



**HANDS OFF THE LAND**  
TAKE ACTION AGAINST LAND GRABBING

## Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles in Europe

### Executive summary<sup>1</sup>

European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)<sup>2</sup>  
Hands-Off The Land (HOTL) Alliance<sup>3</sup>

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### Introduction<sup>4</sup>

Land grabbing<sup>5</sup> is widely assumed to be happening only in the global South, but in-depth analysis by a team of researchers shows that land grabbing is also creeping in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> A longer, full-blown introductory paper by Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Jennifer C. Franco and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, and is currently being finalized and will be available in June 2013.

<sup>2</sup> European Coordination Via Campesina is an organisation of 27 farmers' and agricultural workers' unions as well as rural movements working to achieve food sovereignty.

<sup>3</sup> The HOTL is an alliance consisting of: the Transnational Institute (TNI), the international secretariat of the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN-IS), FIAN-Germany, FIAN-Netherlands, FIAN-Austria, Forschungs und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika (FDCL) in Germany, and the Institute of Global Responsibility (IGO) in Poland.

<sup>4</sup> Corresponding author for the entire collection is Dr. Jennifer Franco: [jennycfranco@tni.org](mailto:jennycfranco@tni.org). The contributors to the entire study are as follows: Austria case (Kim Möhrs, Franziskus Forster, Sarah Kumnig, and Lukas Rauth), Bulgaria case (Georgi Medarov), France case (Morgan Ody), France-La Zad case (Anton Pieper), Germany (Roman Herre), Hungary case (Róbert Fidrich), Italy case (Antonio Onorati and Chiara Pierfederici), Romania case (Judith Bouniol), Serbia case (Milenko Srećković), Spain case (Marco Aparicio Wilhelmi, Manuel Flores, Arturo Landeros, Sara Mingorría, Delphine Ortega Espès and Enrique Tudela), Ukraine case (Christina Plank), and the case of FAO Tenure Guidelines applications (Florence Kroff and Claire Guffens). Brigitte Reisenberger of FIAN-Austria played a key role in helping to get the study process started. The team at TNI that helped put together this report by reviewing and editing the collection of papers, among other things, include Pietje Vervest, Sylvia Kay, Timothe Feodoroff, Gloria Pracucci, Ben McKay, Nick Buxton. The report was edited by Deborah Eadi. The co-authors of the introduction paper are: Dr. Borras, Fellow of the Transnational Institute (TNI) and Associate Professor at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague; Dr. Franco, Coordinator of the Agrarian Justice Program at TNI; and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Professor at Wageningen University.

The report, involving 25 authors from 11 countries, reveals the hidden scandal of how a few big private business entities have gained control of ever-greater areas of European land. It exposes how these land elites have been actively supported by a huge injection of public funds – at a time when all other public funding is being subjected to massive cuts. While some of these processes – in particular ever-increasing land concentration -- are not new, they have accelerated in recent decades in particular in Eastern Europe. They have also paved the way for a new sector of foreign and domestic actors to emerge on the European stage, many tied into increasingly global commodity chains, and all looking to profit from the increasingly speculative commodity of land.

Among other findings, the report reveals that:

### (1) Increasing land concentration

- **Land ownership in Europe has become highly unequal** reaching, in some countries, proportions similar to Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines – all notorious for their unequal distribution of land and land-based wealth. While in the EU there are some 12 million farms, the *large farms (100 hectares and above) that only represent 3 percent of the total number of farms, control 50 percent of all farmed land.*
- **This concentration of land ownership started decades ago, but has accelerated.**<sup>6</sup> In Germany, for example, a total of 1,246,000 holdings in 1966/67 shrunk to just 299,100 farms by 2010. Of these holdings, the *land area* covered by farms of less than 2 hectares, shrunk from 123,670 hectares in 1990 to a mere 20,110 hectares in 2007, while farms of 50 hectares and larger expanded in area from 9.2 million hectares in 1990 to 12.6 million hectares in 2007.<sup>7</sup>
- **In Eastern Europe, the concentration of land ownership has been particularly marked since the collapse of the Berlin Wall.** Many farmers were bankrupted when their countries entered the EU and highly subsidised agricultural products began flooding their markets. In the first six years, the majority of small farmers were not even eligible to apply for EU agricultural subsidies which fuelled sales of farms. Here a new elite group of speculators/investors have succeeded in capturing vast tracts of land.

