



## REVIEW

on a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

**Author of the dissertation:** Jon Arifi, PhD student in independent study at the Department of Economics at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

**Topic of the dissertation:** ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES IN THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

**Reviewer:** *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Dimitrova Kyuskieva-Arabska, University of Agribusiness and Rural Development - Plovdiv, field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field: 3.7. Administration and Management, scientific specialty: Social Management)*

appointed as a member of the scientific jury by order No. RD-16-559/29.04.2026 by the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

### 1. Brief presentation of the candidate

In the submitted CV to the documents under the current procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor", Ion Arifi has indicated as a place of residence Pristina, Kosovo. Completed a bachelor's degree (in the period 2016-2020) in Business and Management with a specialization in "General International Management" from Globus College. Master's degree in "Management and Finance" from Biznesi College (2021-2023). With extensive professional experience as a founder and manager of own company, held management positions in others too, including in the field of project management, sales processes, customer relations and supplier coordination, effective service provision and business growth, etc. Demonstrated skills in the field of leadership and negotiation. Fluent in English and Turkish.

### 2. Topicality of the problem

The dissertation examines a particularly topical problem – environmental protection, in the context of sustainable management of natural resources and the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. Interpretations of the concept of sustainability and sustainable development are presented, taking into account global environmental challenges, such as climate change, deforestation, global air and water pollution, etc. Transformations in agriculture, viewed through the prism of sustainable development are analyzed, and the complex interrelationships and interactions with the natural environment are taken into account, with an emphasis on the economic indicators of agriculture and agro-environmental indicators in the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (CAP of the EU). The dissertationability of the problems posed is emphasized even more strongly with the accent on the potential of organic farming. The search for solutions to the indicated problem areas in the topics described

in this way is one of the main challenges in the modern world. The focus of the study on environmental protection measures in the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU allows for sufficient specificity and contributions in the form of recommendations.

### **3. Aim, objectives, hypotheses and research methods**

The aim of the study is to carry out a comprehensive and critical analysis of the environmental measures and policy instruments introduced through the successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union, with a view to assessing their contribution to promoting sustainable agricultural practices and environmental protection.

The study analyses environmental policies from cross-compliance and agri-environment-climate measures to "green payments" and eco-schemes, their conceptualisation, application and integration into the broader framework of the EU agricultural policy.

In accordance with the aim set and the theoretical and empirical framework, the main research tasks are formulated as follows:

1. To conceptualize and critically analyze the theoretical foundations of sustainable development and its relevance for natural resource management;
2. To examine the theoretical evolution and practical interpretations of sustainability in agriculture, including its principles, components and applicability in the EU policy framework;
3. To trace the historical development of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, identifying key stages of reforms and assessing the integration and transformation of environmental measures;
4. To systematize and analyze the environmental instruments introduced within the CAP;
5. To examine the role and development of organic farming in the EU as an integral part of the sustainable development strategy;
6. To assess the relationship between the economic and environmental performance of agriculture in the EU;
7. To apply statistical and econometric methods to assess the relationships between economic indicators of agriculture and environmental performance;
8. To assess the use and effectiveness of agri-environmental indicators and measures within the CAP;
9. To formulate conclusions and recommendations for improving the environmental dimension of the CAP in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, climate neutrality and long-term environmental sustainability.

The tasks thus specified have been fulfilled in the course of the study through an in-depth analysis of the structure, implementation and impact of environmental measures within the CAP, presenting conclusions for researchers in future studies, but also for the formation of important policies.

The study applies a variety of methods corresponding to the set goals and objectives, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of environmental measures within the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union: literature review, abstraction methods, historical, descriptive, compilation and comparative methods, data collection, statistical methods, etc.

There is a desire to apply different methods and comprehensiveness, but at the same time concentrating on the main subject, object and purpose of the study.

#### **4. Visualization and presentation of the results**

The dissertation submitted for review is 209 pages long. It follows a logical structure in four main chapters - with an introduction and methodological explanation. The sequence of the sections shows an upgrade and consistency of the analyses with a focus on environmental measures and instruments within the Common Agricultural Policy and their impact on the sustainability of agricultural practices in the European Union. The dissertation includes 27 tables and 7 diagrams, 13 figures, illustrating the conducted research to a sufficient extent and volume.

The introductory part presents the relevance of the research, correctly indicates the methods used, formulates the subject, object, goal and tasks of the research.

The subject of the research is the system of environmental measures and instruments set out in the CAP of the European Union. The object of the research is defined as the analysis of the environmental results of agriculture in the EU Member States, with particular emphasis on the effects of the CAP reforms on sustainability indicators. The study also includes forecasting key environmental indicators related to agricultural activity in the EU for future periods.

