THE COMMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND EU ENLARGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the consequences that an extension of the Common Agricultural Policy could have on agricultural production in the Central and Eastern European Countries. It reviews the evidence presented by recent attempts to quantify the potential impacts of accession on production levels in the CEECs. It also takes into account results from previous studies in order to analyse the importance that structural constraints might have on the capacity of the CEECs' agricultural sectors to respond to supply incentives under accession to the EU, and to examine some research questions that are still unanswered in relation to the supply potential of the CEECs. Some conclusions and policy recommendations are drawn at the end.

KEYWORDS: CAP, CEECs, EU enlargement, supply response, structural constraints.

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I. Introduction

The extension of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) constitutes one of the greatest challenges for the enlargement of the European Union (EU). In most of these countries, agriculture has greater relative importance than in the EU in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment. The CAP is besides one of the most important EU policies and its expenditure share in the EU budget is the largest. It is therefore not surprising that the negotiations on agricultural policies with the applicant countries are often seen as the most controversial in the enlargement process.

The overall effect of accession on the CEECs' agricultural prices is difficult to predict, although price and support levels increases could be envisaged for most agricultural commodities. However, the total effects of an extension of the CAP on their agricultural production levels are unclear.

This paper examines the potential consequences that an extension of the CAP could have on agricultural production in the CEECs. It first presents an up to date review of the possible outcomes of the enlargement, taking into account the evidence presented in studies that have emerged since the mid-1990s. Then, the paper analyses the importance that the presence of structural constraints might have on the capacity of the CEECs' agricultural sectors to respond to supply incentives under accession to the EU. It reviews the literature on agricultural structure in the CEECs and examines some research questions that are still unanswered in relation to the supply potential of these countries. Some conclusions and policy recommendations are presented at the end.

II. Agricultural Production in the CEECs

After World War II, the CEECs adopted Soviet-type economic regimes, which, to varying degrees, attempted to impose collectivisation in the agricultural sector. Collectivisation efforts failed in Poland and Slovenia, where most arable land remained fragmented among small private farm holdings. On the other hand, in Bulgaria and the Baltic states, almost all land was allocated to Soviet-style state farms. Hungary, Romania, and Czechoslovakia underwent only partial conversion: although most agricultural production took place in state co-operatives and large collective farms, the private agricultural sector persisted in the form of small farms that, in some cases, made significant contributions to the final agricultural output levels.

Agricultural production in all CEECs was characterised by a high degree of state intervention. Public authorities fixed prices for agricultural inputs, procurement prices and retail food prices. The state monopolised the upstream sector, and food processing and marketing were channelled through state-owned firms.

Transition to a market economy has entailed the liberalisation of producer and food prices, withdrawal of input and food subsidies, the imposition of high real interest rates and the liquidation of state monopolies. Although to varying degrees, for all CEECs this liberalisation

effort had a negative effect on agricultural production, with a decline in the real value of agricultural output in the course of the 1990s. Macours and Swinnen (2000) argue that transition has entailed a very significant deterioration in the terms of trade for agriculture, and that this factor caused 40-50% of the decline of crop output over the 1989-1995 period.

Following the liberalisation measures imposed at the beginning of the transition period, a number of CEECs have progressively adopted trade policies and systems of agricultural market support that, in most aspects, are similar to those employed in the CAP. Intervention buying, export subsidies and border protection measures have been introduced to stabilise their agricultural sectors and to facilitate their future integration into the CAP. Market support covers a wide range of commodities, including cereals, sugar, meat and dairy products.

Table 1. Relevance of agriculture in the CEECs

Country	Agricultural Area 1000 Ha.	Agricultural Production (% of GDP)	Agricultural Employment (% Total Employment)	Agricultural Protection in Percentage PSE
Bulgaria	6000	21	26	-16
Czech Republic	4500	4	5	25
Estonia	1500	6	9	15
Hungary	6000	6	7	18
Latvia	2500	4	19	20
Lithuania	3000	9	21	21
Poland	18500	4	20	25
Romania	15000	15	40	20
Slovakia	2500	4	8	25
Slovenia	1000	4	11	41

Sources: OECD (2000); European Commission (2000); PSE for Bulgaria in Gorton et al (1997); PSE for Slovenia in Rednak et al (1997)

However, market support levels in the CEECs are still on the whole lower than in the EU15, although the gap has narrowed in recent years (OECD, 2000). Thus, for example, some cereal prices reached levels that, in the late 1990s, were even above the EU prices for countries such as Poland and Slovenia, due to increases both in their internal guarantee prices and in world market prices. In any case, for most products the levels of market support are still lower than in the EU15, particularly in the milk and beef sectors.

More generally, the rate of agricultural market support in Hungary and the Baltic countries was around 40% that of the EU-15 in the late 1990s, 50% in Poland and the Czech Republic, and only Slovenia had support levels comparable to the EU. Although is difficult to predict the medium-term evolution of differences in support levels, an extension of the CAP to the CEECs is most likely to raise their agricultural prices, and might, therefore, encourage production increases.