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<sup>5</sup> The definition offered by Borras, Franco et al (2012: 405) is used here: "... land grabbing is the capturing of control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms involving large-scale capital that often shifts resource use to that of extraction, whether for international or domestic purposes, as capital's response to the convergence of food, energy and financial crises, climate change mitigation imperatives and demands for resources from newer hubs of global capital."

<sup>6</sup> While the aggregate number of farms in the EU increased from 1996/67 to 2010, this increase was due to expansion of the Union, from 6 member states in 1966/67 to the current 27, with newer members having relatively large agricultural sectors and being relatively land abundant (for example, Romania).

<sup>7</sup> A word of caution in dealing with official statistics, for Germany and for the EU more generally: official aggregate statistics in the EU often conceal more than reveal actual picture of land property distribution and relations. There are large operational farms whose landholdings are subdivided into smaller units that are reflected in the official statistics. There are also many cases of small farms of 2 ha and below that are 'hobby farms'. Hence, the relying solely on the official statistics on smallholdings is unlikely to provide a precise reflection of the actually existing reality. The less problematic set of statistics is the aggregate of large land holdings and their share in the total utilized agricultural area.

- **Public money, through subsidies paid under the Common Agricultural Policy, supported this concentration of land and wealth.** In Italy, for example, in 2011, 0.29 percent of farms accessed 18 percent of total CAP incentives, and 0.0001 of these (that is 150 farms) cornered 6 percent of all subsidies. In Spain in 2009, 75 percent of the subsidies were cornered by only 16 percent of the largest farmers. In Hungary in 2009, 8.6 percent of farms cornered 72 percent of all agricultural subsidies. Currently, the CAP subsidy scheme is being changed to subsidies per hectare of farm land. Unintended consequences of this might be that it further fuels the European land grab in the Eastern and Mediterranean parts of Europe, as it will marginalise small farms, and continue to block entry by prospective farmers.

## **(2) Creeping land grabbing**

- **Alongside land concentration, new actors have arrived to grab land especially in Eastern Europe.** The report highlights cases of Chinese companies in Bulgaria undertaking large-scale production of maize, of Middle Eastern companies in Romania embarking on large-scale production of grains, and of European companies involved in grabbing up land in many European countries for a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. Just like their counterparts in Ethiopia, Cambodia or Paraguay, all these large-scale land deals are being carried out in a secretive, non-transparent manner. As elsewhere, the “grabbers” are foreign *and* domestic companies, with the apparent participation of regional European capital, including both traditional agribusiness controlling commodity chains and finance capital including pension funds – not unlike in Latin America or Southeast Asia.
- This has further aggravated the already concentrating trend in land control. Outside the EU: in Ukraine the 10 biggest agroholdings control about 2.8 million ha, while some oligarchs own up to several hundreds of thousands of hectares each. In Serbia the four largest Serbian landowners together allegedly control more than 100,000 ha.
- **Land is being grabbed across Europe for multiple reasons:** production of raw materials for the food industry dominated by transnational companies, extractive industry, bio-energy, “green grabs” such as vast solar greenhouses, urban sprawl, real estate interests, tourism enclaves, and other commercial undertakings. In France, for example, each year more than 60,000 ha of agricultural land are lost to make space for roads, supermarkets and urban growth or leisure parks. These are often more scattered cases of usually smaller land deals. But they add up, and also tend to encroach into the most fertile and productive agricultural lands.

## **(3) Blocking entry by prospective (young) farmers**

This is an unprecedented dynamic of land grab and land concentration. The structure of CAP subsidy schemes and accompanying national policies do not really contribute to the entry into farming by prospective farmers, most of them young people. This was already a serious issue before. This issue has become even more of a problem in the midst of increasing land concentration and creeping land grabbing. The current and planned CAP subsidy schemes are likely to solidify the barrier to more democratic access to land and entry to farming by young people. Access to land is a basic condition to achieve food sovereignty in Europe.

