

La crisis agraria europea (1919-1931): De la gestión Nansen de la Ayuda Humanitaria Internacional durante la hambruna en la URSS al Mercado Común Agrícola europeo.

The European Agricultural Crisis (1919-1931): From Nansen Management of International Humanitarian Aid during the Famine in the USSR to the Common European Agricultural Market.

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Resumen: La investigación realizada se centró en el vínculo de la ayuda humanitaria con la hambruna en Rusia, organizada principalmente por Fridtjof Nansen. La acción internacional apuntó a millones de vidas, aunque las autoridades soviéticas limitaron su impacto. La gran hambruna de 1921 en Rusia provocó un amplio movimiento humanitario en Europa y América. Si bien la Rusia soviética permaneció aislada diplomáticamente hasta 1924, las organizaciones humanitarias no gubernamentales desempeñaron un papel importante en el establecimiento de contactos a ambos lados del cordón sanitario. El Comité Internacional de Socorro a Rusia y la “Misión Nansen” parecían estar entre los de mayor alcance en sus tratos con los bolcheviques durante las campañas de socorro internacional dirigidas por los bolcheviques a Rusia a principios de los años veinte. Por lo tanto, esta investigación se centra en cómo Nansen logró tal éxito en un momento de inestabilidad social y política tan delicado. Finalmente, se analiza la propuesta de un mercado común agrícola como instrumento para superar la crisis agraria europea.

Palabras clave: Fridtjof Nansen; Ayuda humanitaria; Hambruna rusa, mercado común agrícola europeo/

Abstract: The research conducted focused on the humanitarian aid link with the famine in Russia, mainly organized by Fridtjof Nansen. The international action targeted millions of lives, even though the Bolshevik Authorities limited its impact. The great famine of 1921 in Russia provoked a wide humanitarian movement in Europe and America. While Bolshevik Russia remained diplomatically isolated until 1924, the nongovernmental humanitarian organizations played a significant role in establishing contacts on both sides of the cordon sanitaire. The International Relief Committee to Russia and the "Nansen Mission," appeared to be among the most far-reaching in their dealings with the Bolsheviks during the Bolshevik-led international relief campaigns to Russia in the early twenties. Therefore, this research focuses on how Nansen achieved such success on such a delicate social and political time of instability. Finally, the proposal for a common agricultural market is analyzed as an instrument to overcome the European agrarian crisis.

Keywords: Fridtjof Nansen; Humanitarian aid; Russian famine, common European agricultural market.

Sumario: INTRODUCCION - FRIDTJOF NANSEN. A MAN OF BIG CHALLENGES - RUSSIAN FAMINE OF 1921-1922 - INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL AID AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF NANSEN - THE FARMING SITUATION IN EUROPE. AGRICULTURAL CRISIS RESULTING FROM THE GREAT WAR AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCED BY THE HUMANITARIAN AID TO RUSSIA – CONCLUSIONS.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian Empire was a major force in the European political affairs in XX century, but had several internal problems. In accordance to the topic of the research presented in this article, it is relevant to mention the agricultural structure of the Empire. The serfdom system, traditional agricultural system in the Russian Empire, was abolished in 1861. It implied the granting of full citizenship rights to the serfs, who also became able to buy the land they worked, constituting themselves as owners. The peasantry represented close to 80% of the population of the Russian Empire, therefore, this initiative influenced the lives of most of the population of the Empire. The relation of the farmers, previous serfs, changed in terms of economy, but also in social terms, as they officially freed themselves from the commands of the Russian nobility. The State plan was encouraging the ownership of land by the peasants, creating a new social class of land owners actively involved in the development of the farming activities. In addition, it looked for an increase in the economic performance of the agricultural sector supporting effectiveness led by owners, overtaking the immobility established by a nobility more interested in stable incomes rather than increasing the productivity. Consequently, the Russian Empire organized a system of auctions of public agricultural lots and farming loans to allow the newly liberated farmers to acquire their own land.

Nevertheless, in reality the system failed in its implementation because of the high demands of big landowners united to the reduction of their previous responsibilities to their serfs, now tenants. It meant that the previous dependence was even intensified with higher payments from the farm tenants with fewer returns from the landowners.

Nevertheless, the liberation of the serfs, meant a liberation of workforce, which was used in the industrialization process led by the State in the war effort of the WWI. The involvement of the Russian Empire in the WWI was not as successful as the government expected and led to an internal unrest and changes in the government. The instability contributed to the revolution led by the Bolsheviks. The Tsar, Nicholas II, launched the Russian Army against Germany and Austria-Hungary with highly negative results regardless its superiority in terms of number of soldiers. Around 15 million Russians were mobilized and almost half had been killed, seriously wounded or became prisoners of war by 1916.

By 1917, the tsar abdicated after massive social mobilizations in the main cities of the Empire, especially in Saint Petersburg, the capital. The social unrest was increasing in a society tired of the war effort, hardships and lack of future expectations. Nevertheless, the social unrest was higher among the urban population; meanwhile the rural areas remained attached to the old regime and a more traditional way of life. The return of Lenin accelerated the revolution and the Bolsheviks took the power from a weak government that did not count with the support of any relevant social actor, including the army.