A still unsolved question is whether the factors behind the drop in agricultural production are transitory. If this is the case, once the transition process is completed and more stable and supply encouraging conditions are achieved under integration into the CAP, then there could be scope for important increases in agricultural output in the years following accession. Significant structural changes are taking place during transition, and most CEECs have experienced timid recoveries in output since the mid-1990s. However, it is still an open issue if those changes will suffice to guarantee an effective response to supply incentives under accession.

III. Review of Supply Response Studies

The recent literature on the integration of European agriculture into a common market provides different attempts to simulate the impacts of the eastward enlargement using both Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) models (e.g. Liapis and Tsigas, 1998; Bach et al, 2000; Frandsen and Jensen, 2000) and partial equilibrium models (e.g. Münch, 1999; Fuller et al, 2000). Although their time frame varies, all the studies use as the baseline scenario the projected agricultural situation in the CEECs without adoption of the CAP. Most of these studies do provide projections under alternative accession scenarios, but only results under the most plausible ones, given the latest policy and market developments, are reported here in the form of percent variations from the projected baseline.

Since the level of commodity detail differs in each study, the present paper aggregates projected results for the cereal, livestock and dairy sectors. Neither those studies that notify more aggregated results (e.g. Hertel et al (1997)) nor those that are focused on a single sector (e.g. Fuller et al (1999)) or a single country (e.g. Banse and Tangermann (1996)) are taken into account in this review.

Most of the simulation studies considered in this paper confirm the hypothesis that integration into the CAP should encourage agricultural growth in the CEECs. They also suggest that these countries will remain net importers of food from the EU. However, since production levels are expected to increase in the CEECs, for most commodities domestic consumption is projected to be lower than production. This combination portends that production surpluses will emerge and will have to be exported outside the enlarged EU.

According to Liapis and Tsigas (1998) average production levels in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia should increase by 24% in the cereal sector, by 41% in the livestock sector and by 119% in the dairy sector following accession, in response to potentially higher producer prices under the CAP.

For that same group of countries Bach et al (2000) project for 2005 a 33% production increase in the livestock sector, and a much higher 76% rise in the cereal sector. The assumption of the CEECs becoming eligible for Direct Payments (DPs) explains the high growth in this last sector. DPs are implemented in their modelling framework as input subsidies to agricultural land. They project also a 0.5% decrease in output in the dairy sector under the assumption that milk quotas will be introduced in the CEECs.

Frandsen and Jensen (2000) estimate, for the same countries, production increases around 31% in the cereal sector, 56% in the livestock sector and 15% in the dairy sector for year 2010. Their projections are carried out under premises similar to those employed by Bach et al (2000), although in their case they incorporate lower set aside requirements and lower DPs levels for

Swinnen, 1998; Sarris et al., 1999; Mathijs and Vranken, 2000; Gorton et al, 2001) on the analysis of the economic, social and institutional, forces leading structural change at the farm level in the CEECs. The studies that, so far, are available confirm a slight drift towards more homogeneous farm structures. They empirically identify the differences in the value of labour productivity among farm sizes as the key economic force leading these changes. However, these studies corroborate the long-term nature and the slow pace of economically induced variations in farm structure.

In relation to this last aspect, it must be taken into account that accession to the high income and market support levels granted under the CAP is expected to lead to a significant improvement of farm income (e.g. Bach et al, 2000; Frandsen and Jensen, 2000; Münch, 1999; Banse, 1999), particularly if DPs are finally granted to CEECs' farmers. For example, Münch (1999) estimates that the introduction of DPs should imply a transfer to farmers of the fast-track CEECs of 6 to 7 billion Euro.

Potential gains in farm income are likely to be unevenly distributed, not only among producers, but also among countries. More than half of income transfers would be to Polish farmers, while Slovenia is not expected to experience a rise in farm income, due to the remarkably high protection levels in place for the agricultural sector. Those farmers engaged in the arable-crop sector would, very probably, benefit the most from the extension of DPs. On the other hand, producers in the livestock and dairy sectors should face strong restructuring problems, particularly if dairy quotas are imposed in the CEECs.

In any case, as in the Iberian enlargement, a general improvement in farm income levels can be envisaged for most CEECs. This situation should improve the financial position of eastern European farmers and should, therefore, facilitate the transition towards more technically and economically efficient farm structures. However, more research is needed to clarify the net effect of DPs on farm structure on the CEECs. This is so because accession to DPs, if finally granted, is also expected to have an inflationary effect on land values (European Commission, 1996; Frandsen and Jensen, 2000). For example, Frandsen and Jensen (2000) estimate that land prices could more than double if DPs are to be introduced in the CEECs.

Finally, despite their importance, the literature has paid little attention to changes in agricultural labour markets and even less attention to the problem of setting priorities for investments in rural infrastructure in the CEECs. More research is also urgently needed in those areas.

