

Politicized Agriculture Backlashing the European Green Deal

Tracing Strategic Politicization of Agriculture by the Center-Right European People's Party



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Abstract

This study aims to establish what has led the center-right European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament to politicize agriculture during the 2019-2024 parliamentary term. This period is marked by crises affecting agriculture, such as the coronavirus pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, the environmental crisis and the outbreak of farmers' protests all around Europe at the start of 2024. On top of that, the European Commission's flagship project of this term, the Green Deal, carries a core component that is aimed at transforming the agri-food chain to become more sustainable. This 'Farm to Fork strategy' has been met with resistance from right-wing political groups. Against this background, and the anticipated surge of right-wing populist parties in the European elections of June 2024, there are many factors at play that have the potential of influencing the behavior of the EPP group.

To find out what has led the EPP to politicize agriculture, this study employs an explaining-outcome process-tracing analysis using data triangulation of press releases, an extensive timeline and elite interviews.

Key words

Strategic Politicization; Politicization Management; European Parliament; Center-Right; European People's Party; Agriculture; European Parliament Elections; Semi-Structured Interviews; Process-Tracing

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AGRI	Committee on Agriculture & Rural Development
BBB	Farmer Citizen Movement
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
EC	European Commission
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Party
ENVI	Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
ID	Identity and Democracy Party
MEP	Member of European Parliament
NGT	New Genomic Technique
NRL	Nature Restoration Law
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
PECH	Committee on Fisheries
PPP	Plant Protection Product
SCA	Special Committee on Agriculture
SUD	Sustainable Use Directive
SUR	Sustainable Use Regulation
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The European Green Deal

On the 11th of December 2019, after the elections for the European Parliament, the then new European Commission first presented a communication on the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019). It is a strategy in the shape of a package of policy initiatives, with the aim of making the EU climate neutral by 2050 as part of its commitments under the Paris Agreement (Council of the European Union, 2024a). It encompasses many initiatives such as the ‘Fit for 55 Package’, the ‘European Climate Law’, the ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030’ and the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’ (Council of the European Union, 2024a). During its five-year mandate, the Commission has rolled out many policy proposals as part of the Green Deal. While aspiring seemingly benevolent goals, this has not gone without significant protest.

At the time of writing this thesis, the Austrian environment minister Leonore Gewessler unexpectedly voted in favor of the ‘Nature Restoration Law’ (NRL), breaking the minority of member states in the Council of the EU that were blocking the new Green Deal law for months, seemingly against the wishes of the Austrian government (Pacheco, 2024). The resulting upheaval in the Austrian coalition is not the first of its kind. In the Netherlands, parliament forced their minister of nature and nitrogen, Christianne van der Wal, to vote against the NRL in the Council of Ministers (NOS Nieuws, 2024). The Netherlands had already seen major farmers’ protests in 2019, with tractors blocking major highways. The unrest there was ignited in opposition to the proposed nitrogen reduction policies that were needed to comply with EU regulations (Bosma & Peeren, 2021).

1.1.2 Farmers’ Protests

In a similar fashion, farmers’ protests broke out all over Europe in the first months of 2024. Although the protests each had their different domestic causes and seem to be the result of many structural issues, one of the overlapping themes was a critique on payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and a resistance to EU regulations, in particular against the Green Deal and the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’ (Cokelaere & Brzeziński, 2024; Bragason & Voet, 2024). These protests have sparked a renewed attention to agricultural policies and the CAP in the media, increasing its salience. On top of that, the protests led to an increasing contestation and polarization of environmental policies under the Green Deal. These EU policies can therefore be argued to have become politicized.

1.1.3 Commission’s response

Such politicization cannot be ignored by EU level actors. Indeed, European Commission (EC) president Ursula von der Leyen already mentioned the growing polarization around the agri-food sector, while showing her appreciation for farmers in her German mother tongue in the 2023 State of the Union address (Von der Leyen, 2023). She then announced ‘Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture’ was quickly launched in response to the protests, bringing together “key stakeholders from across the whole agri-food chain, including farmers,

co-operatives, agri-food businesses, and rural communities; as well as non-governmental organisations and civil society representatives, financial institutions and academia” (European Commission, 2024a, p. 1). On top of that, she enacted a one-year pause on the requirement for farmers to leave 4% of their farmland fallow (European Commission, 2024b), as well as scrapped the pesticide reduction bill (SUR), arguing “the SUR proposal has become a symbol of polarisation” (Von der Leyen, 2024, paragraph 8).

1.1.4 Developments in European Parliament

The SUR proposal, a part of the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’, had already been rejected in the European Parliament (EP) in November 2023 (European Parliament, 2023a), indicating that parties in the EP already caught onto the politicization of agriculture in relation to Green Deal policies. Upon investigation, it becomes clear that the right wing groups had already watered down the proposal with amendments, to such an extent that the left wing party groups were no longer in favor of the law and voted against it (Arboleas & Foote, 2023; Brzeziński, 2023; European Parliament, 2023b). This watering down did not only happen to the SUR, but also to text of the NRL, on which the EP finally agreed in February 2024 amid the farmer protests (Canas, 2024).

The case of the European People’s Party

While resistance to the Green Deal proposal may be expected of the hard right Eurosceptic groups ECR and ID, this is less apparent for the center-right EPP group. The Commission president herself is a representative of the EPP group and has led her Commission in the creation of the Green Deal. One could argue that the EPP group should therefore generally support Green Deal proposals. On top of that, as the largest political group in the EP, the EPP’s support for policy proposals is crucial if they are to pass through Parliament. Any other Green Deal policies that have passed, must therefore generally have had the support of the EPP.

At the same time, the EPP group has justified their new position on these proposals in defense of farmers, with phrases such as: “The revised text is now better. But it is still better to start from scratch and put farmers’ interests first” (Mureşan, 2024, paragraph 4), and “the proposed law was simply not fit for purpose and did not take into account the past efforts of European farmers” (Bogovič, 2024, paragraph 3). Although the EPP group has traditionally represented agrarian interests as a Christian democratic party family (Hix, Kreppel & Noury, 2003; Vogeler, 2021), the group now seems to emphasize their position in defense of farmers more explicitly, politicizing agricultural policies even at the cost of Green Deal proposals from the Von der Leyen Commission.

It is puzzling why the EPP would shift their stance, for multiple reasons. First the electoral benefit is not directly apparent for a party that has been the largest group ever since the elections of 1999. Although a political party must always try to stay ahead of the curve in securing votes, it is still a risky strategy to stray from a winning formula. Furthermore, the Green Deal was Von der Leyen’s flagship project, dubbing it “Europe’s ‘man on the moon’ moment” (Von der Leyen, 2019). At the same time, she is a representative of the EPP and their lead candidate (Spitzenkandidat) for the European elections of June 2024. Turning against the

Green Deal would essentially mean criticizing their own Spitzenkandidat and the one project that characterized her term. Therefore, there must be other factors at play.

