

Olena BORODINA, Igor PROKOPA, Oleksii FRAIER

Department of Economy and Policy of Agrarian Transformations, Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

olena.borodina@gmail.com

iprokopa@ukr.net

oleksiyvf@gmail.com

**THE RENEWAL OF THE UKRAINE – EUROPEAN UNION
ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT ON THE CURRENT EUROPEAN
UNION PRIORITIES FOR AGRICULTURE
AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

ABSTRACT

The paper substantiates the necessity to rethink the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in terms of the transformation of the food systems of Ukraine and the EU following the requirements of the European Green Deal.

The spotlight is turned on the features and objectives of the EU agri-food system modernization that are way beyond agriculture covering the stimulation of changes in the whole food chain. The importance of implementing two key strategies in the field of food security (2021–2027) – “From farm to fork” (F2F) and “Biodiversity” designed to create European sustainability standards on global food systems is emphasized. The difference between the European and Ukrainian food systems is revealed, highlighting the significant structural imbalances in Ukraine’s food system. Structural distortions in Ukrainian agriculture consist in the presence of monofunctional large-scale export-oriented agri-holdings on the one side and farming households producing a variety of goods locally that were moved outside the state’s support on the other. Agri-holdings have significant economic and political power and influence the priorities and mechanisms of state regulation policy exacerbating structural distortions. Thus, there is the tendency in Ukraine to strengthen the role of industrialized agriculture representatives, who ignore the principles of sustainable agriculture and fair spatial development.

Overcoming these structural distortions and the development and implementation of an effective agricultural and rural development policy and considering the latest trends of the European green course is seen as an important and necessary prerequisite for the revision of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The priority directions to implement the principles and methods of strategic planning and state regulation of agricultural and rural development in Ukraine based on EU’s “Green Deal” are substantiated.

Keywords: Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, Green Deal, agrifood, agricultural and rural development, rural household, industrialized agriculture.

JEL Classification: Q01, Q13, Q15.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the proposals to rethink the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement are being considered in Ukraine. The focus is set primarily on deepening sectoral integration, particularly in electronic communications, technical regulation, trading of goods and services, and environmental protection; gradual seizure of tariff and non-tariff barriers for Ukrainian exporters, etc. The important role is given to the Ukrainian Green Course based on the EU Green Deal, including the national agri-food sector, which initiates new research in this field.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Existing studies on the transformation of the food system in Ukraine in line with the EU Green Deal generally reveal the main objectives and directions of this course, challenges, and opportunities for the economy and society in general and the agricultural system in particular (Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, 2021); (Khvorostianiy, 2020); (Alekankina & Tkachenko, 2021). Some publications highlight peculiarities of “Green Agriculture” (Andrusevych N. *et al.*, 2020), investigate methodological approaches of agricultural transition of Ukraine to the Green Deal (Fedorchuk, 2021) and the institutional capacity of state agricultural policy ensuring such a transition (Kucher, 2020), stressing the importance of the agricultural sector for “greening” Ukraine and the role of international donor organizations in the post-pandemic economic recovery (Suschenko, 2021).

At the same time, the structural differences between the Ukrainian agricultural sector and the EU agricultural systems are not properly considered when emphasizing certain aspects of the transition of the Ukrainian agri-food system to the EU Green Deal principles. Representatives of the national and transnational agro-industrial capital that support monocultural export-oriented agricultural raw production use the outcomes of the USAID estimates (Beckman *et al.*, 2020) to protect and expand an industrial monofunctional agri-food system in Ukraine. The mentioned publication assesses the impact of the EU Green Deal initiative on the market and food security in the EU and around the world.

The agricultural impact is calculated by three scenarios: EU-only, middle (adoption by some countries, and including explicit EU trade restrictions against non-adopters), and global adoption. It is noted that the European Commission’s 10-year plan of targeted reductions in the use of land, antimicrobials, fertilizers, and pesticides would lead to a reduction in EU agricultural production and reduce its competitiveness in national and export markets (Beckman *et al.*, 2020, p. 21).

