



## The Limits to Unified Claims against European Agricultural Policies: A Comparative Analysis of Wine Producers in France and Romania

ANTOINE ROGER

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**Abstract.** In 2008, a reform of the European Common Market Organisation (CMO) for wine was introduced. It consisted in helping ‘uncompetitive producers’ to step out of the wine market. The aim was to offer the ‘competitive producers’ the possibility of increasing their vineyards and developing large-scale production patterns on the model of the New World. The article focuses on the defense of the smallest wine producers invited to give up their traditional activities. It analyses the current dynamics in the *département* of Aude in France and the *judet* of Vrancea in Romania – two areas where there is a huge gap between poor producers and owners of large vineyards who could benefit from the reform. Stemming from the theoretical framework worked out by Pierre Bourdieu, the emphasis is laid on the objectification mechanisms by which some organizations managed to unify wine-growers’ claims in the past. The comparison between case studies drives to the conclusion that these mechanisms have not been activated since 2008, either because the reform of the CMO makes them inefficient or because wine-growers by-pass the new policies by other means.

There has been a major evolution of the European Union (EU)’s wine policy over the past few years. The European Commission has embarked on a significant and radical plan to restructure this sector of activity with a view to consolidating and reinforcing wine production while improving the competitiveness of wine producers in the global market. In the Commission’s view, European wine producers are facing increasing difficulties to sell their production overseas while exports from the New World (California, Australia, South Africa, South America) are making ‘huge inroads’ into the market, thanks to wines produced at lower costs in larger holdings. This has led to a branch-and-root reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) for wine, the body in charge of regulating wine production and trade in the EU. In a document published on 22 June 2006, entitled ‘Towards a Sustainable European Wine Sector’, Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, announced a series of measures destined to turn the essentially traditional wine sector – too dependent on subsidies, in her view – into ‘a more industrial and competitive model’. According to the plan, EU wine production should

Antoine Roger is a member of the Institut Universitaire de France and Full Professor of Political Science at Sciences Po Bordeaux, 11 allée Ausone, 33607 Pessac Cedex, France; e-mail: <a.roger@sciencespobordeaux.fr>.

be reorganized through a subsidized grubbing-up scheme for 400 000 hectares over a period of five years, encouraging 'uncompetitive producers to step out of wine production' under 'acceptable financial conditions'. With the abolition of the system of plantation rights as from 1 January 2014, the 'competitive' producers would be offered the possibility of increasing their production in proportion to their export capacities (CEC, 2006).

These proposals, which were met with hostile protests from most EU Member States, initiated a round of negotiations that finally led to the adoption of a new text, amended by the European Parliament. The Working Paper was then transmitted to the body of national experts working for the Special Committee on Agriculture in charge of preparing the meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture. The reform of the CMO was eventually adopted by the Council on 19 December 2007. A few amendments were agreed upon in the course of the in-depth debate on these proposals. The subsidized grubbing-up scheme was scaled down to 175 000 hectares for a period of three years. The abolition of the system of plantation rights was postponed until 2015 with possible derogations for the Member States that so requested. On these premises, the new legislative proposals were progressively implemented under the form of EU regulations.

In such a context, it thus seems interesting to focus our attention on the case of the smallest wine producers invited to give up their traditional activities to the advantage of large-scale production patterns on the model of the New World. In this article, we propose to adopt a comparative approach to the study of their mobilization and protest movements against a reform that has directly impacted them. For that purpose, we will analyse the common and diverging factors at play in two major production areas, the *département* of Aude in France and the *judet* of Vrancea in Romania.

The choice of two case-studies in France and Romania calls for a paired comparison that consists of identifying the fundamental similarities in both cases with a view to better apprehending their differences and variations (Tarrow, 2010). Each case will be studied in depth with special attention on the historical background. The objective is not to juxtapose case-studies but to combine analyses and propose more detailed considerations on the topic with potentially broader implications (Dogan and Pelassy, 1990, p.126; Dogan and Kazancigil, 1994, p.153; Steinmetz, 2004, p.377).

From that perspective, the key question will be to determine whether the two cases can be compared. Indeed, such an approach would be irrelevant if no comparison were possible. A comparative approach would also be pointless if the cases were too similar. Thus, the crux of the matter is to identify precisely the criteria of differentiation and assimilation (Sartori, 1991) that correspond to – and justify – our initial choice, since the two cases under scrutiny offer strong similarities, though they do not strictly mirror each other.

The two cases we propose to analyse have been chosen because they offer structural similarities. The two regions have roughly the same populations and their wine-making activities are organized similarly into two main poles: huge and prosperous estates in which production patterns tend to copy those of the New World, and small-sized wine-growers who stay out of such patterns. The larger wine producers welcome the CMO reform, of which they expect to take full advantage, whereas the second category of wine-growers is directly impacted by the reform as the objective of the grubbing-up scheme is to encourage them to step out of wine production.

According to official data, there were 7,562 wine producers in Aude, France, with 435 of them eligible for income support ('Revenu minimum d'insertion') in 2006, against 119 in 2005. Today almost 3,000 wine producers are on the verge of bankruptcy. Annual losses have been estimated at € 1,000 per hectare and per year since 2004, with a drop in revenue between 40% and 65% per year (Viniflor, 2007, pp. 19, 34, 37, 41). Producers working on very small vineyards can only survive thanks to the financial support of family members who have a salaried activity. Those with no financial help from their kin have often been obliged to cease their activities. At the same time, larger holdings (*groupements*) have adopted vertical organizational models, controlling their wine-making and marketing activities in huge vineyards – much in line with the orientations of the European Commission. The largest *groupe-ment* is Val d'Orbieu. Its headquarters are in the city of Narbonne, Aude. It manages a total area of 10300 hectares, two bottling plants (Les Vignerons de la Méditerranée and Trilles) with approximately 300 workers, and 11 wine-making production units with more than 100 workers. The total production is 600 000 hectolitres per year.