The outbreak of farmer protests all over Europe, the outed domestic critique on Green Deal policies overburdening farmers and the increasing contestation of Green Deal proposals, taken together with the upcoming European elections of June 2024 and the anticipated rise of far-right parties, make for a complicated cocktail of happenstances that have the potential to steer the positions of political parties. With the many factors coming together in the final years of the 9th Parliament, this contribution aims to uncover how a European political group comes to shift position and resort to a strategy of politicization, leading to the following research question:

What factors have led the center-right European People's Party to politicize agriculture between the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections?

1.3 Societal relevance

The European Union is a political institution where a lot of power is located and decision-making takes place, especially in the case of agricultural policies with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and environmental policies with the Green Deal. Paradoxically however, a large proportion of the electorate is unaware of the decisions that are made at the European level.

European elections are often considered second-order national elections by scientists, because campaigning takes place at the national level and voters vote for national political parties on the ballot. Therefore, much of the political dynamics of the European political groups remain relatively invisible to the electorate. This contribution shines a light on the behavior of the European political groups, which most domestic political parties are a part of. Consequentially, this contribution helps to reduce the distance between the electorate and the European Parliament and therewith increases the democratic accountability of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

1.4 Scientific relevance

Most research has focused on the behavior of political parties in domestic parliaments. This research investigates whether the European political groups may also behave in the same manner. Furthermore, EU politicization has almost exclusively been studied regarding core-state powers such as migration, the EU polity itself, or the Eurozone. This contribution studies how agriculture may also become politicized.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

In order to introduce and get to grips with the concept of EU politicization, I will first begin with the empirical concept offered by De Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke (2016). Then, to understand the context in which the politicization of the EU arose, I move to an influential contribution by Hooghe & Marks (2009). They recognized a shift from European integration being a “non-issue for the public” (Hooghe & Marks, p. 6) to suddenly becoming a salient and contested issue in domestic politics. This formed the beginning of several research avenues dedicated to understanding the domestic politicization of the EU polity, policies and European integration itself. I will move on to show how this dominant literature on the politicization of the EU lacks the ability to offer a plausible explanation for the politicization of agriculture, even in a European context.

Lacking any earlier studies on the politicization of agriculture in the EU, I will then move to other recent works that have attempted to theorize how politicians and EU-level actors respond to this politicization. This strand of literature argues that actors such as the EPP group engage in strategic politicization management as a response to the domestic politicization of an EU related issue. This may offer us some initial analytical cues to help identify a potential link between farmers’ protests and the politicization of agricultural policies by the EPP group.

A different strand of literature found in the school of comparative politics may offer an alternative explanation. Where the politicization management literature would predict that politicization by a political actor is a reaction to domestic politicization, the literature from comparative politics suggests that this may also be the result of issue competition.

Before diving into this literature, however, I will first introduce the concept of politicization in the EU context. Without this introduction, it will be hard to grasp what is meant with this broad term.

2.2 Politicization of the EU

2.2.1 The concept of politicization

The commonly accepted general meaning of politicization can be defined as “the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political” (Zürn, 2019, p. 977-978). While this definition may cover our understanding of the concept sufficiently, it offers little help in recognizing cases of politicization empirically. Therefore, with this objective in mind, this thesis departs from the contribution offered by De Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke (2016), who have established a three-dimensional empirical concept of EU politicization that has become a widely shared definition thereafter (Rauh, 2019; Blauburger & Martinsen, 2020; Bressanelli et al., 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2020; Vasilopoulou & Gattermann, 2021; Mérand, 2022; Roland & Römgens, 2022; Van der Veer, 2022; Temizisler, Meyer & Shahin, 2022). Following the path set out by

these authors, the three empirical dimensions of EU politicization are: (1) growing domestic salience and visibility of European governance; (2) increasing contestation and polarization of opinions and preferences on EU issues; and (3) expansion of actors and audiences engaged in or attentive to EU affairs. While these definitions are often applied to the politicization of the European integration and the EU polity itself, the definition can still be applied to that of a particular EU policy area.

Moving on from this understanding of politicization, I now start with the context in which EU politicization and its study have emerged.

2.2.2 Bottom-up pressures of politicization

The first decades of European integration are often characterized as a period in which political elites could determine the trajectory of integration without substantial opposition from the European populace, which Hooghe & Marks (2005, 2009) have termed ‘permissive consensus’. However, since the early 1990s following the Maastricht Accord, the integration project is faced with increasing domestic salience and opposition, introducing a period described as ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, 2009). Much attention has been devoted to the causes and context behind this shift (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, 2009; Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Schmidt, 2019; Börzel & Zürn, 2021) as well as to the reasons for different individuals to become Eurosceptic or not (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004; Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Van Elsas et al., 2016; Trubowitz & Burgoon, 2022). Initially, the new environment in which European integration has become more politicized, was seen as “a domestic-level process constraining EU-level actors” (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 342). By contrast, recent contributions have noted that EU-level actors have strong incentives and capabilities to respond strategically to these pressures (Bressanelli et al., 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2020).

2.3 Politicization in other policy areas

The previously mentioned authors have mostly focused on the politicization of the EU polity or European integration in general. Because this study is interested in the politicization of a specific policy area, namely that of agriculture, it may prove useful to draw on insights from other works on the politicization of a specific EU policy area. Unlike the case of this contribution, most of the literature has been devoted to migration (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2018; Grande, Schwarzbözl, & Fatke, 2019; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019, 2022; Braun & Grande, 2021; Gessler & Hunger, 2022; Temizisler et al., 2022;) and the Eurozone (Kriesi & Grande, 2016; Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Braun & Grande, 2021).

Notably, the politicization of these policy issues have both been driven by crises and both concern so-called core state powers – integrated policies that concern “the action resources deriving from the state’s monopoly of legitimate coercion and taxation: military force, police power, border control, public revenue and administrative might” (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2016, 2018). Both crises and the integration of core state powers have increased the saliency and contestation of EU policies and it is owing to these many contributions that it is now

apparent these types of policy areas are prone to domestic politicization, increasing the bottom-up pressures that elected EU-level actors must manage.

These driving factors apply to a much lesser extent to the politicization of agriculture. Firstly, agricultural policy is not a core state power. “The CAP is the most integrated of all EU policies and consequently takes a large share of the EU budget” (Kengyel, 2022, p. 113), largely replacing national expenditures on agriculture. The bottom-up politicization of this policy can therefore not be the result of what Genschel and Jachtenfuchs have identified as “three sources of failure: low compliance, regulatory gaps and insufficient European risk and burden-sharing” (2018, p. 183). Secondly, agriculture can be argued to be in crisis only to the extent that the fate of the sector is tied to the environmental and climate change crises. The issues that farmers articulate are quite diverse and cannot be attributed to one overarching crisis.