In Ukraine, particularly, any scenario would bring economic losses. Within the EU-only scenario, the total agricultural production would decrease since Ukraine is closely associated with the EU markets where the export of crops such

as sunflower and wheat would be decreased because of a reduction in pesticides, fertilizers, etc. Large-scale reductions in the EU would tighten the market availability of agricultural commodities, leading to increased prices (Beckman *et al.*, 2020, p. 11).

The middle scenario suggests a decrease of agricultural production in Ukraine by 33%, and globally by about 30% (Beckman *et al.*, 2020, p. 8). The global scenario would largely cause the fall of total agricultural production volumes in Ukraine (mainly because of reducing oilseed and wheat production) (Beckman *et al.*, 2020, p. 10).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the need to implement EU principles and methods of strategic planning and state regulation of agricultural and rural development in Ukraine as a condition to transform the food system in line with the EU Green Deal and one of the renewal paths of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. The following research methods were used: empirical (in specifying transforming paths of the EU agri-food policy in line with the EU Green Deal and characterizing structural deformations of agriculture in Ukraine), economic and statistical (in the analysis of the dynamics and structure of agricultural production in Ukraine by types of agricultural holdings), analysis and synthesis (in the substantiation of basic conditions to broaden family-farm segment in Ukraine and tasks of state policy of agricultural and sustainable development aimed at the renewal of Ukraine-EU Association Agreement).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chapter 17 “Agriculture and rural development” of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement envisages covering the above-mentioned fields while encouraging modern and sustainable agricultural production, considering the need to protect ecology and animals, dissemination of organic production and biotechnology; share of knowledge and good practices on the rural development policy to provide economic welfare of rural communities; improvement of agricultural competitiveness and efficiency and market transparency, as well as investment conditions. These are the important target guidelines of the Common Agrarian Policy of the European Union (EU CAP), which should be implemented in national agricultural policy and practice since the signing of the Agreement.

The Common Agricultural Policy will be improved with the transformation of the food system correspondingly to the European Green Deal course in the new programming period 2021–2027. The course is based on strategies that balance nature, food systems, and biodiversity to protect Europeans’ health and well-being while increasing EU’s competitiveness and resilience. This involves combining the

interests of consumers and producers in all food production stages, which should be based on a new worldview platform – the overall reduction of the food system’s impact on the ecology and climate. Despite the “creeping” urbanization, European citizens want to have natural food: fresh products, minimally processed and stable supplies. Food consumers demand guarantees to have a choice of good food, and all the food chain participants should consider it having regard to their responsibility and development opportunities.

The European Green Deal is a real confirmation of the EU executives’ aspirations to radically change the way of food production, distribution, and consumption under the global pandemic. EU agri-food policy aims to meet the food security challenges on a sustainable basis, emphasizing the need to create a strong and sustainable European food system functioning under all circumstances and ensuring access to adequate food for all EU citizens without harming the planet and mankind. There are two key strategies in the field of agri-food supply 2021–2027: Farm to Fork (F2F) and Biodiversity, which aim to transform the European food system into a global standard of sustainability. They are based on the principles of the Green Deal and are a central element of the EU’s pandemic recovery plan.

Among specific goals, the European Commission has proposed a massive reduction in the use of pesticides (50%), fertilizers (20%), and antibiotics (50%) in agriculture and aquaculture by 2030. These measures can help farmers to implement agri-environmental practices. The Biodiversity strategy suggests a far-reaching plan for the EU’s nature restoration, which includes transforming European lands and seas (at least 30%) to effectively managed protected areas to compensate for the growing loss of biodiversity. The Biodiversity strategy will also support ecological recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU is also committed to allocate 25% of agricultural land to organic farming, constantly increasing the annual rate of land conversion.

An important role is given to tackling food loss and reducing food waste, stepping up the fight against food fraud (falsification of food), strengthening rules of animal welfare, and providing clear information to consumers on how to make their own choices in favour of safe food produced sustainably due to all-European food labeling. The F2F strategy also promotes new “green” business models aimed at engaging all participants in the food chain to achieve its sustainability. For example, a circular way of food processing and retail trade, as well as socially responsible production methods will be supported.

Thus, the goals of modernizing the EU agri-food system go far beyond agricultural production: they will stimulate changes in the entire food chain, encourage the transition to agri-organic farming, circular agriculture, bioeconomy, reduce food waste and losses, and move to a healthy and safe ecology.

