

Rehabilitation of Status or the Victory of Stagnation: Rose-Oil Industry in Bulgaria from the end of the First World War to the Great Depression (1919 – 1934)

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Summary

This paper reviews the trends in the development of rose production and rose oil trade in Bulgaria in the 1919-1934 period. On the basis of extensive theoretical and empirical material, the author has made some conclusions, having examining the existing background national and international economic situation. The paper also attempts to outline the reasons for problems, and also the achievements of Bulgarian farmers, producers and traders.

Key words: rose-oil industry, trade, export, trends.

JEL Classification: N0, N2, N5, N9, O2, O4

1. Introduction

As a specific sign of identity, part of the economy of Bulgaria is invariably associated with the oil-bearing rose. The rose industry in Bulgaria included the whole cycle of cultivation of roses, their processing and transformation into rose oil and its derivative articles, as well as their domestic and external sale. In other words, it involved agriculture, preindustrial and industrial forms and activities, as well as domestic and external trade.

The development of Bulgarian rose cultivation in the period between the two world wars is relatively little known to the specialized literature. The limited number of good quality studies supports this assumption. Adequate conclusions about the trends and status of this sector are only possible after considering the general background of the Bulgarian state's economic policy (agricultural and industrial), having in mind the trends in the world economy at the time.

Bulgarian research literature features two outstanding studies, namely those of Irinchev-Topalov¹ and K. Zarev². Arguably, a serious contribution came from M. Palarait's study³ which put forward highly debatable questions. Some more recent research made

¹ According to the two authors, the First World War and the ensuing economic crisis stalled the development of rose cultivation. The area of rose plantations was decreasing by 7500 decares per year, on average. Rose cultivation disappeared from a number of peripheral towns, such as Vratsa, Nikopol, Omurtag, Troyan, Pirdop, Asenovgrad, etc. Besides, "after a partial stabilization of the economy, rose production marked a slight increase, but the new economic crisis of 1929-1933 and the pro-German policy of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie prevented it from developing further" (p.30).

² With reference to the period in question K. Zarev concluded that "The end of the Second World War saw only 23% of the rose plantations of 1917" (p. 47). The same author added that "In 1930 the price of rose petals peaked at 20-24 leva per kilogram" (p. 51).

³ Palarait, M. Primary production in a Market for Luxury the Rose Oil Trade of Bulgaria 1771-1941 –The Journal of European Economic History, Rome, 2000, p.559.

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by Agaoglu and H. Baydar⁴ is also valuable as it presents the state of rose cultivation in Turkey (another major world producer apart from Bulgaria). The main conclusions drawn in most of the abovementioned works were the reasons for the title of the present paper. The main objective of this piece of research is to outline the long-term achievements in the traditional Bulgarian production practices, without overlooking unresolved or aggravated problems. In this line of thought, we are looking for the answer to an ambiguous question: A victory of stagnation or a victory over stagnation?

Side by side with the objective setbacks, resulting from the defeat of Bulgaria in the First World War and the global tendencies at the time,⁵ the Bulgarian economic situation was still suffering from the typical long-lasting (chronic?) consequences. I agree with M. Dimitrov's opinion that "the prevailing narrow-minded ideas of the economy from the Revival era continued to have a strong influence, and after the Liberation they meant a state policy of patronage (protection but not encouragement) of the Bulgarian industrial production" (Dimitrov 2013: 151-156)⁶

⁴ Agaoglu, Y. Rose Oil Industry and the production of Oil Rose in Turkey, Tayler and Francis Group, 2000; Baydar, H., Oil-bearing rose cultivation and rose oil industry in Turkey. Eurocosmetics, 2006

⁵ As for the increase in the cost of living, Bulgaria ranks fourth after Turkey, Russia and Austria. The highest increase has been in the prices of flour, bread, beef butter, butter, milk, potatoes, coffee, gas, clothing and footwear (Tsankov, Al., Bulgaria during and after the war, JBES (Journal of the Bulgarian Economic Society), 1921, b. 1-2-3, p.39).