It is clear that the dominant literature on the politicization of the EU has difficulty explaining the case of this thesis. Therefore, I shall turn to two other strands of literature that may help providing a possible explanation for the observed politicization of EU agricultural policies. Because the interest of this study lies with explaining the actions of a European political group, possibly in response to domestic politicization culminating in farmers’ protests, I will now move to how political actors engage in what Schimmelfennig (2020) calls ‘politicization management’.

2.4 EU politicization management

2.4.1 Assertive or restrained (de)politicization strategies

Building on the domestic-level conception of politicization of EU governance formulated by De Wilde et al. (2016), recent research has shown how EU-level actors may respond to the bottom-up pressures resulting from politicization. As Schimmelfennig describes it:

EU actors can prevent or deflect politicisation that would limit their room to manoeuvre. Alternatively, they may choose to be responsive to domestic pressures or even ‘ride the wave’ by fuelling and exploiting politicisation pressures for their own purposes (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 343-344).

This represents a shift in perspective, from “politicization as constraint”, to “politicization as agency” (Schimmelfennig, p. 344).

Whether politicizing or depoliticizing, actors can do so strategically in a restrained or assertive manner. Bressanelli et al. (2020) therefore propose four types of strategies in response to domestic politicization, depending on whether the bottom-up pressures are enabling or constraining, and whether politicizing, or ‘acting politically’, is likely to be considered acceptable (see Table 2.1). The response type EU-level actors will choose is theorized to be different across and within actors, while also varying with issue-areas (Bressanelli et al., 2020). These four types of strategic responses to the domestic politicization of European policy can manifest themselves in various ways throughout the policy cycle (see Table 2.2). As can be

seen, each of the practices from Table 2.2 “reinforces or moderates one (or more) of the three dimensions of domestic politicisation: visibility, polarisation and engagement” (Bressanelli et al., 2020, p. 331).

Table 2.1

Types of responses by EU-level actors.

Perception of pressure	Strategy	
	Politicization	Depoliticization
Enabling	Assertive politicization	Assertive depoliticization
Constraining	Restrained politicization	Restrained depoliticization

Note: Reprinted from ‘EU Actors under pressure: politicisation and depoliticisation as strategic responses’, by Bressanelli, Koop, & Reh, 2020, *Journal Of European Public Policy*, p. 335.

Table 2.2

Assertive and restrained (de)politicization

	Politicization		Depoliticization	
	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Restrained</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Restrained</i>
Decision-Making	Expand/create open arenas	Use existing open arenas	Expand/create secluded arenas	Use existing secluded arenas
	Seek/expand participation	Use established channels	Actively limit participation	Use established channels
Behaviour	Allow or promote visible conflict	Formal conflict resolution	Consensus when conflict occurs	Active attempts to hide conflict
	Increase public communication	Engage in public justification	Reframe controversy technically	Reduce outward-facing activities
Outcomes	Respond to public opinion	Respond to salient issues	Problem-solving responsibility	Expertise-based optimization
	Focus on responsiveness as legitimation		Focus on responsible output as legitimation	

Note: Adapted from 'EU Actors under pressure: politicisation and depoliticisation as strategic responses', by Bressanelli, Koop, & Reh, 2020, Journal Of European Public Policy, p. 337.

The authors argue that both non-majoritarian institutions such as the Commission, as well as electorally accountable actors like the European Parliament (EP) respond to these pressures strategically. Therefore, it seems highly probable that the political groups in the EP will respond to the EU-wide farmer protests as well. Being a highly political institution that is designed to increase participation and public contestation over EU policies (Leston-Bandeira, 2012; Anglmayer, 2021), the EP can be classified as an institution in which politicizing is considered acceptable and therefore the most likely. The main difference between parties will then be whether they will use assertive or restrained politicization strategies, depending on their perception of domestic politicization as enabling or constraining.

From this contribution, I can take away two likelihoods that can inform my hypotheses later:

1. If the EPP perceives the domestic politicization of agriculture as enabling, i.e. the group sees it as an opportunity to make electoral gains, it is likely to resort to an assertive strategy of politicizing agriculture.
2. If the EPP perceives the domestic politicization of agriculture as constraining, i.e. the group sees it as a threat to their vote share, it is likely to resort to a restrained strategy of politicizing or even depoliticizing agriculture.

These phrases can also be reversed:

3. If the EPP is assertively politicizing agriculture, it is most likely to perceive any bottom-up pressures as an opportunity.
4. If the EPP is politicizing agriculture in a more restrained manner, or even depoliticizing it, then it is likely to perceive bottom-up pressures as a threat.

2.4.2 Electorally accountable actors

Building on the contribution by Bressanelli et al. (2020), Schimmelfennig (2020) “theorises the conditions under which actors can be expected to adopt (de)politicisation strategies” (Bressanelli et al., 2020, p. 338). He argues that electorally accountable EU actors are the most likely to use politicization strategies, especially regarding issues that have become domestically salient and when close to elections. The case of EU-wide farmer protests close to the EP elections of June 2024, suits these contextual factors perfectly. At first glance then, it is to be expected that all political parties taking part in the elections will politicize agricultural policies.

However, Schimmelfennig (2020) argues that electorally accountable actors should be analytically divided in challenger and mainstream parties, based on the findings of many other works from comparative politics on the politicization of European integration (Steenbergen & Scott, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2009, 2018; Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter, Grande & Kriesi, 2016). These contributions have shown that mainstream parties tend to use depoliticization strategies for three reasons. Because some of these works have relied on data from national

political arenas, I will go through these separately as they will each apply differently to the case of the EPP group in the EP.

The first reason is that the mainstream parties' voters may be more Eurosceptic than the party leaders. Mainstream parties therefore risk losing a significant part of their voter base if they choose to politicize European integration and, as such, prefer to avoid the subject. However, as Hooghe and Marks (2009) also show, this is based on the assumption that the issue is not already politicized. At some point, when the politicization of an issue has already passed a certain threshold, depoliticization may no longer be an option for political parties (Gessler and Hunger, 2022). In that case, mainstream parties may resort to restrained politicization strategies. What is more, this argument boils down to electoral risk. Following Bressanelli et al. (2020), the mainstream party could perceive politicizing a specific policy issue to be to their advantage and not necessarily risky, in which case the party would politicize assertively.

The second reason mainstream parties tend to use depoliticization strategies according to Schimmelfennig (2020) and Hooghe and Marks (2018), is that they are oriented along the left-right dimension which does not ideologically predetermine a stance on European integration. If a mainstream party were to become more outspoken integrationist or Eurosceptic, it would lead to internal dissent (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). By contrast, GAL and TAN parties draw their support from voters with respectively a pro- or anti-EU orientation, as predicted by Van der Eijk and Franklin (2001). This would result in GAL-TAN parties using strategic politicization and left-right oriented parties resorting to depoliticization.

The EPP can be considered a mainstream party as it is a center-right Christian democratic party group. What is more, party groups in the EP are more at risk of internal dissent than national political parties. The national parties, can relatively easily decide to switch political groups or go independent. As Martin (2021) has shown:

As a member or a delegation becomes more incongruent with their group, their odds of switching increase significantly. This effect is especially pronounced when individuals or delegations find themselves at odds with the group on issues related to European integration (Martin, 2021, p. 523).