Already in 1918, the Constituent Assembly of Russia was closed, as the Bolsheviks ordered its dissolution, starting a social confrontation leading to a civil war determining the model of State and society of Russia. The Bolshevik authorities signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to withdraw the Empire from the First World War and save their revolution. First, it isolated the country from the tumultuous situation of Europe, immersed in the final phase of the Great War. The Bolshevik idea of withdrawing from the war and the European affairs had a double direction, avoiding the external interference in the Russian affairs of potential western enemies. Once, the WWI was finished, the European society was tired of death and devastation, lacking the motivation to initiate another conflict to reverse the Red revolution. As an example, the efforts of Churchill to involve Great Britain the Russian civil war were mostly fruitless, and the British support was nominal and focus on specific areas. In this context, there were around 500000 war prisoners waiting to be repatriated to their respective places of origin, not countries, since the political map of Europe changed radically after the conflict. An

ambitious plan was designed and implemented successfully by Nansen a Norwegian statesman.

Secondly, the Russian authorities had the intention to focus on the internal threats, the rising White Army and the confrontation and annihilation of all the rest of political forces inside the country. In order to succeed, the Bolshevik could not divide their efforts between external and internal enemies. Therefore, they opted to focus on internal action offering generous terms to the central European powers, isolating themselves from external interference of any kind in domestic issues.

The Civil War started on 1918 and lasted until 1921, the same year when the great famine started. The conflict faced the Reds against a mass of forces, including nationalists, separatist, other leftish, farmers and any other different opinion than the Bolsheviks. The fighting was heavy and the repression at rear on both sides. Nevertheless, the Communist won a bloody conflict that generated more than 2 million refugees towards Europe. Fridtjof Nansen was in charge of organizing this outstanding movement of population, establishing a system of refugee distribution via Narva, Estonia, and further integration in their final destination.

The victory meant the complete annihilation of any opposition to the Bolshevik rule in Russia, and the imposition of the most relevant social experiment in the world history, with numerous consequences in all the fields of the society. The radical position of the Bolsheviks was clear with the assassination of the entire royal family by members of the Communist security forces.

The Russian civil war contributed to the social instability and a number of consecutive bad harvest. In addition, the Bolshevik social model based on the communalisation of the economy was not very popular among farmers, who mainly were expecting access to land, previously in the hands of big landowners. Their expectations of private ownership did not match the Red intentions of communal farms and public property. The adaptation to the new economic model meant poor harvest and a clear disruption in the production. Moreover, the necessity of foreign currency to pay for imports was urgent. The main export product of the country were agricultural products. Therefore, an important part of the production was dedicated to the external market even when the internal demand as barely satisfied.

The accumulation of factors increased the impact of the Great Famine in Russia, in the Volga area, threatening millions to starvation.

1. FRIDTJOF NANSEN. A MAN OF BIG CHALLENGES.

Fridtjof Nansen (10th October 10, 1861-13th May, 1930) was born at Store Frøen, in the vicinity of Oslo. He grew in a prosperous family, as his father was a successful lawyer. In addition, the father was a religious man with a high conception of personal duty and moral principle, ideas he tried to transmit to his offspring. The mother, important shaping Nansen's character, was a strongminded, sporty woman. She introduced all her children to outdoor activities and encouraged them to develop physical skills. It facilitated later achievements of Nansen as he became expert in skating, tumbling, and swimming, but skiing was to play a large role in his life. Physically, Nansen was tall, supple and strong. He possessed the physical endurance to ski eighty kilometres in a day and the mental strength to succeed on long trips.

During the school years, Nansen excelled in the sciences and in drawing, showing academic skills. Therefore, he enrolled the University of Oslo in 1881 joining a major in zoology. During the following fifteen years combined his physical ability, scientific interests, yearning for adventure, and even his talent for drawing in a series of brilliant achievements that brought him international fame. In 1882, he shipped on the sealer Viking sailing to the east of Greenland. On this journey of almost five months, the scientist inside Nansen made observations on seals and bears which, years later, he updated and processed into a book. He then fully dedicated his following years to scientific life as curator at the Bergen Museum, defending his dissertation on the central nervous system of certain lower vertebrates for the doctorate at the University of Oslo.

Then the explorer appeared again as he planned to cross Greenland, whose interior had never been explored. Therefore, he embarked to be the first person to cross Greenland from east to west in 1888. An expedition of six led by Nansen survived temperatures of -45° C, climbed to 9,000 feet above sea level, dealt with dangerous ice, exhaustion, and privation to reach on the west coast early in October after a trip of about two months, collecting relevant information about the interior¹.