⁶ The government of the People's Party, led by Konstantin Stoilov (1894-1899), passed the Local Industry Encouragement Act of 1895, largely developed by the previous government, led by PM Stefan Stambolov (1887-1894). This act made provisions for high protective duties on commodities which could be produced in Bulgaria, too. This protectionism, however, adopted the wrong philosophy, because it provided protection for the industry which replaced import, instead of promoting export-oriented industry based on local raw materials. Regardless of this promotion policy, local industrialists "played away from home". They developed industrial sectors in which their competitors had better traditions, organization, technological superiority, etc. (Ivanov, 2006:199) (Penchev 2011:93).

In 1924, the prominent Bulgarian statistician K. Popov summarized that "the freedom in the political life and the progress made in the development of the country did not change the old economic structure. Today, after 48 years of political life and independence, Bulgaria is still a country of small-scale agricultural property and extensive farming, despite the evident trends of industrial development and intensive farming, and despite the achievements in this respect."⁷ (Popov 1924:1-2) This conclusion is symptomatic, having in mind the fact that rose cultivation is presumably an example of intensive farming; in addition, the export emphasis of rose oil trade *a priori* is a factor for an adequate evaluation of the state of the international markets.

Some national and foreign analysts put an emphasis on the relative, albeit minor progress: "Indeed, what was the Bulgarian industry like before the introduction of protective legislation? About 50 businesses with 4 000 – 5 000 workers. Today after 20 years of protectionist policy, we have 876 protected businesses, with around 60 000 workers. Due to this, the economic image of our country is already different to the one it had in the first 10-15 years after the Liberation." (Mihailov 1925:571).

Undoubtedly, such a conclusion is well-supported by statistics; it is far more complicated, however, to analyse changes in depth, i.e. as far as structural achievements and sustainable progress are concerned.

As a matter of fact, it is remarkable that the Bulgarian economy observers at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were those who did their best to make a critical and balanced assessment and evaluation of the situation. B. Boev, K. Popov and D. Yablanski argued that the economic progress in Bulgaria after 1878 did not correspond to its potential and did not meet the expectations

⁷ Popov, K., Establishment and development of the cooperative movement in Bulgaria - JBES, 1924, b. 1-3, p.1)

in the country⁸. Of course, one may say that the expectations for a rapid and unequivocal economic improvement might have been too optimistic, and in certain aspects, unfounded.

The beginning of economic stabilization in Bulgaria was accompanied by a number of conflicts which approached the dimensions of a Civil War (two uprisings in 1923, emergency legislation in 1924, an assassination in 1925), (Penchev 2009:61).

2. Essence and scope of the rose industry in Bulgaria

According to reliable sources (Bliznakov 1934; Michoff 1950) that complement each other, the oil-bearing rose⁹ was brought to Bulgarian lands from Egypt and Persia (Iran) in the 15th-16th c., and Kazanlak (the valley of Kazanlak respectively) became the first region where it was cultivated.

The growing world trade and the emerging industrialization in Europe in the 16th and 17th c. led to an increased demand for rose oil as a raw material for the developing perfume industry. It was for this reason that rose-oil production in the 17th century grew in India, and in the 18th century in Persia (Iran), and some neighboring countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. The fact that trade in those countries was conducted in kind at the time, the enormous distances between consumers and producers, the uncomfortable roads and the lack of security in transporting goods at the end of 18th century were all

factors that largely conditioned the decline of rose cultivation in the "traditional" rose-cultivating countries.

A source of supplies for the increasingly growing industrial demand for rose oil in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was found in the rose plantations in Bulgaria. According to some records from this period, production in Bulgarian territories accounted for over 80% of the world consumption¹⁰.

Rose plantations usually took up less fertile land. Most of them were found on the steep slopes of the Stara planina and Sredna gora mountain, preventing them from erosion. In addition to this anti-erosion function, rose plantations had a more significant economic importance: in some regions of Bulgaria they provided a major livelihood for the population, and elsewhere (given its seasonal nature), a secure source of finances, which supplemented household incomes.