The *judet* of Vrancea is the main wine-producing area in Romania, with some 160 000 vineyards. More than 100 000 families make a small living out of wine production and complement their income with subsistence crops. Annual production is 230 000 tons, with 200 000 tons for wine production (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2007). Small producers use 60 000 tons to make ordinary table wine according to traditional methods. Large-scale wine-making holdings (*mari procesatori*) buy the major part of the production in addition to their own production. The best-known company is Vincon, which controls 2,150 hectares of vineyards in Romania – with more than 850 hectares in Vrancea – and employs 611 workers. Such companies have sought to expand by buying up small farms from the most fragile wine producers, in accordance with the principles guiding the CMO reform.

Although these two regions have structural similarities, they also present significant differences, which extend and legitimize the scope of our comparative approach. As a matter of fact, they have not adopted or complied with the EU reforms at the same pace. As France is among the main initiators of the European integration process, the French wine producers have become quite familiar with the regulating mechanisms attached to it. In the Aude *département*, wine producers' trade unions have developed over many decades and regularly championed the cause of the 'small wine producers'. It was only in January 2007 that Romania joined the EU, after a period of de-collectivization and progressive alignment with European norms. As a result, there has been a major change in Romania's domestic wine production sector, which has impacted its present organization. Trade unions have been created quite recently; there is a low level of membership and they cannot rely on a long history of activism for the defence of the 'small wine producers'. Such differences in time-scale call for a configurative approach. The idea is not to determine the presence or absence of any given variable in a static mode, concentrating on the situation today; it is rather to try and apprehend how some clearly identified structuring factors have combined over time while analysing their specific historical background (Katznelson, 1997).

For that purpose we shall proceed from a precise theoretical starting point. We have decided to distance ourselves from the studies essentially focused on the question of the historical relationship between the 'organized interests' and the State (Warner, 1960; Wilson, 1982; Keeler, 1987), extended to the case of the EU (Falkner, 2006). Apart from a few minor differences, these analyses are all based on the pos-

tulate of gross and spontaneously formed interests. From such a perspective, producers who happen to be in similar material situations have common and shared claims, simply relayed by trade unions to the administrations concerned. We have borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism to critically assess this approach. In this view, social agents may be in more or less differentiated situations from a *structural* point of view. They never form a unified group spontaneously. Unity is *constructed* by the organization that presents itself as the mouthpiece of the group. The organization itself builds the group and presents it as a *natural* object in order to claim to be its undisputed representative, through a process of *objectification* (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's theoretical approach has been used to study the construction of 'farmers' interests'. In France, these interests were constructed from the outside by organizations claiming they defended them (Bourdieu, 1977; see also Wacquant, 1987). In spite of a variety of objective situations, farmers' unions shaped the group in whose name they claimed to speak. Several objectification mechanisms were at play. The discourses and the modes of self-representation adopted by the union leaders were particularly efficient (Maresca, 1983); the same can be said of the way farmers' protest marches were staged and of the type of comments given *ex post* (Champagne, 1984). The objectification of the farmers' interests by the unions has been all the more significant as it has 'hardened' over time (Hubscher and Lagrave, 1993). From such a perspective, we can envisage the construction of a category of 'small wine producers' through a process of aggregation of rather different situations. We can thus contend that the expression of claims against European policies is stronger when the unions that defend the small wine producers have a long history of activism. We shall put this hypothesis to the test through the analysis of the wine producers' representation work in Aude and Vrancea.

For that purpose, we shall use some qualitative data collected in each region. Our study is based on a documentary analysis: in both cases, we have gathered official information from the national and local administrations; we have analysed in depth the professional press and the unions' publications between 2007 and 2009 (*Réussir Vigne, La Journée vinicole, Le Journal du vin* and *Le Progrès agricole et viticole* in France; *ABC Agricol, Agroazi, Gazeta de agricultura, Gazeta fermierului, Lumea satului, Profitul agricol, Recolta* and *Revista ferma* in Romania). During the same period, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with wine producers in Aude and Vrancea. Twenty-four interviews were carried out in France and 22 in Romania. In both cases, our sample consisted of two main categories of agents: information was collected from an equal number of union leaders and wine producers without any official function.

The study of the data collected reveals some common characteristics in the wine producers' claiming patterns. Both in Aude and Vrancea, the situation is rather paradoxical. Most wine producers clearly perceive the European dimension of the reform. In our interviews, the European Union is commonly seen as being at the origin of the on-going restructuration process. The respondents are neither fatalistic, nor naive. Those who are expected to grub up their vineyards mention specifically a political project destined to promote the large-scale holdings. However, their grievances have not led to any precisely articulated claims, and no co-ordinated and unified critical stance has been adopted by the unions. Is that because the European reform incorporates elements that prevent any unified claims? Conversely, are such obstacles to unity dependent on different and specific local parameters? Our empiri-

cal analysis shows a complex reality. Although the obstacles to unified claims may be externally similar, they are the result of very different dynamics.