If there is one positive insight from this is the fact that across Europe there are so many young people who are willing and eager to take up farming – despite the popular belief

that young people are no longer interested in agriculture. This growing popular interest among young people to take up farming is partly provoked and inspired by increasing interest in healthy, local food and sustainable agriculture by young people. Yet the harsh reality of European agricultural policies means that these future farmers are either losing small plots of land or being denied entry. The winners of the growing land concentration and creeping land grab are large industrial farm-holdings, clinging to a system of agriculture that has significant environmental and social costs.

#### **(4) Growing and spreading farmer's and peoples struggles**

Fortunately the hope for halting and reversing the European land grab lie with many of these same social groups that are getting dispossessed and marginalized. All of the cases examined in the study highlight how new movements, cross-class, rural and urban, and from different occupations, are emerging in Europe. Their actions, as in many regions of the world, are both *defensive* against land concentration and land grabs, but also *pro-active* seeking to occupy land, advance alternatives. The study includes the case of the community of Narbolia, Sardinia mobilising against the use of prime agricultural land for massive solar greenhouse projects, and the case of opposition to the Notre Dames des Landes airport project in Nantes in France. In terms of pro-active struggles, it highlights the case of SOC in Andalusia, where landless peasant farmers are collectively occupying land and cultivating it using ecological farming systems, and SoLiLA in Vienna where young people are coming together to "squat" fertile urban land for community supported agriculture and city food gardening and thus preserve it from conversion to urban commercial projects.

These struggles are transforming both urban and rural spaces into new battlegrounds in the struggle for control of the direction of European agriculture.

#### **Conclusion**

A study of Europe's land dynamics points forcefully to the need to rethink the conventional "Global South-centric" view of contemporary land issues. It shows first, *land grabbing is critical issue today but is not the only urgent and important land issue in the world today; the generic issue of land concentration is just as urgent and important and probably even more prevalent than the former*, at least in the European context.

Second, *it reveals that land concentration and land grabbing do not occur only in developing countries in the South; in fact, both are underway in Europe today.*

Third, as is happening elsewhere in the world, *it points to the hope inspired by people's struggles against land concentration and land grabbing unfolding in Europe.* Their struggles underscored the urgent need for a *truly transnational* political struggle against contemporary enclosures of one of humanity's most critical resources, the land we live on.

#### **Recommendations**

In light of the findings of this report, the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), supported by various organizations directly and indirectly involved in this report, put forward a set of demands addressed to national and EU governmental bodies to address the triangular issues of land concentration, land grabbing and barriers to entry to farming. Our main demands are:

**Land should regain importance as a public good. We must reduce the commodification of land and promote public management of territories. Priority should be given to the use of land for smallholder and peasant agriculture and food production against the simple private property commercial interests. Access to land should be given to those who work it (or: those who want to work it in a socially and ecologically acceptable way) [ this leaves the possibility for young people to enter the land open, and it simultaneously distances from those who currently control and 'work' fast track of land. It also links with the statement that follows here below, i.e. that redistributive land policies are needed] .**

(1) Stop and reverse the trend of extreme land concentration and commodification!

- Carry out redistributive land policies (land reform, land restitution, affordable land rentals, and so on) in areas of concentrated ownership.
- Recognize historical use rights and communal land systems
- Implement policies to support transformation of industrial farms into small family/peasant farms/food sovereignty projects, including urban agriculture.

(2) Stop land grabbing!