VI. Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

Most of the reviewed studies on farm structure acknowledge the key importance of institutional reforms aimed towards facilitating the transition towards a more economically and technically efficient distribution of land (e.g. Hughes 1998; 1999; Swinnen et al, 1997). The polarised farm structure prevailing in the CEECs is a problem of a persistent nature that cannot be solved in the short-term, particularly if the whole restructuring task is left to the economic incentives that agricultural markets provide. Its solution might pose numerous economic, social, and even technical difficulties, but policy action to create flexible and efficient land markets is nevertheless urgently needed.

Successful completion of reforms would require the conclusion of the restructuring and privatisation process, as well as increased certainty on property rights. No significant actions have been taken, so far, to stimulate the concentration of small land plots; on the other hand, the

sale of land from state farms and the restitution of land belonging to co-operatives have faced, and even created, substantial problems in various CEECs.

Both processes have been hampered by slow registration of land ownership and by a lack of adequate equipment and finance. For example, it is estimated that in Poland it takes between six and eight months to register a change in land ownership, due to a lack of adequately trained administrative staff (CEAS consultants, 1996). Legal restrictions remain for the purchase of land by foreigners in most CEECs, which represents an additional difficulty for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the agri-food sector. Although in many CEECs land taxes are relatively low and there are generous tax exemptions for land purchases, there is still scope for reform in the laws regulating the land market.

In some CEECs, there are also legal size limits to the process of land privatisation. Accordingly, land restitution has led sometimes to the emergence of small and fragmented farms in countries like Bulgaria, and has exacerbated the fragmentation of agricultural land in countries where it already existed, as in Romania. These problems might be reduced by renting land, but land rental markets are not properly developed in most CEECs.

The lack of capital and credit sources is also a major difficulty to the land restructuring process. Although some preferential credit programmes have been established, the funding available to them is scarce. Furthermore, the prevailing uncertainty over property rights makes it difficult to use land as collateral and prevents investments in the agricultural sector.

As noted elsewhere, some of the candidate countries already face acute problems in their agricultural labour markets and these problems are likely to be aggravated under accession to the CAP. In Poland and in most of the CEECs of the second accession group a significant labour move out of agriculture can be foreseen after accession. The creation of alternative employment in rural areas and special retraining schemes will be of paramount importance and should become one of the main targets of rural development policies in an enlarged EU. Also related to the training aspect, Rizov et al. (2000) have shown that, in Romania, the choice of efficient organizational forms in agricultural production depends critically on the level of human capital.

Moreover, the CEECs continue to face overcapacity in milling, slaughterhouses and dairies, while most of the equipment is obsolete. In the fast-track group of countries FDI has played a very important role in the modernization of the agricultural and food sector (Gow and Swinnen, 1998; Foster, 1999), encouraging vertical integration in various forms and improving access to capital, inputs, and technology for farms. However, FDI is not sufficient to generalize productivity increases and concentrates only on high value-added sectors, such as beverages, tobacco and confectionery (European Commission, 1998; Gow and Swinnen,1999).

Therefore, improvements in the rural credit system are also necessary in order to finance competitive structures at the different production and marketing stages of the food system. For example, restricted access to credit in the dairy sector of most CEECs is hampering the investments needed to improve feed ratios, hygienic standards and milking technology.

Improvements in the rural infrastructure are urgently needed. As noted, little research is being generated to orientate this task, so that the efficiency of public investments is maximized. Assuring the long-term viability of investments in rural infrastructure is also important. For

example, recently some rural communities in the CEECs have faced too much investment in infrastructure in relation to their tax base (Lisztwan and Dalton, 2000).

In sum, the agricultural and food sector and the rural infrastructure in the CEECs need deep reforms and productivity has to increase. The changes taken to date have not managed to make these countries fully competitive in an enlarged market. Problems in the quality of products and the state of the processing industry indicate that it is the EU producers and companies that are in an advantageous position.

Under the SAPARD programme the EU has compromised to promote the so much needed structural reforms before accession. The SAPARD regulation contains a list of measures to produce growth and development in the rural areas, including assistance to agricultural modernisation, re-structuring in less favoured areas, and early retirement schemes. However, this list does not seem to be sufficiently extensive to ensure development (Dalton and Thomson,1999). Important aspects, such as incentives to change, and correct training and education for off-farm employment are not or are insufficiently covered. Therefore, the success of SAPARD depends on its integration into more broadly based national programmes.

SAPARD should define more specifically the aims and the target groups. The programme also shows weaknesses at the preparation and implementation stage. Most of the applicant countries are understaffed and badly prepared to handle the arduous proposal preparations and the day-to-day management of the projects. Furthermore, the financial provisions of the EU for the new member states are considered to be low: SAPARD has 520 million Euro per year available for the ten applicant countries. The size of these funds looks rather limited, taking into account the tasks ahead in the rural areas.

SAPARD funding will be best used to facilitate development by creating the conditions for private investment to take place. Given the scarcity of available resources, more research is urgently needed in order to set development priorities, to determine what are the most acute structural weaknesses, and to define more clearly what type of investments could maximise technical efficiency and competitiveness in the CEECs' agricultural and food sector.

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