The following four years, Nansen worked as curator of the Zootomical Institute at the University of Oslo, focusing on research and publishing several scientific articles, two monographs (*The First Crossing of Greenland* in 1890 and *Eskimo Life* in 1891), and planned a scientific/exploratory journey into the Arctic, an unexplored territory back then. A big part of his strategy was based on the ship design, revolutionary as

¹ NANSEN, Fridtjof. *På ski over Grønland*. Wichne Bok, 2020.

it allowed the boat to face the ice forces of extreme weather. Consequently, he built the Fram, his legendary boat, and tested it in north Siberia in a trip where the boat was completed isolated by ice for several months without harm. He returned on foot from his expedition in an epic journey, and the Fram thirty-five months after the beginning of the expedition on August 13, 1896, into open water near Svalbard. Nansen was not aboard.

Nansen realized that the Fram was not leading north pushed by the power of the ice, even when the boat was resisting well the ice pressure. Therefore, he and one companion, with thirty days' rations for twenty-eight dogs, three sledges, two kayaks, and a hundred days' rations for themselves, had set out in March of 1895 on a 400-mile dash to the Pole. In twenty-three days they traveled 140 miles over oceans of tumbled ice, getting closer to the Pole than anyone had previously been. The impossibility to move northwards due the weather conditions, forced Nansen to turn back, they made their way southwest to Franz Josef Land, wintered there in 1895-1896, started south again in May, reached Vardo, Norway, the same day the Fram reached open water and were reunited with the crew on August 21 at Tromsø².

The life of Nansen changed dramatically as he became an icon for the independence of Norway from Sweden. He used his high popularity to support the independence and abandoned his academic career. After the independence, he became diplomat and was sent to United Kingdom, the most important country at the time, and a place where Nansen was intensively popular due his explorations. Nansen moved to London at 1908 and worked for the British support to the functionality of the independence of Norway³. Nevertheless, he did not forget the exploration, and led several oceanographic expeditions into Polar Regions, even advising Amundsen's South Pole expedition and lending him the Fram⁴.

The life of Nansen was influenced by a world event, the Great War, inducing a new change from diplomacy to international relations. He became the head of a Norwegian delegation in Washington, D. C in 1917, he negotiated negotiated an agreement for a relaxation of the Allied blockade to permit shipments of essential food, and in 1919, he became delegate of Norway in the League of Nations for almost 20 years.

² NANSEN, Fridtjof. *Farthest North: The epic adventure of a visionary explorer*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 2008.

³ TROITINO, David Ramiro; CHOCHIA, Archil. Winston Churchill and the European Union. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, 2015, vol. 8, no 1, p. 55.

⁴ FOSSE, Marit; FOX, John. *Nansen: Explorer and Humanitarian*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

In the spring of 1920, the League of Nations appointed Nansen to undertake the task of repatriating the prisoners of war, many of them held in Russia. He started working with Bolshevik Authorities, working with efficiency despite lack of funds. He used his skills as explorer to plan the whole operation to the minimal details and successfully implemented it, in one of the main success of the newly created League of Nations. He represented the new spirit of managing together common problems via cooperation inside the organization patronized by United Kingdom and the Allies, but without the active involvement of United States.

In June, 1921, the League of Nations created a High Commission for Refugees, appointing Nansen to manage it. As an example of its sharpness and effectiveness, he solved the problem of the stateless refugees. These were mostly people who hold a passport of the Russian Empire, antecedent of the Soviet Union, or the Ottoman Empire, succeeded by Turkey, not valid since these Empires did not exist anymore. How to provide legal documentation to Stateless refugees was solved by the innovative Nansen Passport, a new document which was eventually recognized by fifty-two governments for permitting the crossing of borders of their holders. In the nine-year life of this Office, Nansen administrated to hundreds of thousands of refugees – Russian, Turkish, Armenian, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean – utilizing the methods that were to become classic: custodial care, repatriation, rehabilitation, resettlement, emigration, integration⁵.

The popularity of Nansen as humanitarian leader was immense due the success on his operations. Therefore, the American Red Cross supported Nansen in the leadership of a new immense and complicate humanitarian duty directing relief for millions of Russians dying in the famine of 1921-1922. Help for Russia, then suspect in the eyes of most of the Western nations, was hard to muster, but Nansen pursued his task with awesome energy. In the end he managed to gather and distribute enough supplies to save a staggering number of people, the estimation ranging from 7 to 22 million people.

In 1922 at the request of the Greek government that directly asked for Nansen's involvement, with the agreement of the League of Nations, Nansen tried to solve the problem of the Greek refugees fleeing to Greece from their ancient homes after the Turks expelled them from their homes for millennia following the defeat of the Greek in their war against the newly formed Turkish State. Asia Minor was transformed by forced following the national

⁵ CHETAIL, Vincent. Fridtjof Nansen and the International Protection of Refugees: An Introduction. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2003, vol. 22, no 1, p. 1-6.

homogeneity pursued by Mustafa Kemal in the creation of modern Turkey. Nansen arranged an exchange of about 1,250,000 Greeks living on Turkish soil for about 500,000 Turks living in Greece⁶. He tried to provide a proper indemnification and provisions to help the refugees in their new life⁷. Most of this Greek population ended up in United States or Australia.