- Ban on all investors and speculators (companies, banks/ governments) that are operating, and /or grabbing land, in Europe and elsewhere in the world;
- create a public databank/tracking system of the transactions of governments and companies engaged in land grabbing

(3) Assuring access to land for farming as the basis to achieve food sovereignty specially for young people - abolish the patriarchal system of land possession or heritage and promote policies of positive discrimination to assure access for women

- - Create public management frameworks or reform existing ones (e.g. Safer, France) to facilitate the access of youth, landless people, also for other resources such as water.
- -Strengthen or create the participation of local communities in decision making on land use
- Develop legal frameworks for cooperative-type farms and co-ownership arrangements that would improve the situation of women in land ownership and make it easier for young people to set up a farm.
- Change the installation and renting criteria and adopt policies to support sustainable small farm/peasants projects (eg leave minimal surface condition for subsidies).
- Push for the adoption and democratic application of the Tenure Guidelines on responsible governance of land (UN) in Europe within a food sovereignty framework
- Support to concrete actions of recovering land (e.g. occupation of industrial zones)

- Prioritize the use of land for food versus agrofuel production and other commercial energy uses , extractive industries, useless megaprojects,...– in Europe and elsewhere in the world

## Overview of the collection

### **Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles in Europe: summary of and introduction to the collection of studies**

**By Saturnino Borrás Jr., Jennifer Franco and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg**

*This introductory paper synthesises the key findings of the various reports, link these to the global perspectives on land grabbing, land concentration and people's land struggles. (Note: this paper is available only in June 2013).*

### **Land Grabbing, Artificialisation and Concentration in France: causes, consequences and challenges**

**By Morgan Ody**

*The past decades in France witnessed a shrink in access to land with the rise of barriers for newcomers in the farming sector. This phenomenon is intrinsically intertwined with land concentration, land grabbing and 'artificialisation' of land (conversion of farm land to non-agricultural uses). People, especially youth, wanting to start a farm find themselves in stiff competition with existing commercially well to do farmers. Land concentration is increasing: in 1955 80% of the farms were of below 20 ha, the current average is around 80 ha. 'Artificialisation' of land has been progressively reducing the amount of available agricultural land. In France, each year more than 60,000 ha of agricultural land are lost to make space for roads, supermarkets and urban growth or leisure parks. There is an increasing trend towards land speculation, as the price of land frequently increases especially if assessed eventually in the category of land for real estates.*

### **Land: access and struggles in Andalusia, Spanish State**

**By Marco Aparicio, Manuel Flores, Arturo Landeros, Sara Mingorría, Delphine Ortega and Enrique Tudela**

*The region is currently undergoing a double process of land concentration and growing privatisation. On the one hand, between 1962 and 2009, the number of farms dropped by 67% (from over 3 million to below 1 million) while at the same time their average size more than doubled. In 2010, 2% of landowners owned 50% of the land. On the other hand, over the past 50 years private property has grown enormously, while other types of land-based social relations – such as sharecropping – have diminished significantly. Furthermore, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2003 brought with it the Single Payment Scheme, perpetuating the maintenance of highly inequitable land distribution, and encouraging the abandonment of smallholder production. The result is the preservation and consolidation of Andalusian latifundia and an ongoing de-peasantisation. Both European and state-level public policies, far from supporting local sustainable production and agrarian workers, are encouraging modes of production that contribute to land concentration in the hands of corporations. Agricultural unions and various other organisations that defend the need for a vibrant rural sector and the right to food have criticised the injustice and illegitimacy of the implementation of CAP measures. The struggles for land have achieved some success: the peasant farmers' movement has occupied and started to cultivate lands, planning and following a model of ecological production that continues to expand. The Andalusian Trade Union (SOC-SAT) epitomises resistance against the*

*concentration of land ownership and the abandonment of farms, and for the creation of employment in Andalusia. SOC-SAT is mobilising across the Spanish State, reaffirming that the struggle for agrarian justice continues. Its land claims are not geared towards obtaining ownership but rather to form workers' cooperatives, organised by the Union. In some cases the political context has facilitated projects based on organic production as opposed to the prevailing agro-intensive and agro-export model.*