The explanation that the term *Bulgarian rose oil* is not a cliché is very simple: it is exactly the Bulgarian rose oil fragrance that is associated with the word 'rose'. Its fragrance is warm, colourful, distinct, strong and consistent, accompanied with slightly spicy and honey-like backnotes. Due to these qualities, rose oil was added to the contents of all perfume compositions to "refine" the fragrance nuances, to make all the other ingredients stand out, and to intensify the fixative function of the perfume: "And here we must mention a big achievement, or success, of our state and our economy.

⁸ Boev, B., Internal review – JBES, 1900, b.10,700-701; Popov, K., A review of the economic development of Bulgaria- JBES, 1907, b.4-5,209-245; Yablanski, D., What should the Bulgarian economic policy be, in general and in particular, in its relations with the neighbouring countries? JBES, 1901, b.4-5,205-263

⁹ Since times immemorial roses have been used to provide decoration, hedging, or ground cover (against erosion). The flowers and their fruit are the raw material for the production of fragrance products, food, wine, vinegar, tanning substances, tea and medicines. Rose water, produced in the Middle East countries was introduced to Europe after the Crusades. At first the link between the Persian rose producers and the European consumers was Bysantium, and later, the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰ According to Hrzanovskij (1958), rose cultivation in France dates back to 13th c. It started with the Gaelic roses, brought from Central Asia, which later became known as French roses. At the end of 19th c. the commercial rose cultivation in France was concentrated around two centres, far away from one another and very different in climate: the south-east district around Nice, Canne and Grasse, and north-west, around Paris and Seine-Oise. According to information presented at the First Bulgarian Rose Oil Producers' Conference, rose plantations in France as of 1906 were about 6500 decares, which gave an annual yield of over 1 million kilograms of rose petals and 100-120 kilograms of rose oil. According to Shipkov (1937), rose plantations as of 1929 were 6040 decares in total, yielding 1 110 700 kg of rose petals.

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Owing to the activities of our traders and the intervention of the state, the rose oil, which until recently had been known abroad as *the rose oil of the Orient*, finally received its real name *Bulgarian rose oil*¹¹.

The consumers of Bulgarian rose oil, both now and in the past, have been the countries with a highly developed perfume industry,

mostly France and the United States, but also England, Germany, Switzerland, and in the last few years, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, among other producers. Due to its high quality, the price of Bulgarian rose oil on the foreign market in some of the years approximated the price of gold, which brought about another common name for it - *liquid gold*.

Table 1: *Rose oils production in Bulgaria.*

Year	Price of 1 kg of Bulgarian rose oil (lv)	Price of 1 kg of gold (lv)	Price of 1 kg of Bulgarian rose oil / Price of 1 kg of gold (%)
1933	37 000	92 000	40
1943	66 800	138 000	48
1966	1 500	1 200	125

(Source: Topalov and Irinchev 1967: 6-7)

Bulgarian rose oil was a luxury item, and as such, it took its deserved place in upmarket perfumery, cosmetics, confectionery¹², and even in the tobacco industry. Until the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) almost the entire quantity of rose oil produced in Bulgaria was exported. The conditions were favourable: "The price of oil at that time and the buying price for rose petals were satisfactory and cost-effective. No other crop could fetch more income than the rose"¹³.

According to the calculations of an agronomist, "with 150-200 leva for creating the plantation and 20 leva for looking after a decare of roses, you get 300 kg of rose petals or 30 vials of rose oil, which sold at the price of at least 2 leva each, will fetch an income of 60 leva, or 40 leva of net profit". Even if we assume that the quoted values were actually lower, the profitability of rose production was indisputable¹⁴. Obviously, for a modernizing economy the presence of such opportunities had to be taken into consideration, and not underestimated.

3. Major achievements and issues

The quantitative trends are clearly shown in the statistic information presented here:¹⁵

Chart 1: Exported rose oil and value from Bulgaria.

¹¹ Karapetrov, Al., Regulating rose oil production and trade (A speech made before the National Assembly on May 22nd, 1940) 1940, p.4.