In the first part, we shall show that the mechanisms of objectification by the unions have not been historically structured in the same way. Consequently, the EU policies do not have the same impact in the two regions. In Aude, there has been a long history of objectification on the part of the wine producers' unions. The new orientation of the EU policy has indirectly altered the balance of power from which unified claims originally stemmed. The individual dimension of the financial support schemes has hampered the historically established mechanisms of objectification and prevented any unified claims. On the contrary, in the case of Vrancea our analysis shows a continuation and renewal of the mode of action used so far. Wine producers who had opposed the development of collective agriculture by by-passing the new norms locally and individually have reproduced the same type of mobilization patterns in order to dodge some of the EU policies. Such an approach has made unification and objectification irrelevant and unnecessary; difficulties have been met in a fragmented way and the absence of any unified claims is not perceived as a problem.

In the second part, our objective is to show that the impossibility to organize and express unified claims has led to very different political reactions to the EU reforms. In Aude, there has been a process of de-objectification of the wine producers' group. Unions have thus been in a position to stand as the only representatives of the small wine producers, whatever their economic situation. Such a process has prevented them from opposing the reforms. In Romania, objectification by the unions remains weak. As a consequence, the wine producers impacted by the EU reforms have not looked to the unions for guidance and help. They have rather been looking for political support in order to fight more efficiently against the reforms. Such support has been provided by political leaders who rely on numerous contacts within the administration and thus strengthen their electoral bases.

### **Obstacles to the Unions' Objectification Patterns**

When the EU wine policies encourage each wine producer to engage in individual action, it becomes almost impossible to shape and structure any form of collective protest. In Aude, the situation has been marked by what we can call a *rupture* with the old system, stemming from the implementation of institutional arrangements destined to treat the most serious cases. Conversely, in Vrancea, individual responses have been a continuation of the type of action conducted during the Communist period; they have not been induced by the institutional arrangements but are part of a broader propensity to dodge existing rules and legislation.

#### *A Rupture with the Historical Struggles in Aude*

In Aude, the history of wine producers' mobilization dates back to the late nineteenth century. Initially, there were very different types of holdings, of varying sizes, and the working conditions were far from standardized. A cleavage appeared progressively between the 'large vineyard owners' who could propose low prices in order to sell their whole production to the wine merchants, and the 'smaller producers' who were in no position to do so. Although some structural differences were identi-

fied, the categories shaped by them were constructed, regrouping agents who were in similar but not totally identical situations. Mechanisms of objectification made the contours of these categories even more visible. With the support of the first unions, co-operatives were created and a specific type of rhetoric adopted. According to the official presentation, the co-operatives were set up in order to put right the balance, with the 'small vineyard owners' pooling their resources and sharing costs for wine-making and marketing. Demonstrations were staged against rampant fraud in 1907. The effective organization of the protesters and the expression of comments delivered *ex post* strengthened the image of a group of small wine producers regrouped in co-operatives and united in the same fight (Levine Frader, 1981, 1986, 1991; Roger, 2008a). Through a process of symbolic construction, the co-operatives rapidly spread in the region. In 1929, 32 units gathered and formed the Federation of the Aude Wine-making Co-operatives ('Fédération des caves coopératives de l'Aude'). New objectives were then defined. Co-operative members no longer pooled the wine they produced on an individual basis; they regrouped their wine-making activities and could hence acquire new, more sophisticated and efficient equipment to resist the influence of the larger vineyard owners. They were helped by some major political leaders who thus also contributed to the objectification process. This was best illustrated by the example of a key Socialist figure, Léon Blum. Repeatedly elected as *député* (Member of Parliament) for Aude from 1929 to 1940, he made use of his national position and of the indirect control he could exert on *Crédit Agricole* mutual help funds. He managed to further the development of co-operatives and was always careful to use the rhetoric of general interest, beyond purely local stakes, in order to justify his action. Co-operatives were presented as an example to follow and an illustration of the model of agriculture promoted by the Socialist Party ('Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière'). They were described as a means of modernizing agricultural production without challenging the wine producers' independence. The objective was to reduce the role of intermediaries as much as possible and eventually 'emancipate farm workers' (Ferré, 2003). After the Second World War, George Guille championed the same mechanism of symbolic representation, in accordance with the reference category defined by the party. As a socialist President of the Aude *Conseil général* (General Council) and *député* for Capendu, he defended the interests of the co-operatives of his *département* in Parliament. While he called for specific and corporatist measures, there was also constant reference in his rhetoric to the collective struggles of the past (Lenoble, 2005). A member of the Aude *Conseil général* for Couiza, a socialist *député* from 1973 to 1978 and President of the Regional Council, Robert Capdeville took up the torch, as it were. He struck up close relations with Antoine Verdale, the President of the departmental Chamber of Agriculture and chairman of the departmental federation of wine producing co-operatives. They managed to articulate and consolidate the defence of the 'small wine producers' in such an efficient way that local producers were able to resist the major crisis that affected local production in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, there was a steady decrease in table-wine consumption during this period and competition from Algerian and Italian wine producers heavily penalized the Aude co-operatives. Collective protest movements gathered around some unifying slogans, the main objective remaining the defence of the co-operative model. Tension climaxed on 4 March 1976 when a wine producer and a riot police officer were killed on the occasion of a march in the village of Montredon (Aude). As a consequence of this tragic event, the French government was forced to address the problem in a more direct way. Through a

programme of state financial aid, complemented by European funds – a subsidized grubbing-up scheme and measures destined to improve the quality of vine varieties – the crisis was averted. The Aude wine producers were then in a position to break into new markets by producing better quality wine. At the same time they were placed under the authority of the CMO for wine. This new orientation *de facto* led the wine producers to adopt a more individualistic approach and break away from the unified defence of the co-operative model.