Chapter one, "Sustainable Management of Natural Resources – Theoretical and Methodological Concepts", examines the relationship between natural resource management and the concept of sustainable development. Different perspectives and interpretations of the concept of sustainability are defined and explored, highlighting the components and principles of sustainable development. Special attention is paid to global environmental challenges, including climate change, deforestation and air and water pollution. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of sustainable development in the agricultural sector, including agribusiness, and the processes of transformation in the context of the principles of sustainable development.

Chapter two, "Historical Evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union – Major Reforms", explores and analyses the history and evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. Previous reforms of the CAP are examined as part of the historical context. The changes in the EU's Common Agricultural and Rural Policy for the period 2014-2020 are examined, as well as the proposed reforms of the CAP for the period 2023-2027. Special emphasis is placed on the systematization of environmental measures within the framework of the CAP reforms and their importance in the context of sustainable development and environmental protection.

Chapter three "Analysis of the Relationship between Economic and Environmental Performance of Agriculture" aims to examine the interrelationships between the economic results of agricultural production systems and the state of the environment. Analyses are presented of how different aspects of the efficiency of agricultural production affect the environment. The impact of the use of mineral fertilizers, pesticides and energy in agriculture is examined, as well as their environmental consequences. The impact of agricultural production on climate change is studied. The consequences of environmental changes on agricultural production itself are also analyzed.

Of particular importance here are empirical studies and analyses of the interrelationships between the economic performance of agriculture and the environment in different EU countries. The presented empirical analysis of the relationship between

the economic and environmental aspects of agriculture at the EU level uses descriptive statistics on the share of the agricultural sector in the gross domestic product (GDP) and the environmental performance index. Correlation analysis examines the relationship between these two variables. The application of agri-environmental indicators in the EU Common Agricultural Policy is also analyzed.

Chapter four, "Organic farming and the natural environment of the European Union", aims to examine the development of organic farming in the European Union, including organic production standards and procedures, and to present its positive impact on the environment, climate and overall sustainability. The characteristics and challenges of organic farming in the EU are analysed. The importance and role of institutions supporting the development of organic farming are examined. The supply of organic products on the EU market is examined. The consistency of the Green Deal ambitions with EU support for organic farming is examined, and the strategic plans of the Common Agricultural Policy for the periods 2014-2022 and 2023-2027 are compared in the context of available interventions. The final part summarises the important conclusions and presents recommendations in several main areas: institutional reforms and policy integration, innovative mechanisms and collective actions, strengthening climate and financial frameworks, practical implementation measures and supporting conditions and a systemic framework.

## **5. Discussion of the results and used literature**

The presented study supports the thesis that sustainable development is the path to achieving long-term food security and social well-being, with agriculture playing a key role in feeding the population, but also in maintaining ecological balance. The starting point is the fact that within the EU the development of the agricultural sector is determined by the Common Agricultural Policy.

Examining the development of the EU Common Agricultural Policy in historical retrospect leads to the main conclusion that in the initial stages the environmental dimension of sustainability was largely absent from the CAP, which was aimed at increasing production, often at the expense of the state of the environment. Efforts to overcome this imbalance have marked a series of reforms towards institutional commitment to environmental issues, emphasis on environmental compliance and measures related to water protection, agroforestry and climate change adaptation, addressing emerging challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss through environmental measures promoting renewable energy and sustainable use of water resources, integrating environmental objectives through the introduction of "green" direct payments, setting soil, air and water quality objectives, eco-schemes, generational renewal, regional development, risk management and cooperative approaches, etc. The analysis of the reforms highlights how the evolution of the CAP shows increasingly targeted and diverse environmental measures, with climate change and resource efficiency being established as top priorities, and environmental protection becoming structurally integrated into policy instruments, promoting sustainable agricultural practices in which technological innovation plays a leading role. The view on the potential for the development of sustainable agriculture, and organic farming in particular, is presented in the context of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy to support the building of sustainable agri-food systems, increasing resource efficiency and reducing environmental impact.

One of the main conclusions of the empirical analysis of the relationship between economic and environmental performance in agriculture is that a complex and often non-linear relationship is revealed. It is emphasized that the Environmental Performance Index and agri-environmental indicators are established as important tools for measuring environmental performance, allowing comparative analysis between countries and supporting evidence-based policy-making.

The author concludes that agri-environmental measures and greening payments have a positive impact on the environment, but their effects are uneven across Member States due to differences in policy implementation, administrative capacity and farmer commitment.

A key thesis is that the European Union's efforts represent "an example of balancing economic, environmental and social objectives, demonstrating that sustainable development is achievable through coordinated policies and innovative practices". The need for a comprehensive, system-oriented sustainability strategy is highlighted in the recommendations formulated as a result of the study - recommendations for structural reforms that integrate sustainability at all levels of governance, production and financing with the aim of long-term environmental sustainability and socio-economic justice.

