

## ABSTRACT

Many history studies show that the first forms of mutual help for the development of economic activities appeared in agriculture in the Neolithic Age (5500-2500 BC), and the assemblies, as effective association forms that joined the kinship relationships to the economic interests, probably appeared on the actual territory of Romania during the passage to the Bronze Age (2500-2000/1800 BC). Evolution and change in time of assemblies are superposed to the evolution of relationships concerning the juridical circulation of land and of other goods of maximum economic importance, inclusively the property rights in the Romanian society.

The assembly for the Romanians from Wallachia and Moldavia had no general denomination, as in case of ancient Germans or Russians, because it was a peasant assembly and in that period, the word village was synonym to assembly. In ancient Romanian language, the village did not mean a geographical, toponimic notion but a demographic one, the totality of inhabitants. In the Moldavia of the XIV and XV-th centuries, many village yards appeared, besides the town yards, having a special meaning, which is more villages found under a common boundary, under the domination of a boyard (feudal field) or under the lordly domination of towns.

According to the Romanian dictionary, the assembly is a form of specific social organization of the feudal system that makes the connection between the farming association and the previous systems and which is characterized by common labour and joining the private and collective properties. According to Encyclopedia, the assembly is a form of social organization specific to the passage from the primitive commune to the class-divided society (slave or feudal systems). The ancient territory assemblies are attested by the names of the villages, therefore by the toponimic system of the Romanian villages. The owner, lacking capital, did not have any other exploitation finding, being obliged to lease the land and agreed the leasing conditions required by the tenant, otherwise the land remained untilld.

The Feudalism in the Romanian countries is the result of the decay of free associations and of the appearance of feudal landowners inside these associations. As the assembly is the basic phenomenon of landownership, which is previous to feudalism, the feudal property is at its turn previous to the feudal State. The assembly could not subsist to the market widening, to the formation of internal trade relationships, to the increase of production and to the work differentiation. It is easy to understand that the assembly, being a close working community, has no longer a role in a society where the individual work is differentiated and where the economic autarchy makes place to the merchandise exchange. In the Romanian countries, the assembly lasted a longer period and was stronger than in the other countries from Western and Central Europe. The desegregation of the common usage of land in the assembly passed through more stages: the first individual (family) property was the household, while the entire land was owned in common. At the next stage, appeared the peasants' crafts, who, besides cattle breeding and agriculture, could earn money and become rich by making a craft. The most

frequent form of foreign elements penetrating the assemblies, during the XVI-XVII-th centuries, is buying by the boyards of a part from the land of the assembly and, thus, they may become members in the assembly.

In Moldavia, the oldest boundary indications showed that they were settled according to the topographic natural limits: hill, origin of a valley, but not the course of waters that were found inside the boundary. When the individual properties multiplied inside the assembly, the village boundaries stated only the individual properties found on the edges of boundaries. We may assess that the possession of a household, of ploughed land or of forests and grasslands must be different as concerns the usage and the individual possession right. The possession within the assembly is generally a usage right, which is not determined on the field. Therefore, the land of the assembly was a geographically structured land: fields, forests, waters, grasslands, vineyards, but also as concerns the rights of each member of the assembly (every family), right exerted on all and on every structural elements from the land of the assembly. This right varied according to the more or less individual usage right, depending on the geographical nature of each element.

Until the XIX- th century, on most of the lands from our country, in Wallachia and Moldavia, the areas used as grasslands exceeded the ones used for agriculture.

Under these conditions, the extensive agriculture, by replacing the farming land from one side to another on the estate of a village, was, for a great part of the villages, maintaining the possession of land in common property, although farming was done individually.

The collective acts for villages became fewer and disappeared in the XVII-th century in Wallachia; after 1625, individual acts issued for each transaction and for each family. Therefore, the disaggregation of the assembly reached its top and the conscience of the individual property appeared.

As concerns the mills, they were found in Moldavia and Walachia under the feudal and assembly regime; there were feudal mills, with privileges, where land-dependent peasants came, and mills belonging to the free assemblies , which belonged to the entire community, without privileges.

From all the aspects of the collective life of the assembly, justice gave birth to more controversies. N. Iorga said that at the basis of the judgment in the Romanian countries is found the judgment of old men from villages, who are the “patriarchs of the village”. We are interested by the existence under lordly authority of the autonomous assembly justice, under the form of maintaining ancient customs, or of the privileges of a prince, under the usual form of the collaboration between the feudal, lordly and assembly justice. In the Romanian Principalities, the farm land was found in the property of boyards, monasteries and free peasants. The State property has significantly increased by the secularization of lands belonging to the monasteries. In Moldavia, it extended by 241 land properties, representing 2/17 of the entire territory. N. Şuţu, in 1849, showed a clear domination of the great property of boyards, who owned 58% of the arable land, compared to 20.72%, owned by the free peasants and 20.45%, by monasteries.

In Moldavia, we found out a transfer of property from lazy boyards to merchants, who discovered the advantages of commercial agriculture and became landowners. The land property of monasteries represented 27.69 % of the farming area of Walachia.