Therefore, the expectation is that the EPP group will use depoliticization strategies to the extent that it can as an elected actor, and otherwise resort to restrained politicization.

As for the third reason, mainstream parties risk losing credibility as they have been responsible for the status quo of EU integration. This holds true for the EPP group that has been the largest in the European Parliament since 1999. Meanwhile, challenger parties are more likely to use politicization strategies in an attempt to offer an alternative to voters who feel dissatisfied. It seems only logical then, that mainstream parties depoliticize the direction the EU has taken and the policies that they have voted in favor of in the EP. This would imply that the EPP is more likely to depoliticize the Green Deal and the existing CAP.

On the other hand, the term ‘mainstream party’ denotes frequent participation in government, in the comparative politics literature (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Moffitt, 2021). This does not apply to the EPP in the same manner, as the EP is only co-legislator and does not have the right of initiative that the Commission has (Rasmussen, 2007; Ponzano, Hermanin, & Corona, 2012). The EPP may be able to profit from this ambiguity and distance themselves from the targets and policies produced by the Commission. If they can convincingly do so, they may be able to use assertive politicization without losing credibility.

Notice that each of these reasons fit within the framework of Bressanelli et al. (2020). The reasons that Schimmelfennig (2020) gives for different parties to choose politicization or depoliticization are what Bressanelli et al. consider constraining or enabling perceptions. While Schimmelfennig argues that political parties may choose depoliticization strategies, Bressanelli et al. would not rule this out, but argue it is more likely that they exercise restrained politicization.

Turning the question around, asking under what circumstances a mainstream political group such as the EPP would assertively politicize the EU’s agricultural and environmental policies, several factors can be deduced from the theories by the previously mentioned authors.

1. In general, the EPP would need to perceive the bottom-up politicization pressures as an opportunity to gather more votes in elections. In that case, the likelihood of assertive politicization increases if elections are close, as parties need to differentiate themselves from each other.
2. The EPP would not risk alienating a significant part of their voter base, and instead perceive to gain electorally by bringing more attention to, and taking a more outspoken stance on the issues in question.
3. The EPP’s newly taken stance is compatible with their existing ideology and does not risk internal dissent as the result of disagreement.
4. The EPP would not look to be contradicting their own actions in the EP and lose credibility.

Although the previously mentioned works provide a logical prediction for politicization strategies by different types of political parties, the literature only scarcely mentions political parties in the EP. EP elections are viewed as ‘second-order national elections’ (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schimmelfennig, 2020; Braun & Grande, 2021), with lower voter interest and less media attention. This supposedly makes MEPs less electorally accountable than nationally elected politicians, represented in the European Council or the Council of the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2020). The European party groups and their strategizing as such are not discussed. The case of farmers’ protests in the context of nearing EP elections, minimizes the ‘second-order’ nature of the EP. With high salience and elections close, MEPs and the EP party groups will perceive more pressure from electoral accountability than at any other moment.

2.4.3 Risky policies

Based on the work of Weaver (1986), Schimmelfennig (2020) argues that some policies are considered risky in the sense that they “impose substantial costs and losses on voters, in particular if losses are concentrated in groups with high capacity to organise, whereas benefits are diffuse” (Schimmelfennig, p. 353). This leads policy-makers to employ depoliticization strategies in an attempt to shield their decisions and avoid blame (Hinterleitner and Sager, 2017). Schimmelfennig specifically mentions “cutting back agricultural subsidies” as an example of such a risky policy. This means that policy proposals negatively affecting farmers are likely to be strategically depoliticized by default.

While this perspective is informative regarding the politicization strategies that are employed before the bottom-up pressures have increased. It tells us nothing about how EU-level actors use reactive politicization management when the risk has become reality, such as with this case’s outbreak of farmers’ protests in Europe.

2.5 Issue Competition

2.5.1 Contagion Effect

Other expectations deriving from the electoral competition of political parties may be found in the broader comparative politics literature. One helpful contribution in this regard is offered by Meguid (2005). She has found that mainstream parties may choose to strategically depoliticize the issues that niche parties bring to the fore, if the threat is perceived to be small. If the niche party threat is big however, mainstream parties may be likely to strategically include it in the mainstream political debate by adopting either an accommodative or adversarial strategy vis-à-vis the niche party.

Following in her footsteps, Meijers (2017) has investigated how mainstream parties may be affected by support for Eurosceptic challenger parties. Where Schimmelfennig (2020) left off with hypotheses that predict that mainstream parties will not politicize or depoliticize the EU and its policies, Meguid (2005) and Meijers (2017) find that under certain conditions, they may be influenced by niche or fringe parties. Notice that these types of parties in this context are similar – if not the same as – Schimmelfennig’s challenger or GAL-TAN parties. All of the mentioned authors refer to green and radical right parties as examples of their conceptualizations of GAL-TAN parties, and these fit well with the Greens and ECR/ID groups respectively.

While much of the literature on party competition has either relied on the spatial theory, or focuses on issue evolution, Meijers (2017) has followed the examples set by Abou-Chadi (2014) and Meguid (2005), by combining the two into a single explanatory model. Both party positioning as well as issue emphasis by fringe parties can explain changes in mainstream party policy agendas through something Meijers calls the “contagion effect” (2017, p. 414). One of

his findings is that center-right parties are indeed susceptible to radical right success. Center-right parties shift their positions as a reaction to the past election results of Eurosceptic challengers (Meijers, 2017). This reaction becomes greater as challenger parties emphasize the issue more (De Vries, 2010).

This would indicate the center-right EPP party may indeed resort to politicization strategies of issues that are associated with radical-right or far-right parties, in this case the ECR and ID party groups. Both these parties are known to side with farmers and criticize climate action policies. On top of that, news articles reveal that a radical-right surge is expected in the elections of June 2024. This news was based on the polls that were periodically released, but also on the recent electoral successes of radical right parties in domestic elections. Because politicians also read the news, center-right parties may react by shifting position following the theory offered by Meijers (2017). This provides a plausible causal explanation for the EPP to politicize agriculture.

This analysis of the literature on the contagion effect has therefore led to the prediction that the contagion effect could apply to the EPP as regards to agricultural policy. This would require the fringe parties to seem successful, and significantly emphasize the issue in question. However, because fringe or niche parties have never been issue owners or issue entrepreneurs as the issue was already a part of the political debate, it may be found this effect is tempered. If they have not emphasized the issue significantly, then it is unlikely mainstream parties will adopt a similar position on that issue as it is unlikely to be the reason for success. However, that does not mean that parties do not eye each other when positioning themselves on an issue.

