

Review on PhD Thesis of **Maxima Gorga** on the topic of

**“The role of land market and contextual characteristics  
in shaping farmland abandonment patterns”**

**Objectives of the thesis**

Farmland abandonment is a persistent problem in large areas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). The thesis aims at identifying the determinant factors of land abandonment and explores policy measures to deal with the problem. For that uses the examples of several countries of EECA and goes in depth in the analysis of certain instruments such as land consolidation and the improvement of land regulations.

**General comments**

The thesis is well structured and most of its contents has been already evaluated by prestigious journals subjected to external assessment of the produced articles. This means that the thesis has enough indicators of quality to be considered as a relevant contribution, and therefore, to be presented and defended as an excellent thesis. My comments agree with such opinion so I only intend to add some further elements for discussion.

The thesis is well structured as it follows a logical sequence, which starts with the understanding of land abandonment and its major causes. Policies are then reviewed in a large group of countries which have faced dramatic changes during the post-Soviet period's reforms. The thesis characterises the development of a land market within a consistent theoretical framework which helps to position the different countries with respect to the recognition of property rights and to the promotion of changes that finally improve farm structures. Finally, the study investigates the behaviour of small farms in relation to a real example of structural policy applied in a specific region. The main study's contribution is to help policy makers to understand how farm structures can be improved and why they could fail or find obstacles.

The thesis is well written and based on sound economic concepts. The statistical analyses are well designed.

Once the merits of the thesis are acknowledged, it is worth noting that many readers can find elements, including the methodology of analysis, that can be of use to fight land abandonment in other parts of the world, eg. Southern Europe, Latin America, etc. For this it would have been very interesting to have a better knowledge of the historical context of the analysed region, because, as the title suggests, the context matters. This need is related to the fact that current structures and policies are the result of past policy reforms and regime changes. Although most of these changes took place some decades ago, we can better understand the present distribution of land and the role of property rights if we took a historical perspective and understand the path dependency of the present.

Another comments, at least, to be taken into account in the discussion, refers to the need to take into account some other aspects that influence the behaviour of land owners and their willingness to sell, lease or exchange land. These aspects are considered in the work at a some extent but perhaps more

discussion on them would be welcome. For example, most of the variables considered by the author are of socio-economic nature. Nevertheless, land abandonment can also be affected by the agroecological characteristics of the land (soil quality, temperatures, slope, etc.). We can also mention the role that external processes (the external context), some of macroeconomic nature, affect to farm abandonment, such as labour migration, the profitability of agricultural markets, the country's economic performance, foreign investment. Also, the kind of crops (permanent or annual crops) could affect the rate of abandonment. This group of aspects connects with the view of land abandonment as a trend and not as a static picture. We would need to see the economic process in a more dynamic way and understanding why the structural change in this region is different from what we saw in other parts of Europe.

### **Minor comments**

Try to unify the way the region is named. Sometimes it is called Central Asia and Eastern Europe, other times it is Europe and Central Asia. Use the acronym EECA from the beginning, if possible.

Last line of page. 10. It says "week". Perhaps it is "weak".

A list of acronyms could be of interest.

In the last concluding chapter the Bibliography is still missing.

Data. Is there a possibility that the databases are registered as Open Access? It would be of help to replicate or further develop the experiments.

### **Questions**

¿How could the success of land consolidation processes in improving productivity and farm incomes be monitored?

¿Can you mention examples of successful policies specifically oriented to young farmers?

Can land consolidation projects be linked at some extent to the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices?

### **Conclusion**

The dissertation addresses several societally very relevant questions, use appropriate scientific theories and methods. The dissertation provides clear conceptual framework and interesting findings and recommendations.

In my opinion, Mr Maxim Gorgan has demonstrated his ability and qualification for academic work and meets the requirements of doctoral thesis. I recommend his thesis for defense.