In 1962, the six founding members of the European Economic Community set up the CMO with a view to standardizing and regulating wine production and trade. However, each Member State had kept much leeway in terms of classification, plantation rights and wine-making regulation. In the aftermath of the 1970s crisis, national governments agreed to give a more interventionist turn to their policies. The CMO imposed a ban on any extension of the wine-producing areas and an obligation to distil the surpluses, a very profitable scheme for producers. Those comprehensive measures were not implemented on an individual basis: each year, producers were notified of a minimum selling price for each variety of wine. They received countervailing subsidies taken from European compensatory funds according to a standardized distribution system (Smith et al., 2007). In 1980, the system was changed as the European Commission considered that such an indiscriminate and automatic subsidizing system led to passivity among wine producers. It proposed a new system destined to reward initiatives and individual efforts, with financial aid for restructuring and introducing new vine varieties. Producers no longer received subsidies automatically; they were invited to send in their own application forms and each case was studied individually. During the interviews conducted by the Commission agents, applicants were encouraged to assume their responsibilities in terms of commercial risks and develop their own business strategies.

In an attempt to address the problems specific to the trade, national and local administrations rapidly proposed measures copied on those implemented by the European regulating bodies. Wine producers in financial difficulties were offered solutions mainly centred on the notion of individual responsibility – a new orientation that prevented them from analysing their situation by using historically constructed mechanisms of objectification. In 1993, the national reconversion system was reformed. Financed by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, subsidies were now managed by each Member State. The European Commission made recommendations and issued a guide for national authorities, which clearly identified criteria on how to differentiate between producers who should be assisted and those who had ‘to step out of wine production’. Codes of ‘good farming practice’ were proposed and the governments that had adopted the best tools in their case-by-case approach were cited as examples to follow. Along the same lines, each national government put in place their own institutional programmes. New emphasis was put on individual responsibility, which was a clear rupture with global management and collective bargaining used so far by the national regulating bodies. This change was particularly perceptible in the ‘Agriculteurs en difficulté’ scheme set up by French authorities in the early 1990s. Stricter rules were fixed. Financial aid could only be granted to those farmers deemed ‘viable’, after a very precise diagnosis had been made. In such cases, a ‘recovery’ programme was proposed, and subsidies were granted regularly, commensurate with the adoption of new techniques or new vine varieties. During the interviews, farmers were invited to attend training sessions proposed by the ‘Fonds pour la Formation des Entrepreneurs du

Vivant' (VIVEA) under the aegis of the Chamber of Agriculture. As in the EU documents, emphasis was put on the notion of individual responsibility and the necessity of developing business strategies. The leaflet presenting the training programmes was typically illustrated with overlapping pictures showing a vineyard and a chess-board. The objective was to develop a 'strategic approach' and reflect on the farmers' 'personal and professional projects' so that they could 'exploit data relating to the management of their businesses and be in a position to make all the appropriate decisions for their futures'. They were offered some 'teaching aid' to provide them with the necessary tools 'to express their opinions on their personal projects' (VIVEA, 2007). Thanks to the diagnosis made on their businesses or the financial support they were entitled to, by consulting the VIVEA documents or attending specialized training sessions, the wine producers were led to accept the idea that the difficulties they had to face in their professional activities were their own responsibility and originated from inappropriate strategies. As cases were always assessed individually, they could never be presented as evidencing a wider crisis affecting the whole trade, which could have justified some form of collective claims (Roger, 2010). The fact that wine producers were encouraged to accept the idea that they had to act as *entrepreneurs* and develop *individual* commercial strategies made harder the emergence of any unifying rhetoric. It contrasted strongly with the dynamics of the past. The mechanisms of objectification constructed around the co-operatives had spread the image of a close-knit group that could negotiate and obtain collective benefits. They progressively lost their substance with the emergence of a new type of rhetoric relayed by very strong communication and institutional supports. The situation was different in Romania, where wine producers adopted from the beginning individual and fragmented solutions to their difficulties – a strategy that can be better apprehended within the framework of set modes of action.

### *The Continuation of Past Struggles in Vrancea*

In order to understand the positions adopted by the Vrancea wine producers it is necessary to analyse the agrarian policies conducted during the Communist and post-Communist periods. Under the communist regime, the new policies led to creation of collective farms called agricultural co-operatives of production (*cooperative agricole de productie*), which immediately gave rise to latent tensions. In an attempt to stifle any risk of unrest among farmers, the authorities allowed co-operative members to cultivate 'individual plots' (*loturi in folosinta*) in exchange for their work on collective lands.<sup>1</sup> An underground economy developed and individual production was sold in an informal market, which hampered the completion of the objectives of the Plan. Though coercive measures were taken, they were never successfully implemented, as the co-operative members engaged in a somewhat hidden and informal struggle to preserve their individual interests (Roger, 2002). After the fall of Communism, the de-collectivization process made it possible for co-operative members to become owners of the plots they had been cultivating. The law on agriculture and agrarian resources (Law nr. 18/1991) passed in February 1991 gave each farmer who had worked for more than three years in an agricultural co-operative of production a plot of 0.5–1 hectare. The preservation of such 'micro-farms' under the new legislation perpetuated older practices and protected farmers from the upheavals affecting the national economy. However, negotiations for the entry of Romania into the EU forcibly furthered the consolidation process in the sector. A law on agricultural com-



panies and other types of agricultural associations (Law nr. 36/1991) was adopted in April 1991. New associations were created, based on informal agreements between farmers. They had no common capital. Their chairmen were under no obligation of keeping the books of the associations. They only had to redistribute a percentage of production to each member, once they had deducted their own share. *Agricultural companies* were distinct entities officially registered at the local prefectures. The farmers who chose to join these companies could pool their investments. Capital was divided into shares managed by a board and the president was helped by an accountant and a warehouseman, who were all salaried workers. Temporary workers paid by the hour were in charge of the ploughing and harvesting activities. Members could sell their production the way they wanted (Fulea, 1996; Voicu et al., 2005; Roger, 2001).