Nansen still was involved in another humanitarian work, as he received the command of the League of Nations in 1925 to rescue the Armenian people from holocaust. He designed, and implemented, an strategy with political and economic aspects to support the creation of a national home for the Armenians in Yerevan⁸. The League of Nations failed to implement the plan, but the Nansen International Office for Refugees later settled some 10,000 Armenians in Yerevan and around 40,000 in neighbour countries.

Nansen died on May 13, 1930, after living an outstanding life as explorer, scientific, scholar, diplomat, and over all, a human helping the others.

2. RUSSIAN FAMINE OF 1921-1922

The south of Russia was one of the most exploited territories by Bolshevik Russia because between 1917 and 1920 the different Supply Detachments of the "Cheka" Political Police looted most of the fields of crops, cereals, wheat and other products to supply the Red forces involved in the civil war. It led to a substantial problem for the supply of basic essentials for the population. The area, especially in current Ukraine, had suffered the booty of Germans and its allies in their request for food to feed their army. In addition, the White Forces did not behaved better than the Red Army, confiscating food and producing a disruption of agrarian activity. The problem was increased due to the end of the civil war and the end of the neutrality that the Communists showed with the new farmers, eager to own land and opposed to collectivization. During the confrontation with the White forces, the Bolsheviks were afraid of rural areas uniting to the enemy; therefore, they allowed farmers to occupied land and act as owners. The Polish army in their fight for independence and occupation of part of Ukraine, was involved in indiscriminate forage actions. Once the danger of the civil

⁶ NANSEN, Fridtjof. *Through the Caucasus to the Volga*. Read Books Ltd, 2013.

⁷ FULLER, William F. Peace Profile: Fridtjof Nansen. *Peace Review*, 2008, vol. 20, no 2, p. 239-243.

⁸ NANSEN, Fridtjof; KJÆRHEIM, S. *Fridtjof Nansen*. Berliner Illustrations-Gesellschaft, 1905.

war disappeared with the agreements with Poland and the defeat of the White forces, the Red authorities focused on farmers and their aim of owning land. Although the process of collectivization started years later in 1928, the pressure on the farmers already started before⁹.

The concatenation of negative impacts on the farming sector led to an important decrease in the production and to the reduction of agricultural reserves and affecting the whole Russia. The weather conditions influenced a bad harvest, triggering an unprecedented famine and starvation of the population¹⁰. In July 1921, the Bolshevik authorities allowed local powers to exempt from the tax-in-kind to all the peasants suffering from crop failures. In addition, Russia looked to the international world for support, allowing the participation of Nansen in the solution to the problem. Therefore, the Bolsheviks established an organization to fuel the relations with the external powers, mainly Western States link with capitalism, promoted by relevant Russian intellectuals as Maksim Gorky, famous writer nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He also was a Communist and supported the ideas of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, he presented the intellectual face of the rescue action to the Russian population affected by the famine, being the intellectual face of the All-Russian Committee to Aid the Hungry. Kalinin, the later first president of the Soviet Union was also involved in the organization, coordinating other public institutions in the humanitarian relief.

The appeal was effective and the international community, via the League of Nations and under the leadership of Nansen, was involved in a great scale aid operation¹¹. It is important to mention the collaboration of the League with other organizations, as the American Relief Administration that provided a large number of food, medicine and other necessary resources. The head of the organization during the years before their involvement in Russian famine was Herbert Hoover. He was a man with a wide experience in food supply who already was in charge of the relief of Belgium during the WWI. His expertise included positions as head of the U.S. Food Administration when his country took an active role in the war and USA secretary of commerce in 1920, becoming president of his country in 1929. He was not involved directly in the Russian operation, as he went back to the States in the

⁹ HAMULÁK, Ondrej. La carta de los derechos fundamentales de la union europea y los derechos sociales. *Estudios constitucionales*, 2018, vol. 16, no 1, p. 167-186.

¹⁰ NANSEN, Fridtjof. Rescuing Millions of War Victims From Disease and Starvation. *Current History*, 1929, vol. 30, no 4, p. 567-576.

¹¹ CLAVIN, Patricia; CLAVIN, Patricia P. *Securing the world economy: the reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

previous years, but his energetic work and organization skills impregnated the organization.

The great famine reached its peak in 1922 when it affected vast rural areas of southern Russia, with considerable negative effects on all agricultural areas dependent on the fertility provided by the Volga River, affecting all the population and generating an important social unrest. The famine also led to sickness as the population could barely survive and their weakness prevent them to combat diseases. The situation was desperate and the international aid was basic to reverse the situation because the Bolshevik authorities were complete overcome by the magnitude of the disaster. The inefficient economic management reduced the capacity of Russia. In addition, the ideology played an important part in the reorganization of the agricultural activities, thus limiting Bolshevik intervention to mitigate the consequences of famine. The desolation spread to other areas of the country as the Caucasus, the central Asia regions, decreasing the capacity of relief of the Russia and threatening with the outbreak of a new civil war.

3. INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL AID AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF NANSEN

The situation was desperate for the Russian population and there were negotiations with the Americans to bring relief, but the demands of Hoover were too much for the new government of Russia. The head of ARA had been distributing agricultural supplies in Belgium, first, and in other parts of Europe after the war, acquiring the necessary expertise in logistics to successfully bring the aid to Russian soil. Hoover led the negotiations in Riga, capital of Latvia, recently independent and buffer zone between the Russia and the Western world. The Americans had a great capacity of production due the mechanization of its agricultural sector¹². In addition, the country counted with larger farms and a capitalist mentality in the agricultural production, increasing the margins of productivity¹³. Therefore, the USA had the capacity to supply Russia with the require means to mitigate the famine. Nevertheless, Hoover required full independence to control the distribution of relief and some control on warehouses, railway, etc.

¹² RUFFING, Jason L. *A century of overproduction in American agriculture*. University of North Texas, 2014.

¹³ DE LA GUARDIA, Ricardo Manuel Martín; SÁNCHEZ, Guillermo Ángel Pérez. *El mundo en transformación*. Ediciones Akal, 1997.

The international effort was channelled by the League of Nations, predecessor of United Nations, an international organization based on cooperation led by the British Empire, without deep involve of the USA¹⁴. The League cooperated with the International Committee of the Red Cross, and launched its own relief operation to mitigate the Russian famine with supplies including mainly, food, clothes and medicines. The operation included other organizations and were all under the leadership and coordination of Fridtjof Nansen. After the mission was officially founded, Nansen met Georgy Chicherin, a relevant Bolshevik, and signed an agreement to start the operation. The logistic challenges were a nightmare in such an operation, but Nansen showed remarkable skills. In addition, following the ARA strategy, Nansen was granted by Russia independence in the relief operations. The lack of trust between Bolshevik and the international community complicated his work. The Russian revolution was meant to be international and spread to the rest of the world to create the proletariat paradise where private property would not be needed. The Bolshevik followed actively the ideas of Marx and had big expectations of the expansion of the revolution to Germany and United Kingdom, two heavily industrialized countries and home of considerable industrial work force. Therefore, the international community was concern about supporting the Russian population, allowing the implementation of the revolution. On the other hand, the Bolshevik were still not firmly settled in power and were afraid of a counterrevolution supported by external forces. The end of the Great War, liberated masses of military forces and resources that could be used to replenish the previous regimen. The interference on domestic affairs was a threat to a revolution with significant external opponents and an unsatisfied population and internal enemies, as the Orthodox Church or the newly formed farmers class. Therefore, Nansen showed his capacity to adaptation and started to rise funds and support from private entities, more flexible in political matters and focus on humanitarian aid¹⁵.

The whole crisis and dysfunctionality of the international system was another important obstacle for Nansen's work. The national obstacles to trade created almost sealed markets. The intentions were to protect the national farmers, specially in those countries where the productivity was not as high as in other parts of the international system. In that sense, the American

¹⁴ TROITIÑO, David Ramiro. Winston Churchill y el proceso de construcción europea. *Revista Notas Históricas y Geográficas*, 2021.

¹⁵ THYVOLD, Hans Olav. *Fridtjof Nansen*. Font Forlag AS, 2012.

productivity was higher than the European because of the bigger size of the farms, a higher level of industrialization and a capitalist market fostering an increase in the production and on the productivity to reach the market in better conditions than any other competitor. Nevertheless, their food production could not be absorbed completely by their national markets, being used for alternative activities, as fuel for railway machines. Nansen expressed his dismay because at the same time there was people dying in hunger in other parts of the planet. Therefore, a more logical and humanistic approach was needed, complemented with logistic organization able to transport on time perishables wherever they were needed. Transportation was another economic field suffering for the newly created national markets and close economic borders in a nationalistic commercial policy. The previous fluid transatlantic trade relations were on break, and the cargo fleet was anchored in the ports¹⁶.

It was neither a lack of working force was an obstacle for the humanitarian work of Nansen nor the support to his strategy of relocating farming supplies from areas where there was an excess of production to areas affected by crisis and severe famine. The end of the WWI generated economic tensions in a system, the demobilisation of millions of soldiers, the disruption in the traditional markets, the war compensations and other obstacles, generated a change in the economic paradigm, causing a high unemployment.

Therefore, there was food in the world market, there were means of transportation and there was labour to operate the actions required. Nansen, as a humanitarian, complained about the situation and blamed the political environment. The Bolshevik revolution was a threat to the rest of the world as it pretended to expand internationally. It was not a secret and was widely known. In addition, most of the European countries counted with their own national communist movements, very significant in countries as Germany, France or Italy. Therefore, the possibility of an internal revolution fostered by external support, was a reality and a fear to most of the European States. Consequently, the European governments were afraid to help the Russian population affected by the famine because it could reinforce the revolutionary government that would otherwise fall due to the internal pressure of its starving citizens. Politics were more important than human lives, tormenting Nansen unable to understand the influence of the Communist in the world history and completely focus on the wellbeing of the more than 30 million

¹⁶ HENIG, Ruth. *The Peace that Never was: A History of the League of Nations*. Haus Publishing, 2019.

people affected by the Russian famine. The government of the USA was perhaps the main partner for Nansen operations in terms of humanitarian support to the Russian population. The country did not count with a significant communist party, the idea of revolution was far from a capitalist society living a successful economic performance and overcoming the British Empire as the main political actor in world politics and economy.