¹² Rose jam has a superb flavor. A funny report from Kazanlak to "South Bulgaria" newspaper said that "a H.I.Veliev was appointed inspector only because he sent three jars of rose jam to Mr. Bobchev. What a relish! Take two spoonfuls of the jam, especially, after you have had a bath, wash it down with a glass of cold water, and another one of rakia...A balm for the soul and body!". Borba newspaper, is. 2/Aug.7, 1885. Lyuben Karavelov, a great writer from Revival times, argued that "those who haven't tasted the rose rakia ("fruit brandy") from the region of Kazanlak, they know nothing about this world...".

¹³ Karapetrov, Al., Regulating rose oil production and trade (Speech delivered before the National Assembly on 22 May 1940), 1940, p.4

¹⁴ First Rose Oil Producers' Conference, Plovdiv, 1906, p.9

¹⁵ The figures presented in the table were taken from the following sources: about the 1885-1905 period: First Bulgarian Rose Oil Producers' Conference, Plovdiv, 1906; about the 1906-1930 period: Statistics of the rose oil factory owners and exporters (Shipkov, 1937); about the period after 1931: Statistical Yearbook of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, Sofia, 1939.



(Sources: about the 1885-1905 period: First Bulgarian Rose Oil Producers' Conference, Plovdiv, 1906; about the 1906-1930 period: Statistics of the rose oil factory owners and exporters (Shipkov, 1937); about the period after 1931: Statistical Yearbook of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, Sofia, 1939).

Articles

Apart from rose oil, Bulgaria exported rose water and rose concrete on the international market¹⁶. The period 1885-1912 saw an average annual export of around 60 000 kg; the next five years the quantity of the exported rose water decreased, the average annual export for the period 1926-1935 being around 15 000 kg. In all likelihood, the reduction was due to the diminished sales of rose water in the main consumer country, Turkey, since the domestic market there was being taken over by locally produced rose water.

The Bulgarian governments did not fail to react to the tendencies in the domestic and international market situation. The Ministry of Agriculture and State Property tabled a bill to parliament in 1922, aiming at promoting rose production, which was discussed and passed by the National Assembly¹⁷. Amendments made to this Act later provided for setting up a special fund for the encouraging rose production. A decree of the Council of Ministers of 1934 was also in favour of the rose producers, as it fixed the price of rose petals at 5 leva per kilogram. Some protective measures were taken for the preservation of the rose flower grown in Bulgaria: in 1925 the list¹⁸ of banned export goods included rose roots and stems with or without roots, as well as rose graft cuttings. Tariff incentives were introduced on some taxes. Despite all the effort made, the results remained insufficient, and they did not meet the expectations of a number of rose producers, or their hopes to develop a highly profitable business (Veleva 2016: 246-247).

Within a few years the situation seriously improved the optimistic attitudes, which,

however, led to underestimating important processes: "After the war people started looking for luxury, perfume factories were opened, and within the next couple of years the whole unsold stock of rose oil, together with that produced in the same period, was welcomed in the market and the price of rose oil kept rising on an annual basis, finally reaching the record 120 000 leva per kilogram in 1929. After the war we lost the huge Russian markets, which accounted for 400 kg of rose oil per year." (Karapetrov 1940:5)

According to the French lawyer Georges Desbons, the quantity of rose petals in 1924 was half that of pre-war levels: 5 935 100 kg in 1924, compared with 13 488 456 kg in 1908. Such a drastic decline, in his opinion, was due to two reasons: The conscription for the wars in 1912-1913 and 1915-1918 took away, often irreversibly, the rose production specialists, and the land was left to the women and old people remaining in the villages to be used for less difficult types of farming."¹⁹ (Desbons 1929: 24). The number of producers fell sharply (a significant part of them being experienced people who had specialized in a certain production), and the composition of the cultivated land shrank, too.

The main obstacle to long-term success was still the falsification of rose oil. The issue had been well-familiar to part of the French partners, who insisted on drastic measures. In 1927 a puzzled French perfume producer confronted a Bulgarian representative with the following retort: "We can no longer afford to be provided with bad rose oil, so we will look for a way to get rid of Bulgaria...We are ready to pay more for oil as long as you can guarantee its purity with your signature"²⁰.