Chapter 3: Methods

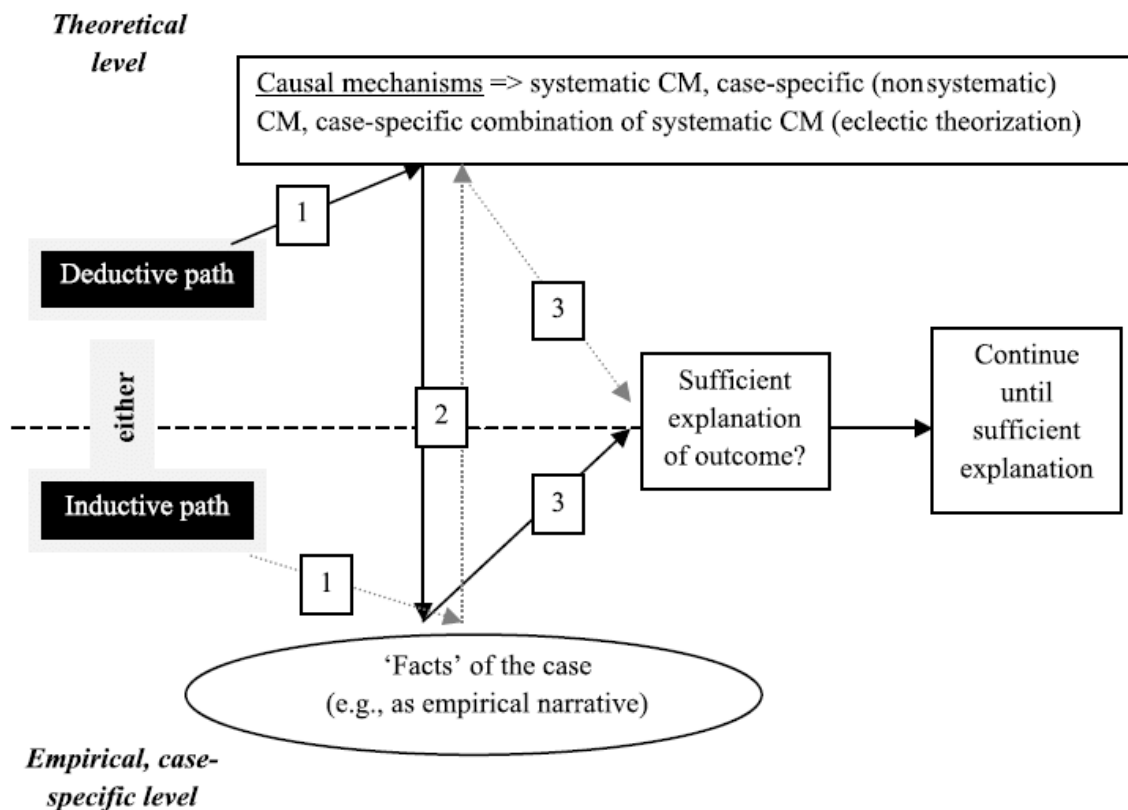
3.1 Explaining outcome process tracing case study

Because this thesis is case-centric and the goal is to answer the question why an actor behaves in a certain manner, the best approach is ‘explaining-outcome process tracing’ as distinguished by Beach and Pedersen (2016). The goal is to explain why the EPP group has politicized agricultural policies and shifted its position regarding environmental action in the shape of Green Deal proposals.

The methodology of explaining-outcome process tracing prescribes that a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome must be made (Beach & Pedersen, 2016). In this case, sufficient means that the explanation “accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome, with no redundant parts being present” (Beach & Pedersen, p. 18) (as in Mackie, 1965). It is an iterative strategy and can be a combination of deductive and inductive paths as shown in Figure 3.1 below. The deductive path starts from the theories I have described in the literature chapter, while the inductive path will emerge from the analysis I shall describe hereafter.

Figure 3.1

Explaining-outcome process-tracing



Note: Reprinted from ‘Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines’ by Beach and Pedersen, 2016.

It will be hard to generalize any explanations because of the particularity of this case, which fits with the case-centric perspective that argues the social world is too complex to make generalizations. It can only be regarded theory-testing to the extent that it seeks to explore to what extent the explanatory power of the selected theories can extend beyond the cases that they are designed to explain:

- Theories of issue competition and issue emphasis may extend beyond the cases of migration and EU integration, to agricultural and environmental issues.
- Theories of EU politicization strategies by elected EU-level actors may be extended to the behavior of the European political groups in the EP in particular.

Indeed, explaining-outcome studies does make some generalized theoretical claims beyond the single case. It has theoretical ambitions beyond the single case (Beach & Pedersen, 2016, p. 19).

3.1.1 Bayesian Thinking

Process-tracing requires a particular method of making inferences. To that end, the Bayesian logic of inference is often applied (Beach & Pedersen, 2016; Fairfield & Charman, 2017). The Bayesian logic of inference makes use of rival hypotheses that are mutually exclusive. From the literature described above, two rival hypotheses can be made to start the deductive path:

- 1) The EPP has politicized policies affecting agriculture because it perceives the domestic politicization of agriculture as an enabling pressure.
- 2) The EPP has politicized policies affecting agriculture because it reacts to the issue position and issue emphasis of fringe parties.

In looking for evidence to assess the likelihoods of the rival hypotheses, what matters most is the much the totality of evidence found discriminates between the rival hypotheses (Fairfield & Charman, 2017). An exception to this is smoking-gun evidence, which is a piece of evidence that almost certainly points in the direction of a particular evidence, without the need to make the other hypothesis less likely.

Another important rule-of-thumb regarding the search for evidence is offered by Fairfield and Charman:

“Observations that intuitively appear to favor different hypotheses, or information derived from distinct types of sources (e.g. two politicians from opposing parties) are usually best treated as separate pieces of evidence, whereas similar information arising from similar sources (e.g. two government informants tell a similar story about a policy process) might usefully be treated as a single piece of evidence” (Fairfield & Charman, 2017, p. 6).

As such, I will treat information from similar sources as one piece of evidence. I will also reflect on the positionality of the source, for example if they have skin in the game.

Bayesian process tracing prescribes the use of likelihood ratios for the hypotheses, which are to be updated with each piece of evidence found (Beach & Pedersen, 2016). However, the practice of updating likelihood ratios using numbers between 0 and 1 requires practice, which

I am not experienced enough to do reliably. I will therefore limit myself to updating the likelihoods in a descriptive manner, but nonetheless made explicit.

3.2 Textual analysis

3.2.1 Object of analysis

In order to discover what is most likely to have caused the EPP to politicize agriculture, the first step will be to ascertain when exactly this politicization happened and what it looked like. In order to do so, a total of 55 press releases from the EPP group have been analyzed. These press releases contain the positions taken by the EPP group, as well as the language used to justify their positions externally. Shifts in both are of interests in this study, as they may point to the politicization of agriculture.

The EPP has published these press releases frequently and consistently enough to be able to recognize potential trends in the degree of politicization contained within these texts. The 55 press releases have been released over a timespan of four years and one month, which means an average of slightly more than one text per month. This means that finding a trend in the data will not point to an exact date, but rather give an estimation of what period should be looked into in more depth.