The study on the evolution of assemblies from the formation of Romanian states until the Union of Principalities points out that the conditioning and privilege system (Law of the Land) represented the means of defending the individual property of the assembly members and of destroying the assemblies, too. This system of privileges represents since the XIX-th century the major element in the appearance and development of modern forms of agricultural cooperation in Romania.

The justice within the assembly was represented by the judgment of “good old men”.

The most ancient form of land inheritance within the assembly was the individual inheritance. The fact that during the great economic depression, the peasants did not have enough money to pay back to those who leased lands explains why the process of assemblies failed.

The basis of the European and Romanian agriculture was put from the legislative, economic and social viewpoint in the last three decades of the XIX-th century and the first decades of the XX-th century, through the agrarian reforms of 1864 and 1918. The agrarian relationships in Principalities developed within the agrarian regime, founded by the Organic Regulation, which limited the right of using the land by peasants and gave one third of the estate as full property to landowners, preparing their transformation into absolute owners. The development of the capitalism in the Romanian agriculture, by the passage of great landowners from the semi-feudal household to the capitalist one, by its slow transformation, opened the way to the straightening of agriculture, a typical phenomenon of all capitalist agricultures.

In 1843, in Wallachia, on a great number of estates from the plain, the bondmen ploughed as much land as they wanted, in exchange of metayage. Since 1841, on the estates of monasteries, under leasing conditions, the bondmen are obliged to work at least half of the days of metayage and the rest could be paid by money. Therefore, landowners and tenants require frequently the measurement of the land, delimiting fields for agriculture to their account, obliging the bondmen to cultivate them. The agrarian legislation before 1867 – year of the Austro-Hungarian dualism – but, especially, after that year, did not have good effects on the Romanian population, although it had positive influences on farm households, by separating the property on forests and grasslands and unifying the properties in viable households.

Since 1864 and until the Union of 1918 there were no significant changes in the agrarian structure of the Romanian Principalities. We must notice that the industrial processing of farm products was at a low level, preventing the creation of farm households, based on trade principles. Many economists belonging to the Marxism current showed that the industrial development, the formation of great

financial and commercial capitals resulted in the appearance in agriculture of great land capitals and in the increase of the areas of land properties.

Cooperation in agriculture is a need required by the characteristics of the activity in this branch of production and by its position within the market economy. The cooperative movement was widely acknowledged by the agriculture of the developed countries, multiplying its manifestation forms as an adaption response to the evolution and characteristics of the economic flows of the agriculture. In developed agriculture countries, the cooperation appeared for presenting the households under the private property regime and for maintaining a healthy competition climate.

This process became stronger after the Adrianople Treatise of 1829. It was in direct connection with the needs of increasing the farm production for internal consumption and especially, for the demands of the external trade. The removal of feudal relationships and putting the peasants into possession of land was an important event in the appearance and evolution of capitalist relationships, generally, and in the agriculture of the Romanian Countries, particularly. The agrarian reform from 1921 represented the enslavement of poor peasants to banks and usurers, in order to pay back the sums established for land owning.

Between the two world wars, the socio-climatic and political conditions in which the Romanian agriculture developed were against the practice of an intensive agriculture. The Great Union, the foundation of the unitary national State has created since 1918 a favourable framework for the development of the cooperative movement. After 1900, spreading of the cooperative movement has resulted in a rapid development of more cooperation forms: leasing assemblies, consumption cooperatives, production cooperatives (forest, vine and milk cooperatives), etc. Between the two world wars, the cooperation has known a high evolution, the cooperation and association forms diversified, while the number of cooperatives and of their members increased.

Generated by the need of economic and social emancipation of disfavoured social classes by the capitalist and industrial evolution of Romania, the modern cooperation has succeeded to become a reality with good effects on the people who took part in its activity.

Agriculture is a field where the association and cooperation are more necessary than in any other field of the human activity, the isolated farmer being incapable of working alone. Helping one another was the conception that was found at the basis of the development of cooperation. In the field of farm life, cooperation is an economic form that was dominant from ancient times. Its foundation is the result of profound economic needs. In 1909, the Law of cooperatives for artisans and workers was voted. It showed an organization identical to that of Popular Banks from villages. Gr. Mladenatz was one of the most outstanding representatives of the cooperation thinking in the between war Romania. As it is shown by Article 6 from the Cooperation Legislation, he considered the cooperation as “an institution of democratic origin and structure where the capital differences cannot bring special rights”. Ștefan Zeletin considered the cooperation as a product of the developed capitalism, which, by its

three forms (consumption, production and credit), represented an efficient means of fighting against exploitation, without destroying the capitalist system. He admitted only few deviations in the undeveloped countries, among which Romania, in order to avoid that peasants become proletarians. Thus, the cooperation acquired a preventive character.

In 1893, the first people's banks were founded. At the beginning, their evolution was slow, recording a faster rate during 1898-1903.

In 1902, there were 700 banks and their number has reached almost 3000 in 1918, while the number of their members increased from 60 thousands to over 630 thousands, most of them being peasants. As concerns the capital they subscribed, it represented over 40% of the total from the village money capitals.

