

Analysis on the perception of sustainable viticulture in  
Bulgaria, Roumania, Hungary, Austria et Switzerland

# MONTHLY REPORT NO. 4

WORLDWINE WOMEN

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# INTRODUCTION

Back in the European Union, after a trip to the East, our journey ends in wine-growing countries that are beginning to make more and more a name for themselves on the international scene: Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria.

These countries, with a long wine tradition, represent "the new world of the old continent" and surprise by the quality of their wines often elaborated with local grape varieties and expressing the specificity of their terroir.

From the point of view of the Sustainable Development Goals and the perception of environmental issues, significant differences emerged between the different countries of the Union.

We will therefore seek to understand the way the local economy works and identify the levers of growth or, on the contrary, the brakes on the development of winegrowing while maintaining this European prism.

Once again, these are analyses based on our feelings and in no way a rigorous scientific investigation. They contain numerous biases, particularly in terms of sample size and diversity, but have the advantage of corresponding to a real experience in immersion in these countries' wine world.

# LOCATION



**Bulgaria**  
Bratanov  
Bendida

**Romania**  
The Iconic Estate  
Aurelia Visinescu  
S.E.R.V.E  
Lacerta  
Mierla Alba



**Hungary**  
Bott Pince  
Kikelet Pince  
Zsirai Pincészet  
Barta Pince  
Csetvei Pince



**Austria**  
Weingut Silvia Heinrich  
Winzerin Wiederstein  
Judith Beck  
Weinkellerei REWA-Waltschek KG



**Switzerland**  
Bachmann Weingut  
Cave de l'Orlaya  
Marie-Thérèse Chappaz  
Domaine la Colombe



# BULGARIA ET ROMANIA

These countries are both members of the European Union since 2007. Historically, they also share common points and in particular a long communist past that still has notable consequences on the current context. Yet, the development of wine in each of these countries is very different: how could this be explained and what is it to expect in the future?

## DIFFERENCES

### A TWO-TIER DEVELOPMENT

All the winemakers of these two countries share the same observation: in Romania, it is difficult to come across a bad quality wine by choosing randomly on the shelf, in Bulgaria it is the opposite!

On the one hand, the Romanian wine sector is returning to its former glory, when there were “more Romanian wines in the Orient Express than French wines” thanks to numerous foreign investments (French, English, Austrian) which have begun at the fall of communism and have intensified in the 2000s.

The Romanian language, of Latin origin, facilitates this openness to the world and to exchanges, and explains the power of attraction of this terroir which, although excellent, has nothing to envy to its Bulgarian neighbour, rich of its excellent indigenous grape varieties.

Bulgaria has a much more traditional wine sector with a significant part of poor quality domestic production, while large groups produce standardised wines whose quality cannot compete with the great Romanian wines. So there is a feeling of a return to the aristocratization of the wine producer in Romania: the winegrowers are often well-off people who are not affected by the population’s daily difficulties.

Conversely, in Bulgaria, most inhabitants own their vineyards and produce their wine, regardless of their standard of living. This can be seen as an obstacle to the development of quality wine because the purchasing power remains low, and the wines remain unaffordable for modest households.

### A DIFFERENT PROFESSION

This difference is also noticeable in the vineyard organization of the two countries.

Within the Romanian vineyard there are large estates, often resulting from heavy foreign investment, while in Bulgaria there are more plots of vines belonging to families who grow them to sell the grapes to wineries.

Thus, the professions of viticulture and oenology or cellar master appear more separate in Bulgaria than in Romania where we find the unity of the “winemaker” as we conceive it in the French culture. This separation occurs within the formation itself. In Bulgaria, the university of viticulture is separate from the oenology studies and the few Bulgarian winemakers who have studied in France enjoy their dual competence, which brings them a more global vision.



## THE ECOLOGICAL THINKING

It seems that having a more global job, working both in the vineyards and in the cellar, plays a role in the perception of environmental issues.

The Romanians, who are overall more “winegrowers” in their practices, seem to be very concerned by environmental issues: climate change and ecological awareness, including the development of organic agriculture. Moreover, the notion of sustainable development and its environmental, social and economic implications, seems very integrated and provokes debates among Romanian winemakers.