The implementation of the development principles of the EU agri-food system in Ukraine involves first of all overcoming structural distortions in domestic agriculture and the formation and implementation of an effective state policy of agricultural and rural development following the latest European trends.

The key distinction between the agricultural systems of the EU and Ukraine is the difference in the structure of the agrarian system. Family farms being fully supported by public policy measures have traditionally been and remain the basis of this system in most EU countries. In Ukraine, post-Soviet transformations and new conditions for a prioritized development of large enterprises resulted in the creation of a dual structure of agriculture. On the one side, there are powerful agricultural holdings, which monopolized the cultivation of export-oriented crops and on the other side we can find farming households, most of which are engaged in food production mainly for their own needs.

Agroholdings are not institutionalized subjects of agrarian entrepreneurship: formally, there are various organizational and legal forms of agricultural enterprises and individual farms incorporated or controlled by them. Farming households producing agricultural commodities (households) are not entrepreneurial formations either, although some of them meet the world-recognized criteria for classification as farms. The farmer segment in national agriculture is represented by a small number compared to the farms of European standards. While in the EU the land area of most agricultural producers does not exceed 100 hectares, in Ukraine, on the one hand, agricultural holdings control hundreds of thousands of hectares, and on the other hand, three-quarters of rural households use less than 1 hectare.

Agricultural enterprises, particularly those incorporated in agricultural holdings, perform production based on industrial, often soil- and environmentally-depleting technologies and usually attract people who do not live within the activity area. The main practice here is the cultivation of limited high-margin crops, monoculture, neglecting environmental and animal protection requirements. A considerable part of agricultural added value is being exported outside rural areas, rather than targeted to the full reproduction of natural, infrastructural, and other resources consumed during the production process, and even more so to improve the rural areas and promote the economic well-being of rural communities. Large-scale farms follow their trace. The activity of farming households and family farms is largely based on the principles of sustainability and (albeit largely forced) the need for food self-sufficiency and promoting the country's food sovereignty. However, without proper state support, they lose competitiveness relative to large enterprises and other structures that monopolized the most profitable agricultural and agri-food markets.

The above-mentioned clarifies that the provisions of Chapter 17 of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement are not being implemented. In Ukraine, measures to bring the agricultural system closer to the European system, and in the EU – to encourage Ukraine to act in this direction are not being taken. As a result, the position of industrialized agriculture is being strengthened ignoring the principles of sustainable agriculture, the interconnectedness of agricultural and rural development, and spatial justice in land use. The volume of gross output in agricultural enterprises in 2020 exceeded the level of 2015 by 5.5%, and their share in the output of the industry increased from 52.4% to 53.9%. In this period, gross output in farming households

decreased (–5.5%), and the share in the industry decreased from 38.4% to 35.4%. Farm production, due to implemented farmers' state support measures in 2017–2018 has increased considerably, by 19.6%. The share of the farmers' segment in the industry's output increased from 9.2% in 2015 to 10.7% in 2020 (Table 1). However, this happened without an increase in the number of farms.

Table 1

The agricultural output of Ukraine by types of holdings (at constant prices in 2016, UAH billion)

Types of holdings	2015	2020	2020 in % to 2015	Shares of holdings in total, %		
				2015	2020	+.–
All types	596.8	612.1	102.6	100.0	100.0	X
Including: Agricultural Enterprises	312.7	329.9	105.5	52.4	53.9	+1.5
Private Farms	55.0	65.8	119.6	9.2	10.7	+1.5
Farming Households	229.1	216.4	94.5	38.4	35.4	–3.0

Source: Based on the data from: Agriculture of Ukraine (2020). Statistical yearbook. State Statistics Service of Ukraine.

The acceptance (non-acceptance) of authorities' decisions in favor of representatives of industrialized agriculture implicitly reflects the strengthening of their positions. Among such decisions, there is a liquidation of the Ministry of Agricultural and Food Policy of Ukraine in 2019, which had previously strengthened support for family farming (the Ministry was restored in late 2020 with significantly limited functions), delay in elaborating a strategy for the development of agriculture, ignoring problems of rural development, and finally, forced introduction of a practically unregulated agricultural land market. The latter may lead to the final consolidation of the course for the establishment of a Latin American agricultural system in Ukraine, not European.