It would be exaggerated and inaccurate to argue that the aforementioned problems were neglected or underestimated. People

¹⁶ Rose concrete, the production of which in Bulgaria dates from 1906, took some time to establish itself in the market. In the period 1926-1940 its export amounted to 8648 kg to the value of 157 424 570 lv in total. The export of rose concrete peaked at 1673 kg in 1937.

¹⁷ The law, the effectiveness of which was denied even by its contemporaries, and for a good reason, was revoked with an Ordinance regulating rose oil production and sale in 1937.

¹⁸ The ban list was published in Decree № 6 of the Ministry of Finance on 20 February 1925.

¹⁹ "Furthermore, the remaining rose gardens are obviously suffering from a shortage of or full lack of fertilization. We got to a point when a hectare which once gave a crop of 3000 kg of roses can now barely yield half of that amount".

²⁰ Kazanlashka Iskra newspaper, is. 66/15 April 1927, p.1.

of experience and authority would voice their worries: "Look through the reports of the foreign trade consuls in Sofia and Tzarigrad and you will see for yourself the funny situation were getting in for...There you will find warnings for greater caution when buying rose oil from Bulgaria because there has been much evidence of falsification... Fake rose oil increases the counterfeiter's profit, undercuts the price of the pure product, diminishes demand, since it saturates the market, and demotivates the rose producer to work without getting the expected reward."²¹

The fight against falsification²² has its background at a legislative level. In 1887 the Council of Ministers passed a decree banning the import of *tereshe* (Geranium oil) into Bulgaria. This act not only failed to meet expectations but it also made the problem more serious.²³ In 1893 Iliya Stokov,

²¹ *Epokha* newspaper, is.387/10 November 1923, N. Pushkarov said: "The harm is too big – the measures we have been taking so far, such as banning the import of Geranium oil, falsification punishment, etc., have been inadequate. Evil must be eradicated by giving rose producers the right to take decisions and trade without intermediaries." Such an outcome seemed too idealistic and impracticable.

²² Falsification /adulteration/ of rose oil is achieved by mixing it with other aromatic oils with the purpose of increasing its quantity. In most cases pure rose oil is mixed with Geranium oil (oil from Geranium and Pelargonium roseum). The problem is aggravated because geranium oils are divided into genuine and fake oils. Genuine geranium oils (e.g. the French Geranium oil) have a quite pleasant rose fragrance, while the fake ones (e.g. the Indian palmarose) "have notes of a heavy odour which stifles the faint rose fragrance". Raykov, P.N.H., On the articles written by Ya. Chakalov and V.Atanasov against the Geranium oil bill. JBES, 1897, b.9-10, p.394

²³ According to P.N. Raykov, PhD, the act of 1887 "did a lot of harm not only to our rose oil traders, but to the rose industry as well, while at the same time benefiting foreigners. It had been hastily created, without carefully investigating the motives behind it, without a comprehensive study of the delicate character of the foundations of the rose oil trade, and last but not least, without considering the interests and the desires of producers and traders alike, who were supposed to benefit from it in the first place. As far as I have been able to investigate this issue, this Act was well accepted by foreign traders, who are still taking advantage of it, using it as an official document verifying the bad faith practice on the part of our rose oil traders". Raykov, P.N., On the articles written by Ya. Chakalov and V.Atanasov against the Geranium oil bill. JBES, 1897, b.6-7, p.280

member of parliament from Kazanlak, put forward the Rose Oil Purity Observance Bill. Despite the backing of 70 members of parliament, "the inappropriateness of much of the bill was so blatant that it only showed clearly that the author of the Bill either did not know much about rose oil trade or had been led by some particular considerations in writing it. The severity provided for in the bill against consumers of Geranium oil could satisfy even the cruelest of legislators, while the arguments that accompanied it were so modest, so scarce and so unfounded that they could hardly be rewarded with such a good title."²⁴ Not surprisingly, the Bill never became an Act.