There are thus more and more organic or under-conversion vineyards in Romania, as well as reflections on energy savings (solar panels, protection of large tanks traditionally outdoors) or on water management (construction of a reservoir and recycling of wastewater).

In Bulgaria, this ecological thinking seems less present, and this can be explained by a greater financial concern of the winegrowers.

## COMMON POINTS

### DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Bulgaria and Romania are among the poorest countries of the European Union and suffer from a large emigration of their population. These economic issues are an obstacle to agricultural development as winemakers struggle to find a reliable workforce. In Romania, there are winegrowers who choose to rely on mechanization to overcome this problem.

### AID FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR A COMMON OBJECTIVE

These two vineyards share a common goal: to improve their image and regain their prestige of the past. Indeed, Bulgaria has a wine tradition of more than 3,000 years and Homer was already talking about the Thrace “gods’ drink” in the Iliad.

As for Romania, as mentioned above, its reputation was no longer to be made before the outbursts of communism, and it benefits from a soil conducive to wine development. They each receive considerable support from the European Union to develop their activity and achieve their goal.

## COMMUNISM AND EQUALITY

These two countries share a common history concerning the establishment of a communist regime after the Second World War and until the fall of the USSR. During this period, the land was collectivized and the production of mass wine was directed towards the consumption of the USSR countries in the context of the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance).

This communist era has nevertheless made it possible to achieve greater equality between men and women, especially in the wine sector. Women were forced to work, as were men, and no difference was made in their wages. Thus, the woman winemakers bear witness to this beneficial heritage and do not seem to feel any discrimination in their work.



# AUSTRIA & HUNGARY

Not so long ago, Austria and Hungary were part of an immense and powerful empire, and today, they observe major differences in their economic development. What about wine development and particularly the environmental issues in these two countries?

## COMMON POINTS

### WINE AS A TOOL FOR INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY

In Austria and even more so in Hungary, wine and related traditions appear to be a powerful lever for the territorial development. The notion of terroir is extremely important and the inhabitants of the wine-growing regions are very proud of it. In particular, there is a large movement to promote the wine professions in the Tokaj region in order to keep young people in the agricultural areas. Many winemakers would like the new generation, for whom this ubiquitous culture can sometimes be a burden, to realize the importance of local resources and the necessity to use them wisely.

In Austria too, vocational training, especially agricultural high schools for 14-19 year-olds, is much more popular than in other European countries and does not close any doors for students who choose this path\*. This promotes winegrowing and encourages the guidance of young people towards this sector.

### AN AWARENESS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In both of these countries, we were also impressed by the broad understanding of ecological issues, not only with respect to climate change but also with respect to the environment. Our exchanges with the winemakers' children have marked us by the maturity and reflections of the latter, their attachment to the land and their precise knowledge on these subjects.

## TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT FACTOR

This attachment to the terroir and territorial integration is also accompanied by a strong will to deploy tourism, which is perceived as an asset for wine development. Although the export share is often not the majority in these two countries, particularly because of strong international competition, local wines are widely consumed in cafés, restaurants and hotels of the touristic wine-growing regions: Tyrol, a famous ski resort, or Vienna, the great European capital, or the world-famous Tokaj.



## WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

In these two countries, it was not difficult to meet women winemakers, they are relatively numerous and especially mediated. In Austria, there is the "11 Women and Their Wines" group, which has enabled women winemakers to quickly make a place for themselves in the wine-growing landscape. Although they do not denounce any consequent machismo, it is a great strength for them and it enables a privileged dialogue between women winemakers. However, for some Austrian women winemakers, this initiative was necessary back then but is no longer necessary and is less and less active.

In Hungary, women are also well represented and suffer little discrimination. There are also more privileged relations between female winegrowers than with male winegrowers.



## SOCIAL POSITION

Finally, as explained above, winemakers are well integrated into their territory in these two countries and their business is therefore valued within the society. As a result, they raise a renewed interest among the younger generation.

## DIVERGENCES

Although Austria and Hungary have a lot in common in the wine sector, there are some environmental and economic differences.

## PERCEPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In Hungary, climate change seems to worry winegrowers more than in Austria. The Tokaj region, which produces sweet wines thanks to *Botrytis cinerea*, is indeed very sensitive to these climatic disturbances, and winegrowers diversify their products by producing more and more dry white wines, not only by taste but also by opportunity and strategy of adaptation.

Nevertheless, we have met more vineyards in organic or even biodynamic viticulture in Austria, although these practices do not seem to be extremely widespread in either of these two countries, and the consumer demand for these kinds of viticulture remains low.

## DIFFERENT ECONOMIC ISSUES

The major difference in these two countries, although the social status of the winemaker does not differ so much, is the very uneven economic development. Hungary is closer to the less rich countries of Europe such as Bulgaria and Romania. Therefore, they don't face the same socio-economic issues. As an example, among all the Austrian winemakers met, the seasonal workforce comes from Hungary while in Hungary it is mainly Hungarian-Gypsies, so integration is subject to many debates.

# SWITZERLAND

Our journey ends in Switzerland, a country not part of the European Union and very different from its neighbours. We will study the three different pillars compared with the winemakers met in the other 13 countries visited.

## ECONOMY

### A CLOSED MARKET

The Swiss wine sector is very different from all the other countries visited since the country's production is insufficient for its own consumption. Thirty years ago, the monopoly on Swiss wines ended, making it possible to import the missing quantity and to produce wines no longer with a goal of quantity but quality.

Beyond this quantitative question, the cost of production is extremely expensive, mainly due to labour, which forces the export share to remain very low. The market thus remains very local and allows certain initiatives such as open cellars, or maybe the development of the deposit of bottles in the future.

### SOCIAL & ECONOMIC CRISIS

There has also been an economic and social crisis in the wine sector in recent years. Heirlooms tend to divide the vineyards and the plots are very fragmented. There is also a "succession crisis" in many other countries, with young people leaving villages. Indeed, the sale of grapes, which had become widespread, no longer makes it possible to make a living, and there are many "Sunday winemakers", who also have another more remunerative profession, which are not necessarily sensitive to all the problems and struggles of those who make it their only job.

## SOCIETY

The winemakers are therefore extremely well integrated into the social landscape, the passage to the cellar is part of the "Saturday morning shopping" and there is a great proximity with the inhabitants of the villages. Compared to France, there is more the figure of the "craftsman" than the aristocratic image. They are all very sensitive to tradition.

Similarly, exchanges between winegrowers appear numerous but more concentrated within an appellation and there does not seem to be much dialogue across the country.

## ENVIRONMENT

The place of nature in Switzerland is very important and all citizens are aware of the necessity to protect the environment from an early age.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

The winegrowers met are very concerned about climate change and its impacts. However, worry is not the general feeling. As in Spain, they are optimistic about the vine's ability to adapt but are looking for solutions to accelerate this adaptation.

## ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Switzerland has some pioneers in biodynamics, and organic viticulture is increasingly widespread. But above all, we find new agricultural initiatives and synergies that integrate even more the vineyard in its territory, through agroecological practices that make vineyards collaborate with other farm







The discovery of these new countries with very varied histories has again made us aware of the importance of taking into account these historical, political and cultural factors to understand the wine of the country. But the development of wine, and the place it takes as a product of the land and of the local culture, also appear as a tool for understanding the rest of the country.

Then, in these countries, which are for the most part subject to the same rules as French winemakers because of their membership to the European Union\* and to certain organizations such as the CEVI (European confederation of independent winemakers)\*\* , we found that environmental issues, both climate change and the impacts of viticulture on the environment, are integrated by the winegrowers.

However, we see again that adaptation strategies are still dependent on the economic health, not only of the vineyards but also of the country, because their implications are so numerous: labour, purchasing power...

**These last countries and winemakers allow us to enrich our reflections on viticulture and especially on sustainable wine, and to consider concrete or ideal solutions to reach responsible practices.**

# WORLDWINE WOMEN



## LA SUITE DU PROJET

Le documentaire prévu pour la mi-mai  
Un cycle de conférences