From the above-mentioned, we may notice that both the leasing assemblies and the people's banks had a positive role in the agriculture of Romania, before the First World War.

Thus, the leasing assemblies (cooperatives) have contributed to the suppression of peasants' tasks, carried out on the properties of these assemblies and the people's banks have contributed to the diminution of peasants' tasks as an ancient form of crediting. In that period, they tried to solve that problem on the cooperative basis, stimulating the organization of the own forces of peasantry, especially by the intermediary of credit and leasing cooperatives. The Central House of People's Banks, which is a State institution, took the place of a general association of credit cooperatives.

The year 1928 may be considered as a reference year, because that year the Code of the Cooperation was adopted, where the notion of "cooperative society" was defined for the first time in Romania. This code did not live for long time, being replaced in 1929 by the Law on the organization of cooperation, which included statements concerning the cooperative types, the minimum number of members and the social capital. Due to the law of the cooperation organization, two central organisms of the farm cooperation were set up: a private-type bank organization – the Cooperative Central Bank and a central control organization of the public right – the National Office of the Cooperation. In 1938, the Law on the cooperation, adopted in 1929, has suffered important changes, being a reform of the cooperation legislation.

The modified law, in fact a new law that combined the regulations of the Cooperation Code from 1928 and of the cooperation law from 1929, had as important point the fusion of the cooperation institutions, which appeared during 1935-1938, and setting up of the National Institute of Cooperation, institution of private right with state participation. Therefore, the idea of cooperation was and remained present within the peasantry. The relationship between the cooperation and State movement represented a great concern for many scientists, their opinions being sometimes identical and other times divergent. The role of cooperation in the field of production is completed with its role in the field of trading the farm products. Therefore, the most important aspect is the contribution of cooperatives towards the offer of farm products and to the regularization of their prices. Contributing to the concentration of farm products, the cooperation structures from

the agriculture of the developed countries makes the conditions for organizing the markets of farm products at concordance with the directions of the economy development and farmers support in their fight within the market mechanism. The cooperation movement promotes the contractual-type relationships, which require a certain discipline in a wide field of problems, from those linked to the used technologies until those concerning the quantity and quality of delivered products. The lack of marketing structures in the world of villages made the landowners set up some cooperation forms in the field of product selling. At harvest, especially in case of vegetables and fruits, when there are “peaks” of production, it is more difficult to sell at good prices (the offer is greater than the demand and prices are lower), which results in redrawing some excess products from selling. These require financial efforts, inclusively for arranging some deposits for farm products. Another way of removing the difficulties from selling the products is to close contracts for the product sold by the created association with various traders. The activity of selling products carried out by such an association may be completed by that concerning the industrial production factors for farms. An organized system may simplify the relationships with the industrial producers or the economic agents, acting in the field of trade with such production factors. Thus, the cooperation relationships are simplified and the transport expenses are diminished.

This thesis had a wider circulation after the creation of the agrarian reform during 1918-1921, when the economic basis of small merchandise production enlarged in the agriculture of Romania. The first creators have used the current ideas, which were adequate to their purpose. The problem was to find a way of liberating the class of workers from their hard situation, because of the generalization of capitalism. The order it produced proves this: England, France, Germany, Italy and, then, the other countries, while they entered the field of capitalism. The association had a legal form by inscribing it as mutual help association. The first norm concerning the association is that the cooperative association is free. Another guiding organ is the administration council, chosen by the general assembly, which has to direct the operations of the cooperative. Among the regulations of the Raiffeisen type cooperatives are those according to which the cooperative should work without social capital, without registration fees and based on unlimited responsibility. One of the special regulations of the Raiffeisen system is the creation of an indivisible reserve fund. During the lifetime of F. W. Raiffeisen, in 1872, a farm cooperative bank was set up in Renania and, in 1876, "Die Deutsche Raiffeisen-Bank", both of them being anonymous joint-stock societies. As norms for the association in the Danish cooperation, there are the following: idea of the own help of those that become members, limited or unlimited responsibility, according to the type of cooperative, without proper capital, the action of cooperatives is limited in most of cases to one village, application of the principle of “open gates”, free entry, associations take from the benefit a part corresponding to the quantum of operations they made with that cooperative, they know the indivisible reserve fund, but only the low sums, the associates enjoy rights equality as concerns the administration of the cooperative.

In the western countries, the participation of credit institutions to the cooperation forms from agriculture, as well as to private or mixed societies has known a great development. All the activities developed by the land associations are complementary to the societies of land improvement SAFER, which role is to regulate the land market. The farm cooperative societies are organized with economic purposes for a better management of the farmers' interests. The State supports financially the producer associations for 5 years, the sums decreasing each year. It gives non-repayable subsidies for improving the production potential. Cooperative unions and federations are organized on branches and work according to a statute, having as aim the promotion, support and defence of the interests of member cooperatives. The Economic Interest Groups – GIE are organized on physical people or groups that are associated in order to develop commune activities in specific fields. The technical cooperation and the development of agriculture are ensured by mutual help organisms and work banks, by CUMA and GAEC, associations, trade unions, groups of studies and professional training.