Associations and agricultural companies were created on the initiative of their presidents. They could acquire new land after negotiations with farmers, but the small farmers who owned plots of less than 1 hectare proved to be the most reluctant (Cartwright, 2001, 2003; Rizov and Swinnen, 2003). In 1996, 15 000 associations and 3,700 agricultural companies were registered, which only regrouped 21% of cultivated land (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2006). In order to accelerate the accession process, the EU urged Romania to speed up reforms. In 2004, a new, more aggressive agrarian policy was implemented, based on several pillars, with a view to furthering the adherence of the country to the Common Agricultural Policy. The law on agricultural co-operation (Law nr. 566/2004) was the first pillar. It promoted the creation of 'Western-style' groups in which several land owners could work together and use the same equipment. This new organizational model was presented as a way to increase competitiveness in the European markets, as it was commonly acknowledged that it would be extremely difficult to produce enough at competitive prices if everybody worked individually on small farms. On these premises, each co-operative had to regroup a minimum number of five farmers who owned at least 5 hectares each. Each member had equal powers in the decision-making process and could cede his/her shares by donation or inheritance. As an incentive, co-operative members were granted tax deductions for a period of five years. However, the scheme fell short of what was expected and very few new co-operatives were created. The second pillar consisted of measures accompanying the SAPARD funding (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development). The EU gave subsidies to the farmers working in the new Member States on condition that equivalent co-financing was secured. Under Law nr. 231/2005, a pilot programme called 'The Farmer' ('Programul-pilot Fermierul') allocated € 200 million for the scheme. Loans worth between € 5,000 and € 30 000 were granted to farmers who had applied for SAPARD financing. Repayment could be spread over a period of 10 years with a 4.5% interest rate. The authorities encouraged farmers to become entrepreneurs and 'take risks'. However, few projects were completed. Generally speaking, the small wine producers in the *judet* of Vrancea did not manage to organize themselves so that they could take advantage of EU financial aid. There were only a few successful exceptions. The Club of Odobești Wine Producers, created in August 2000, brought together 47 small producers from villages of Odobești, Jaristea, Vârtescoiu and Faraoanele. It produced and bottled wines sold under its own brand name, the Odobești Wine Club. Part of the production was sent to the 'central winery' against deferred payment of a certain amount of money determined once production had been sold. Visits were organized on a regular basis so that small producers could appreciate

the advantages of such a system and adhere to it. The Vitis Panciu Association of Individual Wine Producers, with its 60 members, also collected, produced and sold its own wine. Its managers tried to set an example in order to attract new members. However, such initiatives remained quite rare and the vast majority of wine producers in Vrancea went on cultivating their small vineyards.

After the entry of Romania into the EU on 1 January 2007, farmers were supposed to receive financial help equivalent to 25% of what their Western counterparts received for the same type of production. The gap was to narrow progressively as global production increased. To further this evolution, the government issued a document entitled 'Post-accession Strategy: 2007–2013'. The official objective was to decrease the number of farmers by forcing 'small-scale farms' out of the market and developing 'economically viable' ones. The idea was to 'promote the consolidation process in the agricultural sector through a functional real estate market' (Guvernul României, 2005). For that purpose, it was necessary to draw up a register of wine-producing holdings ('Registrul plantațiilor viticole'), as imposed by EU directives (Council Regulation (EEC) no. 2392/86, OJ L208, 31 July 1986, pp. 1–4; Commission Regulation (EEC) no. 649/1987, OJ L62, 5 March 1987, pp. 10–17). During the accession process, Romanian authorities tried to comply with these directives as best as they could and the Ministry of Agriculture imposed the registration of all vineyards over 100 m<sup>2</sup>. On each three copies of the document were indicated the names of the owner and of the producer, the location of the plot, its agri-technical characteristics and the vine variety (Order nr. 64/144/2003). Any change had to be notified. Wine producers also had to keep a log-book ('Carnetul de viticultor') in which they indicated the production mode adopted and the level of production, failing that the producers could not sell their production or receive any financial aid. However, very few wine producers registered spontaneously as they feared that the information collected might lead to new taxes or the implementation of stricter rules on farm regrouping. Initially planned for completion on 31 March 2006, the programme was postponed until 31 December of the same year. At that date, it was deemed necessary to further postpone the dead-line. From the partial data collected, proposals were made by the National Office of Vine and Wine ('Oficiul Național al Viei și Vinului') and the National Office of Designations of Origin for Wine ('Oficiul Național al Denumirilor de Origine pentru Vinuri'). A list of vine varieties for production was drawn up in each wine-producing area, which had to be approved by the Ministry of Agriculture. This document made provision for financial penalties in case of illegal plantation or grubbing-up. However, the authorities did not have much lee-way, constrained as they were by the EU directives. The European Commission imposed a massive grubbing-up plan for hybrid varieties. Local hybrid varieties had typically been Vrancea producer favourites for a long time as they are disease resistant, do not require any phytosanitary treatment and are quite easy to cultivate and produce wine at a low cost.<sup>2</sup> The small Vrancea farmers had indeed planted hybrid varieties on their individual plots after the de-collectivization process, so that the total area of hybrid vineyards had doubled in the 1990s. EU regulation banned hybrid varieties because the wine produced was regarded as dangerous for health. By special dispensation, Romania was granted a transitional period of eight years for the reconversion of 30000 hectares of hybrid vineyards (the deadline is 31 December 2014). By that time, hybrid production would have to be limited to 0.1 hectare per household, for personal use only. Funding for the reconversion scheme was provided through the SAPARD programme, co-financed by the Romanian government, the necessary in-

vestment for reconversion and provision for depreciation being estimated at € 10 000 per hectare. The allowances that farmers could receive did not exceed € 7,500, complemented by preferred loans guaranteed by the State, for a maximum of € 50 000. Even with such financial incentives, the reconversion costs remained prohibitive for the poorest wine producers and less than 1,000 hectares of hybrid vineyards were grubbed up each year. The producers who had remained attached to this type of local production developed some informal trade, which guaranteed a stable source of income. Along Road E85, there are many small stalls still today where car drivers can buy grapes or bottles of traditional wine. This informal trade has remained beyond any control and the restructuring policies implemented by the authorities, along the lines of EU directives, have mostly proved ineffective.