Furthermore, the press releases cover different subsets of issues and policies within the agricultural/environmental policy area. This makes it possible to determine whether potential differences in degrees of (de)politicization can be attributed to specific issues or policy proposals, further narrowing down what has driven the EPP to politicize agriculture.

Press releases also do not differ greatly in size because the format is intended to be digestible for the media and the public. Such a basic format therefore provides some consistency in the size of the pieces of data. This means that a greater piece of text can be considered to contain a message that the author regards as more important to bring across or as requiring more elaborate explanation. It is possible a pattern may be discovered in which the length of the text tends to be larger with specific issues or at a specific time period. As has been shown in the literature chapter, decreasing or increasing communication is an important component of (de)politicization. In the same manner, an increasing frequency of released press releases is also a form of increasing communication and may therefore also point to politicization.

Sources other than press releases, such as social media posts or press conferences, do not have all of these advantages to the same degree and therefore do not hold the same potential to find a trend in degrees of politicization. On top of that, they have proven more difficult to gather in a systematic manner.

3.2.2 Selection of press releases

The press releases have been found on the EPP group website, under the 'Newsroom' tab (www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom). The newsroom section includes all kinds of publications. In order to limit the search to press releases from the 2019-2024 parliamentary term, I applied the

type of text filter: news, and the publication period filter: past 5 years. In order to find the articles about agriculture I used the following search terms and results: Farm, yielding 179 results; agriculture, yielding 67 results; and food, yielding 232 results. I used food in order to make sure that I had been exhaustive with the previous two search terms. This appeared to be the case because the only relevant press releases I could find, were already found with the other two search terms. I selected only the documents that referred to farmers or agriculture as a main subject, and articles about environmental issues in which agriculture or farmers are also mentioned. This resulted in a total of 55 press releases that could be analyzed.

While this method of selecting the press releases is effective and necessary to filter out the documents that are of interest in this thesis, these search terms may result in a bias. For example, using ‘farm’ or ‘farmers’ is likely to yield mostly results that contain references in defense of farmers. It may well be that even political parties that prioritize other interests above the interests of farmers, are likely to refer to farmers mostly in a positive sense to appear as a benefactor and not as an opponent. Therefore, I cannot take direct references to farms or farmers at face value. I will take up this issue in the section on operationalization.

3.2.3 Content analysis in a discourse analytic approach

In order to scour the press releases systematically for instances of politicization, this thesis makes use of a hybrid form of content analysis and discourse analysis. I will start by explaining the assumptions of a discourse analysis and how these fit better with the objectives of this thesis. Then I will show how a content analysis may still be applied within a discursive approach, including a coding scheme.

Discourse analysis

First, it departs from a discourse analytical philosophy which is “qualitative, interpretive and constructionist” (Hardy, Harley & Phillips, 2004, p. 19). It assumes that the content of a text is the product and reflection of the social reality of the author (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). We can think of any issue and argue if it is something political or not, depending on whether we think it involves choices that involve identity, values and/or preferences. This is a social reality, determined by the general discourse about that particular issue. Similar to discourse analysis, which aims “to uncover the way in which that reality is produced” (Hardy et al., 2004, p. 19), this analysis strives to find the causes behind the politicization of a specific issue in texts.

Practically, uncovering politicization in texts is also similar to uncovering the discourse that makes up a text. Analyzing the use of language and choice of words in press releases will reveal to what extent we can speak of a ‘politicized discourse’. In this case, the act of politicizing is assumed to be a deliberate self-interested decision by the author. The particular aim in this study, then, is to study the text in relation to “the intentions of the producer of the text” (Hardy et al., 2004, p. 20).

As the discourse analytical approach also prescribes, this research assumes that texts “are not meaningful individually” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4) and cannot be understood properly without including the context in which they are published (Hardy et al., 2004). A political party, or in this case a political group, publishes press releases when it feels the need to convey its position on an issue. As will become clear later, press releases are often published shortly before or after an announcement or vote on a policy proposal, and on many occasions referring to world affairs such as the coronavirus pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine. As a consequence,

the contents of these texts must be seen in relation to the status of the proposal in the policy-making process and other developments in international relations. Even when press releases are published with increasing frequency and with more paragraphs substantiating a position compared to earlier publications, this is a contextual indication that something is driving the political group to increase its external communication. The context in which these texts appear, rather than merely the content, is therefore essential to answering the research questions of this thesis.

Finally, the discourse analytical school of thought assumes that the analysis of texts is also subject to the social reality and interpretation of the researcher. There is no way to completely separate the interpretation and subjectivity of the researcher from the analysis and this ought to be acknowledged. In this thesis, this actuality is further compounded by the fact that there is only one researcher, which means it has been impossible to apply an inter-coder reliability check. Transparency on the coding process and how conclusions are drawn is therefore all the more important in this particular research.

Content analysis

Aside from the aforementioned elements that have been adopted from the discourse analytical school of thought, the practical textual analysis will employ a coding scheme using analytical categories, which is more common to a content analysis (Hardy et al., 2004). I will show and explain the coding scheme itself in the operationalization section hereafter, but for now I will argue how such a coding scheme fits within this analytical approach.

First of all, the category codes are not derived purely from the theories of chapter 2 but also emerged from the data. Although I have used the theories as an analytical starting point, politicization is a broad term that is not easy to apply to a textual analysis directly. As such the codes required revision many times in an iterative process of going “back and forth between the texts and the categories” (Hardy et al., 2004, p. 21). This process of coding and revision was repeated until theoretical saturation had been achieved, which is “when no additional issues or insights emerge from data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified, explored, and exhausted” (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi, 2017, p. 592).

It must be noted that the use of a coding scheme should not give the illusion that the process of coding the press releases is completely objective, systematic, and quantitative, as would be the case with an ideal-type content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977). Different coders may apply the codes differently and there is no way of knowing this for certain without the possibility of an inter-coder reliability check. Furthermore, it is impossible to quantify the codes “in the sense that the results of content analysis are amenable to statistical analysis” (Hardy et al., 2004, p. 20).

Regarding quantification, as will be shown later, a code can be applied to a particular choice of words, a (part of a) sentence, or even an entire paragraph. Splitting up a paragraph into sentences with the aim of quantifying codes for example, can make the meaning of the paragraph disappear, while it is the meaning of the paragraph as a whole that speaks to the code. In order to be able to capture the full extent of politicized discourse in the texts, I have not applied the codes to delimited units of text. Consequentially, a code does not weigh the same in each instance that it is applied and can therefore not be quantified in the analysis. However, so long

as the depoliticization codes and politicization codes are treated similarly, it may still be possible to count the occurrences and compare them across the analyzed texts.