For the financing, Nansen faced similar obstacles, as the member states of the League of Nations were not willing to finance the operational cost of such a large humanitarian aid in a moment of financial restraints. The big economic crisis initiated by the collapse of Wall Street stock market in 1929 was still far, by the European States had other domestic priorities and their focus was on the reconstruction of their own States in some cases, and the payment of onerous war compensations in others. Therefore, Nansen faced a lack of funds to implement his plan coordinating the international effort to help the Russian population affected by the famine.

Nansen's strategy, within the Russian Famine Parliamentary Committee of the League of Nations, was to foster the private involvement in the humanitarian operation due the lack of interest of most of the States in getting involved with Russian affairs in a period of internal instability with possible impact on the international arena. Therefore, he looked for private funding from citizens and organizations, and promoted the public dissemination of the desperate situation of millions of Russians. His strategy looked for the citizens involvement in the crisis from a humanitarian approach, forcing their governments democratically elected to intervene. Consequently, he wrote numerous articles in the most popular newspapers of the time describing a desperate situation of men, women and children, left without the public protection of overwhelmed Bolshevik authorities¹⁷. He used the social media of the time to educate the population so that they pressure their respective governments to take action on the matter. As an example, he initiated a public campaign in United Kingdom, asking regular citizens to write their representatives in the House of Commons asking for British financial support via cheap loans. In addition, he asked British citizens to write letters, postcards or telegraphs to the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to pressure a government besieged by domestic problems and that would fall that same year. The campaign for financing the operations emphasized the independence of Nansen from any political influence and his

¹⁷ VOGT, Carl Emil. An internationalist pioneer: Fridtjof Nansen and the social issues of the league of nations. *The League of Nations' Work on Social Issues*, 2016, p. 187-99.

main goal of helping people. Therefore, in his public interventions asking for financial support he dramatized his petition comparing the cost, 5 000 000 pounds, with the cost of a war ship at that time, 10 000 000 pounds, and the lives at stake 30 000 000 people.¹⁸ His public campaign focus on dismantling the opposition to international aid based on three fundamental ideas, Bolshevik involvement, logistic constrains and domestic priorities. Regarding the first issue, Nansen made public his opinion that the famine was not a consequence of the Bolshevik policies but a combination of factors, as war or two consecutive droughts. Therefore, it was not an ideological issue to help the people affected, but moral. Nevertheless, Nansen obviated the point that resolving an internal Russian crisis would underpin the revolutionary government and have serious long-term international consequences. Nansen showed his good connections with the Russian government, outlining their involvement in the support of their people, but their incapacity to reach all of the, Therefore, Nansen was asking for a complementary action to the Russian government participation in the relief. He pointed out the agreements signed were always respected by the Bolsheviks and the fact that it has given all the facilities to the international relief workers. In other words, Nansen was trying to portrait the Russian government as a reliable partner in the humanitarian aid operation focus on the Russian famine, he was trying the avoid any blockade to the international support caused by the fear to communism¹⁹.

Regarding the second issue, Nansen defended that the humanitarian aid was located in the area affected by the famine and was not misused by any other. There was an idea in the Western world in relation with the Communist appropriation of humanitarian aid and their use in their own benefit, and not on the benefit of the people affected by the famine. Nansen disregarded this claims by outlining how the wagons were sealed and reached their destination with the seals unbroken.

On the third challenge based on the incapacity of Europe helping Russia because of the devastation of the WWI and their own domestic problems, Nansen used populist approaches warning about the negative consequences for Europe of such a famine in Russia. Perhaps, he tried to reach the emotional level of the European people by dramatizing his strategy, but his focus was humanitarian. The nationality, neither the political ideas were

¹⁸ <https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/russian/id/892>

¹⁹ WHITELEY, William. Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930). *Journal of Neurology*, 2006, vol. 253, no 12, p. 1653-1654.

important, the people starving needed help and the Western world could provide it.

The innovation of Nansen's campaign looking for international support included the massive use of audio-visual material, photographs and videos, of the desperation of the Russian people affected by the famine. Children, mountains of death corps, desert cities and all kind of dramatic images were used to appeal to the conscience of Europeans following the motto that a picture is worth a thousand words. Therefore, Nansen started a new model of communication in terms of humanitarian aid, a populist approach but efficient in its results²⁰.

The main supplies required by Nansen in order to reduce the pernicious effects of the famine in the south of Russia were food for the population. More than 30 million people was affected by the short supply of food in the region, forcing millions to survive in very poor conditions and causing the death of many others. Nansen propose a transfer of food resources from the world regions with surplus to the Volga region in Russia. A logical step in terms of humanity, but affected but the international situation already described. In addition, there was the problem of duplicating the work of the Americans, already involved in the humanitarian support in Europe. They had great logistic skills and higher capacity to reach the American key associations and persons to implement an effective aid system. Therefore, the work of Nansen focused in Europe and in the League of Nations, collaborating tightly with Americans but from a partnership rather than leadership.