Thus, by refusing to regroup their farms and by developing an underground economy, the owners of small plots have opposed in a very pragmatic way the new orientations in the wine sector initiated by the Commission. They have remained outside any mechanism of objectification and have not gathered around a common platform of shared claims. As they have never been represented in such a way, their action is not fundamentally different from the type of action developed in the past. The informal nature of their trade is a modern continuation of what they used to do before the end of Communism in their country, i.e. outside any organization.

Our paired comparison shows that in Aude as well as in Vrancea the EU reforms have hampered the objectification of a group of 'small wine producers', according to Bourdieu's scheme, and hindered the emergence of common claims defended in its name. However, the trajectories that have led to this common situation have proved to be very different. Individual responses have been based on institutional arrangements in Aude while in Vrancea wine producers have adopted more informal ways and tried to dodge official regulation mechanisms. The EU wine policy has indirectly led to the fragmentation of the Aude wine producers whereas the development of individual action in Vrancea has served conversely to strengthen opposition to the EU reform. In Aude, giving up all collective claims evidences a rupture with the unions' mechanisms of objectification of the past; in Vrancea, it testifies to the continuation of older modes of resistance developed in the past, which have prevented the emergence of a mechanism of objectification. Indeed, in the two countries, the unions have not opposed the EU reforms.

### **Obstacles to the Unions' Opposition to EU Policies**

In our two case-studies, unions have failed to adjust their rhetoric and action to the European stakes and to the ensuing social restructuring. They have not been in a position to articulate claims against the EU reform of the wine sector. Here again, this situation is the result of different configurations. While unions have always been well organized in Aude, they have not stood up for the 'small wine producers' as it has proved particularly difficult for them to adopt a clear position on account of their claim to represent the wine sector as a whole – including wine producers who could benefit from the on-going restructuring process. In fact, these producers are in positions of responsibility within the unions and support the EU reforms. In Vrancea, unions have remained empty shells. Owing to the politicization of the local administration wine producers have shunned unions and set up a system of patronage in order to dodge more efficiently measures imposed by the EU.

*The Aude Unions under the Control of the Beneficiaries of EU Policies*

The wine producers' unions in the Aude *département* endeavour to oppose individual wine producers and co-operatives – two loose categories regrouping producers who benefit from the CMO reform as well as poor wine-growers who are incited to step out of the wine market (Martin, 1996; Lem, 1999; Petric and Gouez, 2007). As the objectification mechanisms dedicated to the defence of the 'small wine producers' are no more exploited, no one takes issue with these categories. The first category is especially extensive as the farmers who work in private holdings have very different economic orientations. The owners of large vineyards can have low production costs per hectare and sell their output easily. They may even be only investors and choose not to live on their farms. Beside, there are smaller size wineries, most often organized into 'groups of wine producers'. Members are in charge of the wine-making and bottling activities of their own production. Wine is sold collectively. Applications for subsidies are also centralized. In spite of these visible differences, the Federation of Independent Wine-growers in Aude ('Fédération des Vignerons Indépendants de l'Aude') claims it represents the whole trade. But, in actual fact, the Federation is controlled by the major vineyard owners. It is also the case of the larger Regional Federation of Independent Wine-growers in Languedoc-Roussillon ('Fédération régionale des Vignerons Indépendants du Languedoc-Roussillon'). According to its chairman, Jean-Marie Fabre, the restructuration programme initiated by the European Commission 'goes in the right direction: reform and competitiveness'. In his view, the development of grubbing up subsidies can be profitable if it is accompanied by 'specific and well-framed financial aid'. What is needed is to 'encourage the older wine producers to cease their activities with financial compensation so that they can retire in decent conditions' and to 'make sufficient financial provision' to help the other producers invest in new sectors of activity (Badea-Guerité, 2007). Co-operative members fall into another category. Their main activity is to grow grapes. Co-operatives are in charge of the wine-making activities and sell their output either to wine merchants or to the large-scale distribution chains. Even in this category, there are conspicuous differences. Large-size 'co-operative groups' with significant marketing capacities have been set up. There are also smaller co-operatives that produce wine on their own. Their members have seen their income decrease steadily and significantly over the last years. As they sell their output mainly to the large-scale distribution chains, they have been obliged to adjust to demand. Selling prices are not high enough for them to make a living, which has led to the absorption by more 'competitive' co-operatives of the smaller co-operatives in financial difficulties. In such a context, the absence of any mechanism of objectification that could make it possible for a union to present itself as the representative of the 'small wine producers' is heavy with consequences. In spite of diverging positions, the Federation of the Wine-making Co-operatives in Aude is the self-proclaimed representative of *all* co-operatives. It is in fact controlled by the major groups. Its official president, Michel Servage, has called for an increase in grubbing up subsidies to make them more attractive. He considers that higher subsidies may be a way of setting up 'a social plan' in this newly 'decentralized' sector of activity. In his view, it is essential to allow 'those who want to step out of wine production to do so with dignity' (AFP, 2007). In September 2007, his federation merged with those in Hérault, Gard and Pyrénées-Orientales, under the name of the Regional Federation of Wine-making Co-operatives in Languedoc Roussillon ('Fédération régionale de la coopération vinicole du Languedoc-Roussillon'). Boris Calmette is the chairman of

this new group. A former president of the Federation of the Wine-making Co-operative in Hérault ('Fédération des caves coopératives de l'Hérault'), and manager of 'Les Terroirs de la voie domitienne' co-operative, he has officially declared that he intends to take full advantage of the CMO reform (Huillet, 2007).<sup>3</sup>