## **Land concentration, land grabbing and options for change in Germany**

**By Roman Herre**

*Germany has witnessed a significant trend towards increasing land concentration recent decades. A total of 1,246,000 holdings in 1966/67 shrunk to just 299,100 farms by 2010. Of these holdings the land area covered by farms of less than 2 hectares shrunk from 123,670 hectares in 1990 to a mere 20,110 hectares in 2007, while farms of 50 hectares and larger expanded in area from 9.2 million hectares in 1990 to 12.6 million hectares in 2007. A novel feature of the last 5 – 10 years has been the increasing appropriation of land by non-agricultural investors for non-agricultural purposes, including for bio-gas production. In some regions in Germany, it is estimated that these new investors have purchased between 15% and 30% of the land available on the market. The problem is particularly marked in former Eastern Germany where the further privatisation of formerly state-owned land and the deregulation of the land market have favoured big investors with large financial resources. This has led to a surge in land prices. Between 2005 and 2011 the cost of 1 ha of land in Germany increased by 55% from € 8,692 to € 13,493. The rising demand for and control over land by non-regional and non-agricultural investors threatens the livelihoods of local family farms both now and in the future, as it denies people the opportunity to go into agriculture unless they have large financial backing.*

## **Land concentration and green grabs in Italy: the case of Furtovoltaico in Sardinia, Italy**

**By Antonio Onorati and Chiara Pierfederici**

*During the past decades, Italy has been experiencing a concentration of agricultural land property, whereby 22,000 farms with more than 100 ha own more than 6.5 million ha of total agricultural area. Aside from the public lands, the remaining 4.5 million ha are concentrated in the hands of 19,000 private companies or farms, each possessing more than 100 ha. National policies have exacerbated the situation by allowing the rush to privatise the common or public lands still available, which are labelled as 'under-used'. Regardless of its vital role in providing employment, securing food sovereignty and offering viable alternatives in a context of global economic and environmental crises, governments continue to underestimate small-scale agriculture: most policies are designed and implemented on the basis of viewing the agricultural sector as a 'burden' rather than understanding the potential of small-scale farming, especially in terms of economic growth, social development and employment. The report focuses on an Enervitabio Ltd project in the municipality of Narbolia in Oristano province. A solar greenhouse plant for agricultural production was built, with an energy production target of 27 megawatts (MW). The plant is a relevant example of a trend whereby hundreds of hectares of prime farmland are being used for solar greenhouse projects that have various negative impacts: not only are they undermining the rights of local communities to produce food and secure access to land, but also they are skirting the law and eroding the capacity of small farmers to contribute to resolving the crisis affecting Italy. The case of Narbolia solar greenhouses illustrates how large industrial groups and foreign investors are taking advantage of government subsidies and national laws to amass profits, regardless of the largely adverse impact on Sardinian agriculture. Moreover, such projects have been capturing financial resources intended for the agricultural sector. These issues prompted community reactions and protests. Since 2012, local mobilisation*

and resistance have mainly been expressed via the local 'S'Arrieddu for Narbolia' Committee. The groups composing the Committee have been intensively active in disseminating information and also bringing lawsuits concerning the irregularities outlined in the paper.

### **Land Grabbing in France: the case of Notre-Dame-des-Landes Airport By Anton Pieper**

*A highly disputed and much resisted airport project in the French countryside provides a clear example of politicized agrarian struggle within the context of land grabbing and artificialisation in Western Europe. The grab of 2,000 hectares of agricultural lands for an airport whose relevance is being contested, demonstrates one of the ways in which large corporations are currently seizing land. It embodies the problem of arable lands being diverted and 'artificialized' for industrial and urban uses, a change driven by large-scale capital interests. This takeover, achieved through a 'revolving door' configuration between government and corporations leaving little space for local democracy involves hundreds of millions of euros, among other issues, while the government refuses to consider alternatives put forward by the resisters. Although debated for more than four decades, the issue took a new turn in 2008 with the granting of building permission, and in 2011, with the publicity surrounding farmers squatting on the land in protest. Local farmers and activists and other spontaneous formations have been united in the resistance against the 'Grand Ouest' airport project. Renaming the area ZAD, Zone à Défendre (Zone to Defend), and themselves zadistas, activists, farmers and local residents have been resisting the development of the airport by occupying the land expropriated by the state on behalf of Vinci, the company which won the tender for construction works. With the increasing pressure and police violence, especially since the forced eviction procedures started in October 2012 this land struggle, characterised by its diversity and creativity, is loosing ground.*

