Food	36,7	36,1	56,7	46,4	46,2	45,3	46,1	41,0	-
2.	Drinks	4,0	4,2	3,7	3,7	4,0	4,8	4,6	4,5	-
3.	Tobacco	2,2	2,3	2,7	3,6	2,7	3,1	3,0	3,1	
4.	All (1+2+3)	42,9	42,6	63,1	53,7	52,9	53,2	53,7	48,6	-
IV	Non-agricultural households									
1.	Food	35,0	35,0	53,0	43,9	47,3	47,5	52,7	40,7	35,0
2.	Drinks	4,0	3,4	3,8	3,6	3,9	3,7	3,5	4,3	4,3
3.	Tobacco	2,4	2,3	3,5	4,2	3,9	4,1	3,5	3,8	
4.	All (1+2+3)	41,4	40,7	60,3	51,7	55,1	55,3	59,7	48,8	39,3

[1)] Data refer to the SFRY. [2)] Estimates, without the data for Kosovo and Metohija
[3)] Only Serbia without the data for Kosovo and Metohija
Source: (Milanovic at all, 2004), Survey on Personal Consumption in 2005, No 125, Belgrade, 2006.

Differences between the European countries, as well as other observed factors are substantial. The situation in Serbia is significantly apart from the average in the EU-15, and the EU-25. In the past several years, these expenses have considerably decreased in Serbia (from 49% in 2000 to around 37% in 2004). However, the relative level of these expenses is still for one forth part higher than the highest in the EU-15, and even three times higher than the lowest level in the EU-15 (lit 2, pg. 106). At the same time, the heterogeneity of the European Union member states, irrespective of their climatic factors and the food consumption tradition, is still evident: in the EU-15 (but also in the EU-25) the highest level was 2.5 times higher than the national level of the relative food consumption expenses.

Detachment of Serbia from the European standards regarding the relative cost of the population's food consumption habits has been considerably diminished and toned down with the comparative quality analysis of the average daily meal. From the nutritive aspect, and the energetic and biochemical structure, the average meal could be considered as sufficient but not as optimal for this climate zone and achieved level of general socio-economic development.

CONCLUSION

High relative price of nutrition products in Serbia drastically decreases the possibilities of the population to meet other basic life needs. The remaining part of the income (without food expenses) can reflect the low level of general socio-economic development and poverty, low level of the living standard and the quality of life. Structural changes in the population's food consumption habits can point out two specific problems: (a) decrease of the market consumption, and the increase of the domestic processing and the natural consumption, and (b) return to the traditional food consumption, due to the intensification of noneconomic migrations (war refugees and displaced persons) and the change of social structure.

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