Left to their own devices, the poorest wine-producers have found it extremely difficult to voice any articulate political demands and give a national dimension to their claims. With no organizational support, some of them have resorted to violent action. In 2004, a regional action committee in the wine sector ('Comité régional d'action viticole' – CRAV) claimed responsibility for several bomb attacks against local bank agencies, a building belonging to the Treasury in Narbonne and some railway lines. In April 2007, petrol bombs were thrown in supermarkets, and the electric power station of the 'Leader Price' discount store was destroyed by an explosive device, with CRAV slogans sprayed on nearby buildings. On several occasions, there were also messages of defiance against the unions (Roger, 2011).

Such sporadic acts of violence evidence the desperate and inarticulate efforts made to attract the attention of the unions, whose commitment in the various administrative bodies and agencies has distanced them from the poorest wine producers and prevented them from setting up any organized protest movement against the EU reform of the wine sector. There is a sheer contrast with the situation of the Vrancea wine producers who have not sought the support of the unions but rather managed to efficiently oppose the EU reforms with the help of the administration services.

#### *The Vrancea's Unions Deprived of their Substance by Partisan Networks*

Farmers' unions are very weak in Romania. They are only the professional branches of political parties and have no real autonomy. The National Federation of the Unions of Agriculture, Food, Tobacco and Related Domains and Services ('Federatia Națională a Sindicatelor din Agricultură, Alimentație, Tutun, Domenii și Servicii Conexe') boasts 38000 members. It has long had close relations with the Social-Democrat Party ('Partidul Social Democrat' – PSD). In 2000, its president, Elena Sporea, was elected Senator on the PSD list. The Liberal Democrat Party ('Partidul Democrat Liberal') developed ties with the League of the Association of Agricultural Producers of Romania ('Liga Asociațiilor Producătorilor Agricoli din Romania') by promoting its former leader, Adrian Radulescu, as a junior minister of Agriculture. In 2005, the association 'We are acting as Landowners' ('Proprietari Acționăm') became a union, under the impulse of the National Liberal Party ('Partidul Național Liberal' – PNL). In 2008, a local branch was created in Vrancea. Under the chairmanship of Gino Toma and Costel Ichim, it claimed it represented the Vrancea wine-producers but its links with the local PNL representatives deprived it of any functional autonomy. Placed under the authority of national parties, the unions were hardly ever consulted on the elaboration of public policies. Their membership remained very low. When demonstrations were organized, they could only gather a few dozen people.

The small wine producers turned directly to the local representatives of the political parties and to the administration in order to oppose the EU reform. Local officials, who were supposedly in charge of implementing the national and European norms, could also help the wine-producers by-pass them. This trend was facilitated by the very organization of the administration in Romania. Indeed, Romania's main ministries have local agencies in each *judet*. Officials are appointed according to a

hybrid procedure, theoretically based on meritocracy but more realistically on political co-optation. When there are vacancies, recruitment for jobs is by competitive examination in the local prefectures under the supervision of the National Agency of Civil Service Employees ('Agenția Națională a Funcționarilor Publici'). The jury is made up of civil servants belonging to the ministry concerned. There is a written test followed by two interviews, and candidates are recommended by the party local representatives.<sup>4</sup> The newly appointed civil servants are then supposed to relay the orientations of the party they belong to. They all have a prominent position in the *judets*. Their action is publicized and analysed by the local press, much like what happens for the elected representatives. The frontiers between the partisan and administrative spheres are rather blurred; indeed, most local agency officials are former mayors or members of the *judet* Council.

In Vrancea, it is the local agency of the Ministry of Agriculture that has typically been the most active in such matters, especially the Departmental Office of Agricultural Consultancy ('Oficiului Județean de Consultanță Agricolă'). Created in 1998 with a view to providing technical aid for farmers, it has regularly staged introductory courses in modern agronomics. Its second mission is to help farmers applying for SAPARD financing. The other institutional pillar is the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development ('Direcția Agricolă și pentru Dezvoltare Rurală') officially in charge of ensuring the smooth running of the agricultural sector, notably through the monitoring of the SAPARD application dossiers. The two agencies can hinder the granting of EU subsidies to the large-scale wine producing holdings, a policy presented locally as a way of offsetting market imbalance and alleviating the financial burden of the small wine producers. In the context of the entry of Romania into the EU, the Departmental Office for Financing Rural Development and Fisheries ('Oficiului Județean de Plăți pentru Dezvoltare Rurală și Pescuit') was created in 2006. It has been in charge of implementing the 'The Farmer' pilot scheme and helps farmers obtain additional financial aid for investment in complement to SAPARD financing. It has also managed EU structural funds that the Vrancea *judet* may benefit from. The Financing and Intervention Agency for Agriculture ('Agenției de Plati și Intervenție pentru Agricultură') was set up the same year. In charge of managing the allowances for production directly taken from state and EU budgets, it has supervised the registration of holdings and verified that the levels of production officially declared by the producers were correctly evaluated. Several local offices were set up in Focșani, Adjud, Panciu, Vidra, Nănești and Dumitresti. Small wine producers have typically asked for derogations in exchange for their electoral support of the party controlling the administrative department concerned. Derogations have not only been about grape crops but also about their complementary subsistence activities. In that respect, it is the Directorate General of the Sanitary-Veterinary and Animal Security Affairs ('Direcția Sanitar-Veterinară și pentru Siguranța Alimentelor' – DSVSA) that has the most extended competence in such matters. Its agents are commissioned to make regular or surprise visits to the production areas and the market places. They can be assisted by the police. In accordance with the EU norms, the maximum amount of produce that can be sold directly is limited. The farmers who wish to sell directly their own production of grapes, meat, milk, eggs and so on have to be registered on the DSVSA list. They can only obtain their 'registration certificate' after an *in situ* visit to determine the sanitary conditions. These controls have to be made each year and are paid for by the producers. In December 2006, the scheme was extended and made stricter for pork meat, the Romanian farmers'