One could even come across advocates of rose oil falsification. According to one of them, Geranium oil is a "good thing for rose oil production and trade. It regulates production and the price of rose oil."²⁵ A similar suggestion called for "giving a go-ahead to Geranium oil in our country, thus giving a weapon in the hands of our rightful traders, so that they could fight against their competitors abroad, establish free trade, and have a guarantee for the interests of our precious rose production."²⁶ Ts. Kalyandzhiev bluntly stated that "we must above all defend the interests of our country, and its producers, and leave aside such sentimental things like the good name and the prestige of our fragrant product. What's more, our prestige will be raised more easily by defending the interests of the country rather

²⁴ Raykov, P.N., On the articles written by Ya. Chakalov and V.Atanasov against the Geranium oil bill. JBES, 1897, b.6-7, p.268

²⁵ An advocate of the free import of Geranium oil insisted that it is "an unavoidable regulator of the prices of rose oil because when the harvest is bad, it will compensate for its shortage, and it will not let prices soar". This is not a serious argument, however. In the medium (and long) term the skepticism about the natural purity of rose oil led to a decline (sometimes a drastic fall) of prices. Raykov, P.N., On the articles written by Ya. Chakalov and V.Atanasov against the Geranium oil bill. JBES, 1897, b.6-7, p.271

²⁶ Atanasov V., Rose oil – The question of the day – JBES, 1897, b. 1-2, p. 103.

than by guaranteeing the purity of our rose oil"²⁷. Such an untenable suggestion attests to the chaotic wandering of specialists in this sector, and the lack of consistency and vision in dealing with the problem.

Judging from the available data, decline turned into stagnation in the middle of the decade: "proof of that was statistical data of cultivated land with rose gardens in the vicinity of Kazanlak, the best rose production centre"²⁸.

Table 2: *Cultivated area and price of rose plants.*

Year	Cultivated area, decares	Price per 1 kg of rose petals, lv.	Rose flower, kg
1897	20589	980	
1917	27306	2180	
1918	26792	4000	
1919	22988	6000	
1920	20259	20000	
1921	17132	20400	
1922	14761	20000	
1923	14589	23000	
1924	12850	44000	1511500
1925	12080	67000	1479400
1926	12346	64000	1381900

According to the data provided by the Plovdiv Chamber of Trade and Industry, the situation in 1927 was the following²⁹:

District	Old plantations, decares	New plantations, decares	Total, decares	Total flower yield, kg	Flower yield per decare, kg
Karlovo	24619,3	2865	27484,3	5678597	207
Kazanlak	11781,4	1922,5	13703,9	2023910	148
Plovdiv	5761	564,9	6325,9	1019700	161
Chirpan	2902,8	787,7	3690,5	611065	166
Nova Zagora	1491,6	430,9	1922,5	186942	97
Stara Zagora	713,1	143	856,1	141489	165
Peshtera	160	40	200	200000	300
Panagyurishte	269	26	295	59826	203
Sevlievo	4,5	-----	4,5	720	160
Berkovitsa	3	-----	3	400	133
Total	47705,7	6780	54485,7	9782643	1,795

Source: *Kazanlashka Iskra* issue 79/ 1 October 1927

²⁷ Kalyandziev, Ts., On rose oil, JBES, 1897, b. 11-12, p. 505. The author supported his thesis with the argument that "People all around the world buy rose oil without any restrictions, so why not do the same in our country? And also, Geranium oil does not seem to have any harmful effect on the ladies, when they smell the rose oil, neither does it stimulate the sexual drive of the gentlemen, consequently it is strange that it should be prosecuted" (p.506). This unfortunate attempt to show one's sense of humour is an expression of the existing resignation and hopelessness in that situation.

²⁸ *Kazanlashka Iskra*, issue 66/15 April 1927

²⁹ *Kazanlashka Iskra* (newspaper), is. 79/ 1 October 1927

The processes described here should not be given a one-sided, let alone definitive evaluation. According to the information provided by the lawyer Hr. Madzhunov, the industrialisation of rose production in the district of Karlovo was gathering momentum by the end of 1924. "At present three factories and two rose oil factories are under construction, and they will soon open and will make use of the 1925 crop".³⁰