Nansen's operation also provided fodder for the animals of the farmers as they were an important part of their well-being. The industrialization of the farming sector in Russia was still reduced, and animals were an important part of the productive system. In addition, cattle was an additional source of food in a mostly rural society. Consequently, the idea of Nansen was not just to provide food to the affected by the famine, but to protect the productive system and avoid future famines. In that sense, he also provided seeds to the farmers for their coming harvests. The situation was so desperate that no seeds were available for future farming, expanding the crisis in time if not properly addressed in the present. Therefore, Nansen's vision was not just an immediate action to solve a punctual problem, but an operation

²⁰ HOUSDEN, Martyn. White Russians Crossing the Black Sea: Fridtjof Nansen, Constantinople and the First Modern Repatriation of Refugees Displaced by Civil Conflict, 1922-23. *Slavonic and East European Review*, 2010, vol. 88, no 3, p. 495-524.

to solve an urgent crisis and prevent future famines in the area. He was looking for short and long term impact.

Following this thinking, Nansen asked for additional materials, as medicines, to avoid the outbreak of diseases thanks to the weakness of the population, the creation of orphanages, clothes for winter, and the effective relocation of population. It provides a compact vision from a statesman based on effectiveness in the present and sustainability in the future²¹.

The success of Nansen's effort was notorious and established a competent system transferring the farming supplies needed from Europe (and America) to Russia in a moment of great necessity. Nevertheless, the political implications of his actions were to affect world politics for decades and caused relevant troubles for the international community. Regarding the appropriation of the Russian authorities of the supplies, it was never a significant problem, but it fostered a fraud. The Bolsheviks, in need for international currencies to finance their imports, dedicated, later on, their recovered farming production to export, at the same time they were dependant from international support to supply their population.

This, and other factors, as the international economic crisis and the donor fatigue, led to the end of the international mission in Russia, but the crisis was overcome and millions were saved by the efforts of Nansen and other humanitarian visionaries.

4. THE FARMING SITUATION IN EUROPE. AGRICULTURAL CRISIS RESULTING FROM THE GREAT WAR AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCED BY THE HUMANITARIAN AID TO RUSSIA.

The end of the Great War had multiple consequences, the punishment imposed on the defeated and the modification of the political borders generated a new situation in the European economy. In addition, this period is the beginning of multilateralism based on the League of Nations, at the international level, and Commission of Enquiry for European Union (CEEU) in the continental level. The last institution, subsidiary of the League of Nations, was in charge of revitalize the European agricultural system. It became heavily involved with the agrarian sector because it included among its priorities the promotion of social stability in a continent dependent on agricultural labour. Therefore, the support of the agrarian countries of central

²¹ KERIKMAE, Tanel. Supranational Law as International Law and vice versa. *Juridica Int'l*, 1998, vol. 3, p. 43.

and east Europe became a basic principle for peaceful cohabitation and the prevention of wars.

The CEEU undertook its first investigations from an exclusively European point of view on financial issues such as:

- Double taxation
- Advice for loans granted by the League of Nations
- Agricultural credits

Regarding the creation of a Sub-Committee dedicated exclusively to transport, five priorities were highlighted, among which was the transport of agricultural products at European level. Emphasizing the importance of agriculture in the CEEU and its link with the committees and subcommittees that formed it.

Already in its second session in January 1931 held in Geneva, with Aristide Briand at the head, the CEUE requested concrete actions from the League of Nations to address Europe's agrarian problems, especially those relating to grain exports. It was requested to establish a Committee to study all the measures capable of solving the problem, including tariff agreements at the continental level. This Committee originally included eleven members, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.²² The General Secretariat of the League of Nations assumed the administrative tasks and the assistance of other technical committees of the organization. In addition, it was decided to establish a close collaboration with the International Institute of Agriculture, an autonomous institution but based on international cooperation. The second request from the CEEU related to a formal request to the Finance Committee to continue research on agricultural credit and generate plausible proposals for immediate implementation.

The objective of creating a single agricultural market, as the first step towards the creation of a common European market, was seen as logical due to its high potential for integration. The agricultural market represented the complicated reality of the beginning of the 20th century, as an international problem with a highly interconnected economic sector at a global level, in need of common solutions. The problems generated by the disruption of markets because of economic nationalism had generated social instability throughout the continent, not only in the most affected countries, and in the end they were a factor to be taken into account in numerous conflicts that

²² MAIER, Charles S. *Recasting bourgeois Europe: stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the decade after World War I*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

shook Europe and changed the world²³. Therefore, as a common problem, a common response was necessary, and Europe represented that possibility of solving the problems of European farmers through European responses. The common response to agricultural problems is encompassed in the conception of a single European market that would favor continental production over imports from other parts of the world.