Overcoming structural distortions in agriculture and forming a national strategy of agricultural and rural development with considering the conceptual provisions of the European Green Deal is primarily related to the creation of the most favorable conditions for Ukraine to become a powerful family-peasant-farmer segment of agriculture. This segment is the most appropriate for the creation of a sustainable food system that continues to function under all circumstances and provides access to food to all social groups without harming the environment and mankind.

In the context of pro-convergence, the state agricultural policy in Ukraine, addressing the mentioned problems, involves the introduction of the agricultural producers' typology system adapted to the European one, which includes the transition to determining their economic size based on the standard output (Standard Output-SO). Thus, it is necessary to adapt our information sources to the relevant EU standards on (commercial) economic activities of agricultural producers, functioning agri-food markets, etc. Integration with the EU also considers Ukraine's involvement in the European system for the collection, processing, and use of information on

agricultural entities (FADN). This is connected with the introduction of a special ongoing surveying program of agricultural producers, selection of participants who adequately represent national agriculture, determination (creation) of the institution-coordinator of FADN, which will organize and ensure the implementation of the program. It is extremely important to speed up the All-Ukrainian Agricultural Census, which will provide the necessary information for the selection of participants in this program.

The cost of standard output (SO) is considered when assigning an agricultural producer to one of 14 classes of economic size – from “up to 2 thousand” until “more than 3 million” euro. EU countries use this classification to distinguish (taking into account national specifics) groups of small, medium, and large farms. Its implementation in Ukraine would resolve disputes over the division of farms into small, medium, and large, related to their affiliation to various organizational and legal forms, specialization, land-use area, and so on. National farming households and all other economic formations fit perfectly within 14 classes of economic size. Bringing them together in one list allows ranking farms according to their output value and identifying lines that separate different groups of size. Such lines should select groups of farms to which preferential measures of agrarian policy on family farming development would apply.

At the same time, a strong family peasant-farmer system of European type in Ukraine requires the following basic conditions:

1. *State-regulated agricultural land market.* Legislative support for the market circulation of agricultural land, which would promote the development of family farming, should focus on the implementation of the public function of land tenure including guaranteeing fundamental human rights to safe and sufficient food, as well as ensuring the right of peasants to decent livelihoods. This excludes the free purchase and sale of land as an ordinary commodity: land has the characteristics of a commodity, but is not a commodity in its classical sense since land is not reproducible, cannot be replaced by any other means of production, food cannot be produced without land. From the point of view of its owner, the land is considered not as a commodity or a factor of production, but as a unique individual social good – a safe form of preserving the acquired amenities, obtaining social and political guarantees, ensuring family food sovereignty. With this in mind, several protective measures should be introduced to monetize land, transform land resources into financial assets that can be the subject of market appropriation, takeover, and resale for profit. The most important of them is the right to acquire agricultural land for agricultural production exclusively by a natural person living at its location.

2. *Balanced agricultural structure,* which is necessary to ensure economic competition based on economic equality. This requires the formalization of the existing agrarian system in Ukraine, which is represented by four groups of agricultural producers:

- a) agro-industrial corporations as vertically integrated structures (agroholdings);
- b) corporate farms (business associations, private enterprises, production cooperatives, and farms that operate solely based on hired labor);
- c) family farms (farm and personal peasant farms of commodity and semi-commodity type);
- d) farming households.

The Law of Ukraine “On the Agrarian System” should be adopted, which would define the criteria for classifying each business entity as a certain group of producers to introduce a differentiated state policy.

- A. The agro-industrial corporations are subject to state regulation as corporate structures with mandatory maintenance and publication of consolidated accounts in terms of enterprises that are part of them. To withdraw rental profits of corporations to the budget, regulating mechanisms of rental relations in agriculture are introduced. Corporations are being excluded from the system of tax benefits and state support programs.
- B. Corporate farms managing sole activity have actual state support and tax benefits preserved.
- C. Family farms have priority in the state support and preferential taxation (for farms), land tax (for households). Tax rates can be differentiated depending on the composition and area of agricultural land, structure of commodities.
- D. Farming households are envisaged to have support under the state agricultural policy: both production of commercial agricultural commodities and preservation of the consumer type of activity are stimulated.