The emphasis is on institutional reforms and practical mechanisms for policy integration through reform of the CAP architecture to achieve higher efficiency and compliance, transparency, reallocation of resources, green financing, preventive investments, risk management, ecosystem services, incentives for innovation, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, informed decision-making, digital transformation, competitiveness, etc.

The author points out that the transition to sustainability requires coordinated action in the energy, transport, housing and resource management sectors, drawing parallels with the transition to a circular economy in the EU. A key recommendation is to create favourable conditions for the integration of education, technology and public participation, paying special attention to new technologies and AI, as well as issues related to international cooperation, etc.

The author stresses that the effectiveness of future EU reforms for a successful transition to sustainable development depends on the ability to move from compliance-based to results-oriented and data-driven models. In order to build a sustainable, fair and adaptive system that balances economic growth with environmental protection, the EU must integrate institutional reforms, technological innovation and stakeholder participation, applying a systematic approach based on scientific evidence, innovation and inclusion.

The results achieved in the dissertation research contribute to broadening the understanding of the interaction between agriculture and environmental sustainability, identifying good practices, policy gaps and opportunities for improving the environmental performance of the CAP, with the author paying particular attention to the ecological transformation, legitimacy, effectiveness and social justice of sustainability measures.

The list of sources used contains 230 items, mainly in English, relevant to the research topic.

## **6. Contributions of the dissertation**

I accept the contributions presented in the abstract to the dissertation as credible and the author's personal work.

## Scientific contributions

**Conceptual integration of sustainable development and agricultural policy:** synthesis between the theoretical principles of sustainable development and the mechanisms of action of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. A comprehensive conceptual framework has been developed that unites the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability in the context of modern agricultural policy, emphasizing the role of the Common Agricultural Policy as both an economic and environmental management tool.

**Clarifying the relationship between economic and environmental outcomes in agriculture:** through theoretical and empirical analysis, the interdependencies between agricultural productivity, environmental degradation and environmental sustainability have been systematized.

**Assessment of the evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy:** systematizing the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy through the prism of sustainable development. It analyses how successive reforms reflect a gradually changing paradigm – from a support primarily oriented towards productivity to a policy instrument in which environmental dimensions are increasingly integrated.

**Extending the Eco-Performance Index to the agricultural context:** adapting and applying the Eco-Performance Index framework to assess the sustainability of agriculture in the Member States of the European Union, linking macro-level environmental indicators to sectoral characteristics of agriculture and allowing international comparability of environmental performance.

## Scientific and applied contributions

**Empirical assessment of agricultural and environmental performance in the European Union:** providing empirical evidence on the relationship between the economic performance of agriculture and the environmental situation in the European Union countries based on comparative statistical analysis. The results obtained create a quantitative basis for policy formulation, showing that countries with a higher degree of technological implementation and agri-environmental integration achieve better environmental performance, without compromising productivity.

**Evaluation of the effectiveness of environmental instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy:** a systematic evaluation of agri-environmental measures, environmental schemes and interventions in the field of organic farming within the different programming periods of the Common Agricultural Policy (2014-2020 and 2023-2027). Discrepancies between the design of policies and their practical implementation are identified, and specific recommendations are formulated to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the environmental architecture of the policy.

**Policy recommendations for long-term environmental sustainability:** formulating an integrated set of institutional and practical recommendations for reforming the Common Agricultural Policy and related environmental policies of the European Union - introducing payments based on results achieved in the provision of ecosystem services, strengthening monitoring and control systems, harmonizing environmental data and improving coordination between agricultural, water and climate legislation.

## 7. Critical notes and questions

The presented materials do not raise any particular critical notes and questions, considering the need to set certain restrictions when conducting such scientific research. A little attention to formatting and presentation of tables, diagrams, figures and literature can be discussed as a recommendation. I would also recommend subsequent publications and presentations at specialized forums of the results of the conducted research and the formulated recommendations presented in the dissertation.

## 8. Published articles and citations

Three independent publications were submitted under the procedure, which meet the requirements of the minimum scientometric indicators.

The presented abstract objectively reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

## CONCLUSION:

Based on the various research methods learned and applied by the doctoral student, the correctly conducted experiments, the generalizations and conclusions made, I believe that the presented dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on Agricultural Research and Development of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the Agrarian University for its application, which gives me reason to evaluate it **POSITIVELY**.

I would like to propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury also vote positively and award Ion Arifi the educational and scientific degree of "**doctor**" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

Date: .....  
Plovdiv

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