### **The politics of land and food in urban cities in the North: reclaiming urban agriculture and the struggle**

**By Kim Möhrs, Franziskus Forster, Sarah Kumnig, Lukas Rauth – members of *Solidarisch Landwirtschaften!* (SoliLa!) in Austria**

*Against the backdrop of a larger and long-term decline in the farming population in Austria, small farmers are abandoning agriculture at a particularly alarming rate. Loss of access to land is a key factor. One-third of the arable farmland has been lost in Austria since 1951. Today 20 ha of land per day are enclosed for roads, buildings, infrastructure projects, and numerous other real estate activities associated with urban sprawl. This is twice as fast as in Germany and occurs within an EU context whereby 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> is lost per year. The rural exodus in Austria and the loss of agricultural land is thus linked to broader questions of land use and land planning which transcend the traditional rural-urban dichotomy. It is in fact at the rural-urban interface, that the battle for the valuation, use, and meaning of land can become most apparent. Vienna shows how land used agricultural purposes - from urban gardens, to allotments, to various forms of community supported agriculture - is often the most expendable when faced with competing pressures and interests. Agricultural land use in Vienna shrank by 20% between 1999 and 2010 while the number of farms decreased by 30.2% between 1995 and 1999 - 67.7% of those disappearing farms holding less than five hectares. In response to the loss of agricultural urban spaces and in protest against the prohibitively high cost of leasing or buying land, land occupations have been carried out in the city with the aim to build a broader alliance for food and land sovereignty. Thus, the insights from urban land struggles and urban political ecology must be taken into account when examining the scale and nature of land grabbing in Europe.*



## **The Return of the White Horse: Land Grabbing in Hungary**

**By Robert Fidrich**

*With Hungary's accession to the EU, land and natural resources are increasingly being commodified and controlled by large-scale capital to the detriment of Hungary's small-scale farmers. The highly unequal distribution of EU agricultural subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy has played a major role. In the first six years after EU accession, the majority of small farmers were not eligible to apply for subsidies, effectively excluding 93% of Hungary's total farming population. In 2009, 8.6% of farms were receiving 72% of the agricultural subsidies. The low price of land in Hungary compared to the old EU member states has been another key driving factor behind a new wave of land grabbing. Although a moratorium on land ownership by foreigners is currently in place, the expected lifting of this ban in 2014 has already spurred outside actors to grab and control large areas of land through various means. The Hungarian government now estimates that around 1.0-1.5 million ha land is in the hands of foreigners, many of them from Austria, who have been able to capture significant amount of national and EU agricultural subsidies. Though the purposes for which the land is grabbed vary – from motorcycle rings and golf courses to hotels and private luxury estates - in all cases, it is Hungary's family farmers and local food cultures that are losing out.*

## **Scramble for land in Romania: an iron fist in a velvet glove**

**By Judith Bouniol**

*Across Romania, natural resources have become the object of greed and massive investments. Lands are being grabbed for many purposes – agricultural, mining, energy, tourism, water resources and speculation. It is reported that around 800,000 ha, or 6% of Romanian farmland, could already be in the hands of transnational corporations. In this case, Europe is all at once a land grabber, a site of, and context for land grabbing. The phenomenon is hidden behind the harmonious image of Romanian accession to the EU, including the liberalisation of national market to foreign buyers. The country is ideal for investments in land and agro-industrial products. Its natural characteristics make it suitable for cereal crops, large areas are potentially available and land costs less than in the rest of Europe. Rural areas are being abandoned, leaving behind an ageing and vulnerable local population who who not have much alternative but to accept the arrival of agro-industrial European corporations that settle legally through lease or purchase of land. In addition, government legislation and support favour large-scale investors. It is probably that some element of speculation to capture the lucrative EU CAP subsidies is one of the drivers of the grabs. Half of the subsidies were received in 2012 by 1% of the farmers, all of whom have farm size above 500 ha. However, the apparent legality is like a velvet glove disguising the aggressiveness of the iron fist driving the phenomenon. Land is being massively seized and the control over the benefits of its exploitation as well as the power to decide on its use is being monopolized in private hands.*