3. *Effective rural institutes and institutions.* An institutional environment being targeted to the development of family farming should encourage all social groups, including the poor, to participate in and benefit from the growth process. The crucial role is allotted to the government, as it is committed to facilitating access of rural communities to economic and social infrastructure; protecting natural resources; improving land security; suspending the process of labour migration, etc. Improving the management of natural resources (especially land) will help increase the market share of small agricultural producers, strengthen rural advisory services and the social impact of agricultural and other investments in rural areas. The general vector is to modernize the management of agricultural development processes to ensure positive results and new opportunities for families, rural communities, local economies, as well as society, and the country as a whole. The desired results involve reducing vulnerability and increasing the resilience of the agricultural system. In the long run, the abovementioned will create the preconditions for suspending migration.

The measures of prime importance in this direction are: strengthening and developing farmers’ organizations and communities for their better representation and effective work in partnership with others; protection of land rights of family

farms without depriving them of new economic opportunities, reducing land conflicts; development of inclusive, sustainable business models and partnership arrangements for the participation of small farmers in agribusiness development and value chains; appropriate institutional framework to improve coordination and provision of effective rural advisory, information and financial services to achieve sustainable agricultural intensification and better market access; developing strategies to strengthen and support the capacity of local service providers to support farmers, farmers' organizations and rural communities; strengthening the comprehensive system of management and implementation of agricultural development processes to ensure the positive impact of agricultural investment on the local economy; development of practical standards (frameworks) for joint work, stakeholder platforms and coalitions for the management of sustainable and comprehensive agricultural development through the establishment of effective links at local, regional and national levels; development and implementation of institutional innovations for investors in the development of sustainable agriculture, land use and natural resources.

4. *Rural infrastructure.* Efficient infrastructure in rural areas accelerates agricultural development, as it facilitates agriculture, provides favorable conditions important for attracting national and foreign investment, introducing new technologies, and increasing productivity. Rural infrastructure also contributes to rural development, particularly to ensuring farmers' access to markets and basic services, rural economic growth, job creation, and income growth. Investing in the development of a rural road network greatly facilitates poverty reduction in areas with a high potential for family farming. At the same time, the improvement of local roads in rural areas occupied by industrial agriculture is not conducive to inclusive rural development. Although these high-value investments improve the living conditions of some groups of peasants, they do not lift people out of poverty.

5. *Financial services in rural areas* should be distinguished by their specific – financial inclusion. Individuals and legal entities – owners of family farms have access to and use the necessary services provided by financial institutions in an acceptable and safe users way. Potential rural customers may not have difficulty in accessing services (opening a bank account or taking out a loan) but may delay using these opportunities for many reasons. Overcoming barriers to using services is a more important goal of financial development in rural areas than simple access to finance. The poorest households need to have some policies and investments in place to improve their assets and opportunities.

Ukraine has such important entry points into inclusive rural financing, including family farming, as migrants' money transfer. Application of this money to provide other financial services (additional or new) presents a unique opportunity to create a convergence between the financial goals of millions of senders and recipients transfers. Migrants should be better informed and have real funding and investment possibilities applicable to their profile to benefit from this opportunity. Migrants' remittances, savings, or investments suggest a powerful set of tools to change their own lives and the lives of fellow villagers.

6. *Non-agricultural activity of peasant farms* is entrepreneurship that is carried out in rural areas and on a functional basis, it is a set of activities that do not include primary production of agricultural commodities. This activity covers the entire production and marketing chain (processing, transportation, distribution, marketing, sales, retail), as well as tourism, non-agricultural production, construction and mining, various self-employment activities (crafts, bakeries, repair, trade, etc.). Rural entrepreneurship can make a significant contribution to rural economic growth, income diversification, rural employment, poverty alleviation and improvement of farmers' life quality if measures to promote it are taken in the context of poverty reduction. Otherwise, the benefits of entrepreneurship in rural areas will be appropriated by external stakeholders, exacerbating the existing dichotomy between agro-rural and non-rural populations.