Julius Curtius, Minister of Economy of the Weimar Republic between 1926 and 1929 and Minister of Foreign Affairs in both Müller and Brüning cabinets from 1929, replacing Gustav Stresemann, the alter ego of Briand and his partner in obtaining the Nobel Prize for the peace, developed a more aggressive foreign policy than his predecessor, although his involvement in the Federal European Union was very intense despite his brief tenure as he ceased his ministerial duties on October 3, 1933, when he was succeeded by Chancellor Brüning, which would also assume foreign powers. His greatest contribution to the debates on the construction of Europe came from the debate on the agrarian crisis, where he highlighted the numerous problems of the rural world in Europe between the wars and doubted that partial solutions could improve the situation. Faced with the global crisis, European countries had adopted protectionist measures to protect their farmers, especially a significant increase in customs duties. For the German minister, the situation was very simple: a good European and world harvest had increased supply, while production costs in large agricultural countries outside Europe had lowered prices to unbearable limits for European farmers whose production cost structure did not allow them to sell their products at a profit. The contraction of demand due to the general economic crisis had added pressure on prices, reducing them even more, reaching decreases in the price of wheat from 1929 to 1930 of 50%, an even greater cut in other types of cereals and unaffordable by the producers. The interconnectedness of the agricultural sector and its structural problems, together with the ineffectiveness of partial national measures to face a global problem, were the main reason for Curtius to request a common and global response to face the problem, a common European agricultural market. His proposal, more theoretical than practical, was supported by different delegates, such as the Estonian or the Romanian at the second meeting of the CEUE in September 1931, but it was soon abandoned by sectoral approaches, with more possibilities of implementation in an unfriendly atmosphere for European solutions. Therefore, the work of

²³ FEDERICO, Giovanni. The growth of world agricultural production, 1800–1938. En *Research in economic history*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004.

the European Committee for the Study of the European Union focused on sector-specific solutions to partial problems²⁴. Issues such as the lack of financing, the crisis in the cereal sector, the European transport of agricultural products, the problems of Mediterranean agricultural production, agricultural unemployment (particularly important because the industrial sector was in deep crisis and could not absorb the surplus labor, thus creating large pockets of poverty and social instability), or even the treatment of specific products, such as tobacco, of great importance in Europe, became the priority of Europe, which in the face of obstacles became less ambitious in its plans to end up in total insignificance.

The European effort to address their rural problems prioritized agriculture as one of its essential objectives. The economic integration in Europe after WWI was focus on the creation of a common agricultural market in Europe as a solution to its many ills. An option that was quickly abandoned for more pragmatic positions focusing on particular problems, among which two issues stood out due to their relevance and effort invested, agricultural credit and cereal surpluses. The first generated numerous debates and great activity in all kind of European organizations and initiatives, conceiving concrete results, but they were never implemented.²⁵ Cereal surpluses reveal the importance of continental agriculture in the construction of Europe. The original idea of a European system to solve the problem ended up being converted into bilateral preferential agreements, clearly insufficient, and in many cases at the service of other interests. The agreements of this type between France and Austria what they really reflect was the French concern about the German alignment.

As of 1932, initiatives at the international level to solve agrarian problems were not completely paralyzed, but they did disappear from the European agenda, which thus failed in its search for common positions to solve common problems. The opportunity that agriculture offered to the construction of Europe was not taken advantage of by the protagonists who could not, nor did they want to, build a Europe in a globalized world. Its failure meant the failure of Europe, with great social problems, emigration, conflicts and poverty. Given the great weight that agriculture had, and still has, in the

²⁴ GREŠLOVÁ, Petra, et al. Social metabolism of Czech agriculture in the period 1830–2010. *Auc Geographica*, 2015, vol. 50, no 1, p. 23-35.

²⁵ APARICIO, Gema, et al. The world periphery in global agricultural and food trade, 1900–2000. En *Agricultural development in the world periphery*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018. p. 63-88.

European social fabric, the common failure deepened the divisions and fueled the greatest armed conflict in humanity.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The agricultural situation in Europe after the WWI generated relevant tensions, problems, social unrest, movements of population, famines, nationalism and conflict.

This research focused on two main areas, the Russian famine and the European support led by Nansen, and the own crisis of the agrarian European system that was not properly solved with common actions.

The Russian famine management was an international success where the outstanding figure of Fridtjof Nansen was crucial. He started a new approach on the media to attract the private interest on a specific problem. On the other hand, the Europeans at an institutional level, could not address successfully the two main problems of the European agrarian sector, the issue of agrarian loans for the required investment and transformation of the rural world, and the grain surplus.

The Nansen operation proved to be effective coordinating the Europeans in agrarian management, but the later attempts to address the internal problems of the agricultural sector in Europe failed.

Nansen's operation saved more than 20 million people from starvation, mobilized the European society to help and effectively coordinated a logistic effort. Subsidiarity, it helped to address the European surplus of grain and its impact on central and east Europe by financing the absorption of such a high quantity of grain, and avoiding an internal crisis in Europe, or at least delaying it.

Nansen provided time to the Europeans to reform their agricultural system and solve the problems generated by the dissociation of traditional markets with the creation of national agricultural markets after the WWI. Nevertheless, the communalization of the Russian famine humanitarian support did not extend to the solving of the agricultural problems of Europe, causing social problems and influencing in the rising of radical options to some governments of Europe.

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