Taking into account the abovementioned elements taken from both discourse and content analysis, it can be concluded that this textual analysis can best be described as a “content analysis within a discourse analytic approach”, following from the essay by Hardy, Harley and Phillips (2004, p. 21). Having explained the analytical approach, the next section will elaborate on the operationalization of politicization for the textual analysis through the creation of a coding scheme.

3.2.4 Operationalization and coding scheme

Coming up with a coding scheme to analyze politicization in texts, a good starting point is offered by the contributions of Bressanelli et al. (2020) and Schimmelfennig (2020). However, not all aspects mentioned by the authors can be observed by analyzing the content of press releases. For example, from the distinction between assertive and restrained forms of (de)politicization made by Schimmelfennig, the restrained types are near impossible to observe in press releases because they stick to the ordinary course of affairs. Therefore, I have made a selection of aspects of (de)politicization that can be measured with the analytical approach described in the previous section, ignoring the distinction between restrained or assertive types. The selection of aspects of (de)politicization has been the result of an iterative process of revision, going-back and forth between the coding scheme and the data. First, I will elaborate on two sets of codes containing clear opposites in terms of politicization and depoliticization, then I will show four other codes that only pertain to either politicization or depoliticization separately.

The first set of codes focuses on conflict visibility (Bressanelli et al., 2020), which is mostly related to the polarization dimension of politicization. The EPP can emphasize conflict with strong use of language, showing clear opposition to a proposal or idea, by emphasizing differences of party positions and through confronting and blaming other actors. All of this has been captured with the code ‘conflictual language’. The other end of this spectrum is de-emphasizing conflict, or alternatively, cooperative and consensus-seeking use of language. Although harder to find, the EPP can downplay disagreements and highlight cooperation by mentioning explicitly when decisions are the result of a compromise or consensus with other actors, or for example by mentioning common ground with other political parties. This has been captured by the code ‘consensus/compromise language’.

The second set of codes is closely related to the first set. Aside from agreeing or disagreeing on an issue or policy which is central to the first set, an issue or policy may also be framed as either a win-win situation, or a situation that has winners and losers (Weaver, 1986; Schimmelfennig, 2020). Starting with the win-win frame, the EPP may argue that its position is in the interest of everyone. This is a way to hide losses, choice and alternatives and therefore also conflict and debate, which amounts to depoliticization captured by the code ‘win-win frame’. On the other end, the EPP may highlight the redistributive implications of a policy or proposal and naming the winners and losers. Emphasizing redistribution and/or the losers of a situation imply that a political choice has been or should be made. This aspect of politicization is captured by the code ‘winners-losers / redistribution’, which relates to the dimension of salience and visibility.

Another element of politicization mentioned by Schimmelfennig (2020) and Weaver (1986) that I have coded is ‘claiming credit’. Similar to highlighting the winners and losers as a consequence of a policy, the adoption of a policy proposal can also be claimed as the success of the EPP. Claiming credit for a policy emphasizes victory and therefore implies political conflict, and that credit is not due to other actors. However, this code does not have an opposite that represents depoliticization. Following Schimmelfennig (2020, p. 9), the opposite of claiming credit is obfuscating responsibility, which is naturally near impossible to observe in texts.

A different separate depoliticization code has been selected that fills this gap. This code is applied to the pieces of text that frame and justify a position as the most efficient, based on arguments of expertise or research results and/or aimed at optimization, which is therefore called ‘efficiency/optimization/expertise argument’. While this is more often associated with supranational actors that are expected to be technocratic or apolitical, such as the European Commission (Schimmelfennig, 2020; Bressanelli et al., 2020), political parties can also rely on these arguments in an attempt to hide conflict and choice. It is different from the win-win frame in the sense that win-win still mentions that everybody’s interests are served, while this code does not apply to references to any interests, and instead captures arguments of objectivity.

Similarly, controversies may also be reframed as technical or legal issues (Schimmelfennig, 2020; Bressanelli et al. 2020), once again hiding political conflict and more often associated with institutions such as the European Commission. This final form of depoliticization is aptly coded as ‘technical/legal language’. Lastly, the fourth and final coded aspect of politicization is derived from the expansion of actors and engagement dimension. Captured with the code ‘transparency, communication, responsiveness and inclusion’, this applies to pieces of texts that highlight that the EPP is or has been in close contact with their constituency, for example through public meetings. This also concerns statements that the EPP is listening and giving voice to their problems and calling for more direct participation in the policy-making process.

Table 3.1

Codes capturing aspects of politicization and depoliticization

Politicization codes	Depoliticization codes
Claiming credit	Consensus/compromise language
Conflictual language	Efficiency/optimization/expertise argument
Transparency, communication, responsiveness and inclusion	Technical/legal language
Redistribution, winners-losers frame	Win-win frame

There are aspects of politicization that cannot be measured through a textual analysis alone. For example, an increasing frequency of publications on a subject relates to the salience and visibility dimension of politicization. To that end, the methodology of this research is not limited to textual analysis alone. The contextual sensitivity described in the section on the discourse analytical approach, combined with a comprehensive timeline of relevant events, makes it possible to identify key events that have initiated the politicization of agriculture

3.3 Additional interviews

In order to supplement and check the findings from the textual analysis, semi-structured elite interviews with party officials have provided an alternative source of information enabling data triangulation. To that end, I was able to arrange two interviews with members of the Dutch center-right political party Farmer Citizen Movement (BBB). The first had been a candidate MEP for the 2024 elections, previously a candidate MEP for the rival Christian-democratic CDA party, and with a career as a public affairs consultant in Brussels. The second participant is a board member and co-founder of the BBB, who had participated in the exploratory talks with the political groups of the European Parliament.

Agriculture is one of the key focal points of the BBB, having risen in popularity and gaining momentum as a consequence of the Dutch nitrogen crisis and the following Dutch farmers' protests in the 2019-2022 period (Pricop, 2023). At the time of writing this thesis, the BBB has joined the EPP group in the European Parliament after the 2024 elections. These two interview participants were able to provide me with invaluable insights from the perspective of a farmer-focused national political party regarding the agricultural policies of the EPP group and in what way its position has shifted.

The interviews have not been coded in a systematic manner. Rather, the findings of the textual analysis, cross-referenced with the timeline of events, are then triangulated with the data from the interviews. With only two interviews there is no need for extended coding procedures, as the potential evidence that is deemed relevant based on the first findings can be found by manually skimming through the interview transcripts.

3.3.1 Recruiting interview participants

The interviews have been arranged through a relative of mine who opened a few doors for me. This person got me into contact with (old) colleagues and also agreed to bring me along to two network events that were centered around agricultural policies and took place at the beginning of the campaign for the European parliamentary elections of June 2024. One was the LTO-spring event and the other was a members meeting of the BBB. These events provided me with the opportunity to speak to the persons-of-interests in person which I assumed would increase my chances over a cold approach via e-mail. I also reasoned that going out of your way to meet these people in person would show dedication to the research and communicate a common interest in European agricultural policies.

