

[TOP STORIES](#)
[MEDIA CENTER](#)
[PROGRAM](#)
[LEARN GERMAN](#)
[GERMANY](#)
[WORLD](#)
[BUSINESS](#)
[SCI-TECH](#)
[ENVIRONMENT](#)
[CULTURE](#)
[SPORTS](#)

TOP STORIES / WORLD / EUROPE

ROMANIA

# Rabobank raids rural Romania

A small and poor village in Romania has become the focus of a story involving land grabbing by foreign-owned multinationals and mafia-style corruption. Luke Dale-Harris investigates.



On the unpaved streets of Zarand, a village in Western Romania where hundreds of subsistence farmers scratch a living on tiny plots of land, everyone is telling the same story. In hushed tones, they tell how hundreds of hectares of farmland have been stolen from local families by a corrupt mafia, leaving them with no kind of income and no access to the food source they almost wholly relied on. How it happened, few of them know, but they are aware of one thing: it now belongs to foreign-owned companies, and those companies have little interest in farming.

Zarand is one of over 50 Romanian villages where the Dutch banking giant Rabobank now owns large tracts of land, as part of a 315-million-euro (\$337-million) investment into farmland in Romania and Poland. Through subsidiaries belonging to a farmland investment fund called Rabo Farm, Rabobank have bought up at least 140 hectares in Zarand since 2011, and over 21,000 hectares in Romania as a whole. In 10 to 15 years, the fund plans to sell at a profit of over 900 million euros, in line with the rapidly soaring price of land in Eastern Europe.

The fund is now facing questions amid accusations that it is 'land grabbing' in some of the poorest and [most corrupt regions of the country](#), and profiting off the back of crime and abuse at the expense of small hold farmers.

## Rabo raid

An analysis of dozens of land registry and court documents shows that Rabo Farm bought land in Zarand between 2012 and 2014 from two intermediaries, a woman called Elena

**Date** 12.11.2015

**Author** Luke Dale-Harris, Zarand, Romania

**Keywords** Romania, Rabobank, Rabo Farm, village, land grabbing, fund, corruption, mafia

**Share** [Send](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Google+](#) [More](#)
[Send us your feedback.](#)
**Print** [Print this page](#)
**Permalink**
<http://dw.com/p/1H3ut>

### MOST READ

- » [Pubs and clubs in Freiburg forbid refugees](#)
- » [Denmark's daylight robbery of refugees](#)
- » [Trying to strike a blow to right-wing populist party, Germany's left wounds itself](#)
- » [Woman stabbed to death at Swedish migrant center](#)
- » [Cars blaze in Dresden as PEGIDA demonstrates nearby](#)

### INSIDE EUROPE

- » [Listen to the entire show, produced 21.01.16](#) 
- » [Paris prepares its citizens for future terror attacks](#) 
- » [Dreadlocks disturb the Spanish parliament](#) 

### FRANCE

[Taxi drivers, teachers](#)

land in Zarand between 2013 and 2014 from two intermediaries; a woman called Elena Bosca and an Austrian-owned company called Bardeau Holding Romania. They in turn had obtained the land from nearly 100 subsistence farmers two to four years earlier.

Mircea Necrilescu is a subsistence farmer whose land Rabo Farm now owns. But he is adamant he never sold it to anyone. "I don't know exactly [what happened], but this has happened to lots of people in this village," he told DW. "It is our land, handed down to us by our parents, and it is not right that someone else can just become the owner of it."



Many farmers say they were tricked into selling their plots and were victims of Mafia-style dealings

Bosca and Bardeau's methods for obtaining Necrilescu's land, as well as at least 10 other plots of land in Zarand which they sold to Rabo Farm, were unusual. After obtaining pre-contracts for the land, they took Necrilescu and 151 other sellers to court in four different identical hearings, claiming that they had all reneged on their deals to sell the land. The hearings were over fast; none of the sellers came to the hearings or provided any form of defence, and Necrilescu claims he was never made aware that the cases ever happened. But Florita Bolos, a judge who was convicted last year for forgery and taking bribes, ruled in the intermediaries favor, granting them legitimate ownership of the land and allowing them to sell it on to Rabo Farm.

These court cases, and the ownership documents provided by Bosca and Bardeau, are now under investigation by state prosecutors and the National Directorate for Anti-Corruption (DNA) on charges including forgery of private documents, forgery of official documents and abuse of office.

A pattern of contested land acquisitions by Rabo Farm appears across Romania. In a village near the Bulgarian border, for instance, Rabo Farm has been taken to court by farmers claiming that they never sold land which the fund had registered as its own. After purchase, the fund leased the land out to over 129 leaseholders, including politicians and criminals convicted for crimes including keeping works as slaves.