typical diet. A ban was imposed on the selling of individual animals bred in farmyards, and the farmers who could not produce the required documents were liable to fines and their goods could be seized. Controls have also been made on the stands along Road E85 where farmers directly sell their production. Fines have not been issued systematically and the farmers could negotiate with the official agents (Roger, 2008b). As a result, this type of informal trade has prospered and been extended. It can be said that the possibility offered to the producers of finding compromises with the administrations directly concerned by the implementation of the reforms has made union intervention unnecessary and irrelevant.

## **Conclusion**

The comparative approach that we have adopted in our study makes it possible to examine Bourdieu's theory and the objectification of the farmers' interests by the unions. We may infer from our analysis that, beyond some formal similarities, the consequences of the EU policies on that ground are not exactly the same in each region. In Aude and Vrancea, the small wine producers see the EU norms as a source of difficulties. However, their claims have not been channelled by any well-structured movement or relayed by any clearly identified representative. In spite of these common elements, two clearly distinct trajectories can be discerned. In Aude, financial aid given to the smallest producers has progressively fallen in line with the financial mechanisms put in place by the EU. In the institutional response to their financial difficulties, emphasis has been laid on the notion of individual responsibility, thus furthering the process of fragmentation in the unions' approach to the crisis, in sheer opposition to the collective claims movements of the past. As a consequence, the mechanisms that made it possible to objectify the group of 'small wine producers' have been blocked. Unions have adopted a totally different strategy. Their leaders stand as the representatives of the farmers as a whole, including those who could gain from the EU reform. In Vrancea, the farmers' individual responses have been the result of past modes of action, adopted under the Communist regime. They have not been seen as a rupture with the past as each small wine producer has kept resisting reform by defending his/her small individual plots and making a living thanks to informal trade. In such a context, unions have not been in a position to articulate specific demands. Producers have directly dealt with the local administration in charge of implementing the reform in order to obtain derogations. The mechanisms of objectification have not been operative, but they have been superseded by other means: clientelist networks linked to political parties that have helped farmers to resist EU norms and regulations.

We have shown that the expression and articulation of collective claims for the defence of the small wine producers was impossible in the two cases under scrutiny. The causes and consequences of such a situation are different and contrasting: when the unions used to act as objectification entities in the past, producers are left to themselves, defenceless; when there never was any objectification by the unions, other means of defence are found, as a way of parrying the direct impact of the EU reforms. Such differences invite us to consider the historical dimension of the mechanisms of objectification and to differentiate between several types of obstacles: a process of de-objectification weakens the wine producers impacted by the reform more than the complete absence of objectification by the unions.

The paired comparison makes it possible to go beyond appearances. It invites us to take into consideration the historical trajectories and study the evolving combination of various factors. The distinctive feature of such an approach is to open up research in order to gain new understanding in other domains. Two complementary research areas can be proposed. In line with the focus that we have placed on the wine sector, it first seems interesting to analyse the evolution of other local areas where wine production is predominant, and study any potential variations. The idea here is to determine whether the new cases under scrutiny converge with or diverge from the two case-studies we have analysed or whether new configurations appear. Second, the study of other professional groups exposed to EU policies may give interesting clues to assess precisely the scope of the contrasts that we have identified and point to other factors of differentiation. Our analysis of the wine sector in Aude and Vrancea may finally fall within the scope of a broader programme of comparative research.

## Notes

2. State-run agricultural companies were also created. Employees only worked on collective land for fixed salaries. The plots cultivated were progressively sold to private companies.
3. The total production area is 227 800 hectares; 227 200 hectares are used to produce wine. Hybrid varieties are cultivated on 122 200 hectares, a 50% increase since 1990. The European Union wants the total production area to be reduced to a maximum of 40 000 hectares. In 2007, 25 715 hectares of vineyards were in the Vrancea *judet*, including 2,759 hectares of hybrid varieties (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2007).
6. There is an official body in charge of defending the wine producers' interests in Europe, the Comité des Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles–Confédération Générale de la Coopération Agricole (COPA-COGECA). However, it has not been very active and has very loose contacts with the wine producers. The wine sector representatives who belong to COPA-COGECA are all large vineyard owners. Joël Castany was the vice-president of the organization until 2005. He was also in charge of the 'Wine' committee.
7. Law n°161/2003 makes provision for an incompatibility system. It stipulates that 'a civil servant cannot belong to the leadership of a political party nor publicly express the positions of a political party'. A newly appointed civil servant falling into this category must resign within 10 days, failing this he may be relieved of his duties. However, he may remain an ordinary member of a political party.

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