In actual fact, the situation was more complicated: "At the time when sugar factories were providing for the education of future agronomists, and were taking other important steps to the improvement and promotion of sugar beet producers, rose oil traders were rushing to surround themselves with high fences, so as to prevent the rose producers from glimpsing what was going on in the house of speculating rose oil traders... The most dangerous disease that is withering and destroying this sector of the economy is the specific character of the rose oil trade and traders, who stifle and kill the small producer and trader, doing away with rose gardens each year. As a result, instead of getting more decorated and more beautiful, this scenic part of Bulgaria is gradually turning into a desert, which can only yield starvation and poverty."³¹

In conclusion, I will present the proposal of the head of the State Experimental Field in Kazanlak, K.Georgiev, which I support. He was convinced that Bulgaria would continue to have a leading position in rose oil production for two main reasons: "1. First, it has the most favourable climate and soils; 2. It has cheap labour in the rose production and oil production sector." Georgiev believed success could be guaranteed by two necessary actions: "Our long-term tradition has proven that even without great expenses, our roses can give twice or three times as big crops...The second condition, without doubt, is the purity of the oil. Only a pure product could guarantee the sale

of all our annual production, and in this way preserve the national rose industry."³²

In 1929 with the modernization of the production facilities and the introduction of high-capacity oil retorts, the number of rose oil distilleries fell from 2 798 (as of 1906) to 500, and the oil retorts from 13 129 to 2 300. In 1930 they were 376 with 1 449 oil retorts, and in 1932, only 314 with 1 214 oil retorts. In 1935 rose processing was done in only about 100 modernized oil distilleries.

As far as the available technical equipment of Bulgarian farmers is concerned, and their ability to embrace new ideas³³ and adopt new achievements in agriculture, the situation remained complicated despite some obvious improvements. The economic situation provides a partial explanation for this, but does not justify the lack of "great enthusiasm"³⁴ of the Bulgarian farmer. It is not surprising then that one of our most distinguished economists of the time after the Liberation did not hide his bewilderment at the fact that the Bulgarian peasant only worked 120 days per year, on average, which besides everything else was also a sign of startling hidden unemployment.³⁵

4. Closing remarks

The rose industry in Bulgaria represented a complex blend of relationships and activities

³² Kazanlashka Iskra (newspaper), is. 189/31 May 1932

³³ An example which speaks for itself: in 1937 (i.e. six decades after the Liberation) "many farmers deny the usefulness of machine threshing. They say it is "ineffective" because the time saved cannot be put to good use" (Iskra newspaper, is. 312/31 August 1937.) Indeed, any comment here would be superfluous.

³⁴ "The lack of great enthusiasm" in rose cultivation led to low prices..." Palarait, M., Primary Production in a Market for Luxury the Rose-Oil Trade of Bulgaria 1771-1941. – In: The Journal of European Economic History. Rome, 2000, p. 560. This study, though being undoubtedly of a very high standard, features some factual mistakes (e.g. the assertion that the statistical data of the rose industry until 1892 is unreliable), and he put forward a number of debatable theses, without good argumentation. Such summary papers, however, were more than necessary).

³⁵ Yablanski, D. What should the Bulgarian economic policy be, in general and in particular, in its relations with the neighbouring countries? JBES, 1901, b.4-5,227

³⁰ Borba (newspaper), Plovdiv, is. 1119/4 January 1925

³¹ Bankov sayuz (newspaper, is. 13/22 January 1923

between producers, traders and consumers. There were secondary “branches” of cooperative members, intermediaries, state control and management bodies, chambers of trade and industry, etc. The period studied in this paper, 1929-1934, gives a bipolar and somewhat ambiguous answer to the question “An upturn or downturn of the rose industry in Bulgaria?” The achievements were the lasting image of the Bulgarian product, the attempt to keep hold of the most important markets, the quick recovery of the sector and the introduction of new essential oil crops (mostly lavender and peppermint), as well as the undeniable scientific progress made with the establishment of the Oil-bearing Rose Experimental field in Kazanlak.

Problems still unresolved, and some of them aggravating, included the unsuccessful fight against the falsification of the Bulgarian rose oil; the failure of the cooperatives to establish themselves in the international markets; the conservative attitude of producers to technological innovations and modern fertilization; the inadequate awareness of new international competition; the lack of continuity and the ineffectiveness of sporadic legislative initiatives.

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