### Due diligence?

The findings are in stark contrast to Rabo Farm's claims of due diligence and corporate social responsibility. In a report issued in 2013, the fund claimed that: "Before we acquire or invest in a farm, we conduct an intensive due diligence analysis on sellers, leaseholders, farm operators, farms and many other factors relevant to the investment phase."

### launch massive strike in France



Cab drivers have blocked roads in Paris and across the country to protest harsh conditions and unfair competition. Teachers and civil servants joined the walkout in a blow to France's socialist government.

### EU ministers challenge Greece on refugee issue

### German honor killing on trial in Turkey

### People traffickers offer visa and transport through Russia

#### CULTURE

### Writer in exile Robert Schopflocher dies in Argentina



He fled the Nazis in 1937 and started a new life in Argentina. Robert Schopflocher didn't start writing until late in life, but his works offer valuable insights into a life of exile, caught between three worlds.

### German filmmaker Werner Herzog slams 'stupid' social media at Sundance

### DW's netiquette policy

DW offers its readers, listeners and viewers the opportunity to engage in a discussion on



dw.com, Facebook, Twitter and other online platforms.

---

#### MORE FROM THE WORLD REGIONS

» [Europe](#)

» [Africa](#)

» [Asia](#)

» [Americas](#)

» [Middle East](#)

---

Rabo Farm says it's acting responsibly and contributing to the region's social and economic development

The report also states that, "Rabo Farm is active in rural regions where the economic and social situation is usually below the country's average. Rabo Farm believes that its investments contribute to the local social and economic developments of the communities where it takes place and that it has a role in supporting these developments."

Attila Szocs, an agriculture and land rights researcher at the Romanian NGO Ecoruralis, says that large-scale land acquisitions in Romania are [deeply detrimental to the social and economic structures of rural Romania](#). "Land grabbing in Romania, done at such a blatant level, kills out almost any real chance for the next farming generation to develop and compete. The problem is transparency. Large land deals and their effects over the Romanian peasantry are hidden from public eyes," he told DW.

Since 2002, land prices in Romania have risen over 25-fold, driven up in large part by the country's entrance into the EU and the effect of common agricultural policies on the land market.

Rabo Farm's investors include the American retirement fund TIAA-CREF and Dutch pension funds PFZW and APG. Rabobank itself owns a 5-percent stake in the fund.

In response to the allegations put forward by the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, Rabo Farm responded that: "We will take the information provided by you to further analyze the cases seriously. Should this lead to the need to review our standards or terminate business relationships, we will do that."

*This investigative project was funded by Journalismfund.eu and the Robert Bosch Stiftung.*

---

#### DW RECOMMENDS

» ['Cancerous corruption in Romania'](#)

Romania's Prime Minister Victor Ponta has resigned. This is a new beginning, but the country still has an ailing political system, says Romanian journalist Vlad Mixich in an interview with DW. (04.11.2015)

» [Watchdog unearths dubious dealings behind Romania's economic boom](#)

Bribery charges against employees of French water giant Veolia have raised questions about the role of corruption in Romania's economic boom. Bucharest has rebuked the agency that brought it up, Luke Dale-Harris writes. (12.10.2015)

---

---

**Date** 12.11.2015

**Author** Luke Dale-Harris, Zarand, Romania

**Keywords** [Romania](#), [Rabobank](#), [Rabo Farm](#), [village](#), [land grabbing](#), [fund](#), [corruption](#), [mafia](#)

---

**Feedback:** [Send us an e-mail.](#) Please include your name and country in your reply.

**Print** [Print this page](#)

**Permalink** <http://dw.com/p/1H3ut>

#### RELATED CONTENT



## EU funds spent on 'brutal revamp' of Romania's Saxon churches

26.08.2015

In Transylvania, centuries-old churches are being "brutally revamped" using EU funds. Original features have been stripped in restoration projects mired in conflicts of interest. Luke Dale-Harris reports from Sibiu.

#### TOP STORIES

[Germany](#)  
[World](#)  
[Business](#)  
[Sci-Tech](#)  
[Environment](#)  
[Culture](#)  
[Sports](#)

[A - Z Index](#)

#### MEDIA CENTER

[Live TV](#)  
[All media content](#)  
[Latest Programs](#)  
[Podcasts](#)

#### PROGRAM

[What's on TV?](#)  
[TV Program Guide](#)  
[TV Programs](#)  
[Video on Demand](#)

#### LEARN GERMAN

[German Courses](#)  
[German XXL](#)  
[Community D](#)  
[Teaching German](#)

#### ABOUT DW

[Who we are](#)  
[Press](#)  
[Business & Sales](#)  
[Advertising](#)  
[Hotels](#)

#### MORE DW

[Explore DW](#)  
[Inside DW](#)  
[Reception](#)  
[Mobile](#)  
[Newsletters & Co.](#)  
[FAQ](#)

#### DW AKADEMIE

[About us](#)  
[Media Development](#)  
[Master's Degree](#)  
[Traineeship](#)  
[Training](#)