## **Land concentration, land grabbing and land conflicts in Europe: the case of Boynitsa in Bulgaria**

**By Georgi Medarov**

*The new wave of enclosures by large private investors hitting Bulgaria falls within the context of a massive (re)concentration of land ownership fostered by EU accession in 2007. 82.4% of agricultural landholdings are above 100 ha. Although the aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse had witnessed a wide redistribution of land to large number of people, the lack of adequate state support and economic incentives for small-scale agriculture led to severe rural degradation throughout the country. The unfolding process of re-consolidation of land has been nurtured by government's policies such as 'voluntary consolidation' programmes, driven by the Bulgarian State's eagerness to attract foreign investments for large-scale intensive agriculture. The adherence to EU brought new rules for competition that further limited the possibilities for smaller*

farmers and cooperatives. The rush to land in Bulgaria has fuelled widespread speculation, and has driven the rise of a new class of land speculators and brokers, the *arendatori*. Entwined with foreign capital – investors and funds – they capture vast tracks of land for a diverse range of purposes. Land is being grabbed for urban or tourism industry development, including gentrification and golf, ski and sea resorts, as well as mining projects. Land grabbing is also traced to large-scale agriculture and even to genetically engineered crops.

## **Land grabbing and concentration in Europe: the case of Serbia**

**By Milenko Srećković**

*Land grabbing in Serbia started during the rapid privatisation that took place in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's disintegration and is now being further extended following Serbia's accession to the EU. Taking advantage of this situation, national and foreign corporations are seizing control of vast tracts of Serbian land. Started in the threshold of the 2000s, the privatisation process led to a strong consolidation of land ownership. The four largest Serbian landowners are nowadays reported to hold altogether more than 100,000 ha each. Carried out in a non-transparent manner this privatization drive has been above all conducted with questionable legal ground. It seems to have been based on abusing a loophole between right to use and right to appropriate agricultural land. The subsequent consolidation of landholding trend is furthermore reinforced by the large-scale land acquisitions involving foreign – mostly European – corporations. Besides being a grabber, Europe is also linked to land grabbing in Serbia as a context for the phenomenon. The terms of EU adhesion imposed upon its new members include the liberalisation of national land market to foreign buyers within a decade, before 2014. At the dawn of those terms becoming fully effective, large landholders are hoarding land and anticipating market speculation, a calculation based on the big differential in the price of land on the Serbian and European markets.*

## **Land Grabs in the Black Earth: Ukrainian Oligarchs and International Investors**

**By Christina Plank**

*In Ukraine, land grabbing concerns to some extent the transfer of formal ownership, but primarily revolves around who has de facto control over the land. The phenomenon represents an alarming case of controlling, capturing and concentrating decisions regarding Ukraine's land use and agricultural model in few private hands. The push for a large-scale agro-export model, in the context of the privatisation of agricultural land within the framework of Ukraine's land reform, led to the current wave of land grabs, with foreign and national agri-business obtaining control over Ukrainian agriculture. Although the land reform has redistributed land to approximately 7 million rural inhabitants, the agricultural policies provided to date hardly any state support for small and medium farmers. As a consequence the majority of the actual landowners lease their land and this has paved the way to the rise of large-scale agroholdings. Increasingly horizontally and vertically integrated in order to control the whole value chain, their expansion goes hand in hand with the concentration of land. The 10 biggest agroholdings control about 2.8 million ha, while some oligarchs own up to several hundreds of thousands of hectares each. Those are used for agro-export intensive cultures, with a trend emerging toward the growing of flex crops. Due to their need of foreign technology and further financial capital, Ukrainian agroholdings are interwoven with transnational capital flows through stock exchanges, European pension funds and the support received by international financial and development institutions.*

**The myth of good land and natural resource governance in Europe: What the FAO Tenure Guidelines on land, fisheries and forests reveal**

**By Florence Kroff and Claire Guffens**

*This paper examines the FAO tenure Guidelines and its potential usefulness in the context of contemporary land concentration and land grabbing in Europe. Note: this paper will be available only in June 2013.*

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