7. *Budget support for the "green course" of agricultural and rural development.* Agrarian and rural development policy is an agreement between farmers and society that encourages producers and industry to produce goods and services that meet the needs of society, rather than those that meet the market alone. This is a fair policy for all participants in the agri-food system, which supports family farming, dynamic rural entrepreneurship, encourages the rational use of resources, and respects taxpayers' investments aimed at subsidizing the agricultural sector. It is extremely important to use in Ukraine the experience of EU member states on the differentiation of the tax pressure on agricultural producers, in particular the introduction of zero and preferential tax rates for small and medium-sized farms. The compensation of contributions to social insurance funds for the family farm heads and members should be increased. This practice should also be extended to farming households, which are registered in the State Agrarian Register.

At the same time, state support for agricultural and rural development can be justified only if it stimulates:

- production of healthy, safe, and high-quality food, rational use of natural resources in an environmentally sound way;
- rural prosperity, where producers work with rural communities to improve landscapes and biodiversity;
- clean and healthy environment, which is considered as the economic basis of agricultural production, which functions in harmony with nature;
- introduction of technical-technological and social innovations while preserving and stimulating traditional knowledge and technologies;
- maintaining long-term productivity in the face of climate change and environmental disasters;
- implementation of comprehensive solutions based on the achievements of science, knowledge, and understanding of the multifunctionality of agriculture, abandoning short-sighted technological approaches to increase production and exports.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result of post-Soviet transformations and new conditions for a prioritized development of large enterprises in Ukraine, a dual structure of agriculture was created. On the one side there are powerful agricultural holdings, that monopolized the cultivation of export-oriented crops and on the other – farming households, most of which are engaged in food production mainly for their own needs. Contrary to the goals of the European integration, measures to bring the agricultural system of Ukraine closer to the European one and in the EU – to encourage Ukraine to act in this direction, are not being taken. Thus, Ukraine is strengthening the position of industrialized agriculture, which ignores the principles of sustainable agriculture, interconnected agricultural and rural development, and spatial justice in land use.

The implementation of the latest principles of the EU agri-food system development involves overcoming structural distortions in national agriculture and the formation and implementation of an effective state policy for agricultural and rural development, while considering the conceptual foundations of the European Green Deal. This requires the creation of the most favorable conditions for the creation of a powerful family peasant-farmer segment of the agricultural system in Ukraine.

In this context, the national public policy priority should be the formation of such basic conditions, such as:

- *state-regulated agricultural land market* – legislative support for the market circulation of agricultural land, which will promote the development of family farming, should focus on the implementation of the public function of land, as well as the right of peasants to decent livelihoods.
- *balanced agrarian structure*, which is necessary to ensure economic competition based on equality of economic entities; this requires the formalization of the existing agrarian system in Ukraine, which is represented by four groups of agricultural producers: agro-industrial corporations; corporate farms; family farms (farm and farmer type households); farming households. The Ukrainian Law “On the Agrarian System”, which would define the criteria for assigning each business entity to a certain group of producers to introduce a differentiated state policy for them should be adopted.
- *effective rural institutes and institutions* – an institutional environment targeted to the development of family farming should encourage all social groups, including the poor, to participate in and benefit from the growth process.
- *rural infrastructure* – efficient infrastructure in rural areas accelerates agricultural development, as it facilitates agriculture, provides important favourable conditions for attracting national and foreign investment, introducing new technologies, and increasing productivity; rural infrastructure also contributes to rural development: ensuring farmers’ access to markets and basic services; rural economic growth, job creation, and income growth.

Other important tasks of the state policy for agricultural and rural development of Ukraine, aimed at the renewal of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement under the European Green Deal, are:

- *introduction* of the European system of collection, processing, and use of information on economic entities in agriculture (FADN) in Ukraine;
- *the implementation* of European approaches to the differentiation of agricultural producers into “small”, “medium” and “large” to implement a differentiated public policy;
- *improvement* of support (including “zero” and preferential taxation) for small and medium-sized agricultural producers;
- *formation* of the social security system for self-employed persons in agriculture.

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