There, I was able to approach and get into contact with relevant (candidate) MEPs and other party officials. Before going to these events, however, I had prepared myself by writing down the things I could not say to the potential interview participants because of the risk that it might reveal information that could bias the participants. However, in order to get the potential participants to agree to an interview, I had also written down the things I could explain about the subject of this thesis and where my interest in agricultural policies come from. This way I could establish some rapport without sacrificing neutrality and objectivity (Patton, 2015; Damhuis & De Jonge, 2022).

I had approached many people and got quite a few people to accept being interviewed at a later time. However, upon e-mailing and calling them using the business cards I had been given, I only got a few responses back. Of the three party officials that I had been able to schedule an appointment with, one had to be cancelled last-minute due to an interview with a large media outlet, which they had prioritized. Luckily, I was still able to arrange two other interviews. The first had been an extensive one-and-a-half hour interview, which took place in-person at their personal residence. For the second one, I was only able to arrange a phone call with more targeted questions that took place during commute.

3.3.2 Preparing interviews

In line with the recommendations from the contribution of Damhuis and De Jonge (2022), I committed to meeting my interview participants at their personal residence if they were comfortable inviting me there. I wanted to be as little inconvenience as possible to them to ensure they would feel comfortable to agreeing to participate in this research. On top of that, “granting the interviewee the benefit of having the ‘home court advantage’ can give them the sense that they are in control of the interview process” (Damhuis & De Jonge, 2022, p. 5), which may make the participant more inclined to open up and answer honestly.

Regarding clothing, I opted for a semi-formal nondescript outfit. I deemed semi-formal to be the most fitting for an elite interview, taking place at their personal residence as opposed to an office setting. A nondescript outfit is important to convey neutrality and to avoid potential “cultural distaste” (Damhuis & De Jonge, 2022, p. 6) that may influence the data produced in the conversation.

In preparation of the interviews, I had written semi-structured interview protocols (Appendix A). I made different interview protocols for different participants because of their different roles. The participants each had their own career paths and held different positions, providing me with the opportunity to ask different questions, although there was also some overlap. For the second interview, which had to take place via a phone-call during the commute of the interview participant, I had to shorten the interview protocol to a few key questions.

Furthermore I had prepared a consent form (Appendix B) in order to provide the interview participants with the necessary assurances. These assurances include that the information they shared would only be used for the completion of this thesis, that it would be handled with strict confidentiality if they so desired, and that only the student researcher and the thesis supervisor(s) will have access to the interview material. The consent form also included a paragraph with a data management plan and offered the participant the ability to decline or accept that the interview would be recorded.

3.3.3 Interview participants

At the time of writing this thesis, both interview participants are members of the same Dutch political party affiliated with the EPP group. However, their histories, roles and functions within and outside the political fraction are different.

Participant 1 had been a candidate MEP in 2019 for a different Dutch political party affiliated with the EPP (CDA), before joining their current party (BBB). Although not having made it to the European Parliament in the 2019 elections, this participant is experienced with European agricultural policies nonetheless, having worked as a public affairs consultant in Brussels for horticulture organizations since 2010, before going independent starting in 2023. This experience provided me with the additional opportunity to explore an outsider view on the earlier events of the investigated time-period. At the time of writing this thesis, Participant 1 is a candidate MEP for the elections of 2024 on the list of the BBB, which is set to join the EPP group.

Participant 2 is a board member and co-founder of the Dutch BBB party, known in full as the Farmer Citizen Movement (*BoerBurgerBeweging*). As board member, he had been involved with the talks this party had with the EPP group when they were in the process of deciding which political group to join after the 2024 European Parliament election. With agriculture as one of the key focal points of the BBB, this political party is expected to be mainly interested in the agricultural positions of the European political groups. Therefore, his personal experiences taking part in the talks between the BBB and the EPP group, could provide invaluable insights into the potentially shifting agricultural positions of the EPP, also regarding the Green Deal.

3.3.4 Reflections and positionality

I have kept an interview diary for myself in order to reflect on all my thoughts, perceptions, observations of non-verbal communication, the setting, and other variables that could potentially influence the results from the interviews which need to be taken into account before drawing conclusions. Most importantly I reflected on my positionality as a researcher and my relation with the interview participants.

I first spoke to Participant 1 at a small BBB members meeting where I introduced myself and the close relative that had brought me along as a guest, and explained that I was working on this thesis. The small-scale setting of the event with largely only members of the BBB party, including my close relative, is likely to have had the effect that I was seen as an ally. This was further compounded by the fact that I showed an interest in the agricultural policies of the EU, explaining that I am a masters' student of political science and grew up on a farm myself. I assume that this has had a positive effect on the interview, because Participant 1 would have seen me as trustworthy, feeling free to open up.

Participant 2 is a personal acquaintance and (old) colleague of the aforementioned close relative. As such, the same effect of trustworthiness applies, although the participant seemed to have forgotten that our common acquaintance is a close relative of mine, until after I told him at the end of the interview.

Furthermore, because both of the interview participants are politicians and still fulfill a role within the BBB party, they still have skin-in-the-game. This may affect the extent to which their answers reflect their own thoughts, or conveys the interest of the political party. Participant 2 indicated that he did not need to remain anonymous, which makes it likely that he stuck to a

narrative that is favorable to the BBB. This should be taken into account before drawing conclusions from the interview data.

Regarding my own positionality, it must be acknowledged that my own background of growing up on a farm in a rural town and having a relative that is a member of the BBB party, holds the potential of skewing my judgment of the data. However, as a researcher, I am obliged to remain as objective as possible and I have done so to the best of my ability.

Chapter 4: empirical analysis – part 1: background information, historical observations and initial evidence

It is important to understand the context in which the press releases are published. Because timing of the press releases' publications is tied into the steps that the legislative proposals have to go through, this section will first show what the legislative process has looked like for the most important topics.

Upon analyzing the contents, it has become clear that there are a few topics in relation to agriculture that emerge more frequently than others. For obvious reasons, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU is one of the more frequent topics, as well as the Green Deal of which the 'Farm to Fork Strategy' and the 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' are core parts affecting agriculture. Below I will highlight the developments of these topics during the 2019-2024 EP term. In order to be able to do so, I will begin with a short overview what the legislative process looks like under regular circumstances, so that the developments of legislative proposals can be better understood.

4.1 Ordinary Legislative Procedure

Agricultural policy has a long and complicated history in the EU, undergoing many reforms and subject to a complicated decision-making process with varying groups of actors involved under different circumstances. I will not explain these procedures here as it would only complicate this chapter unnecessarily and serve little to the objective of understanding strategic politicization by a political party or group. For understanding the context in which the press releases are released, it suffices to mention that the CAP is subject to co-decision as part of the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP), following from the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

As part of the OLP, the European Commission has the right to initiate legislation, while the European Parliament (EP) and the member states in the Council of the EU together hold the legislative power. The EP may also ask the Commission to submit legislative proposals through an 'own-initiative report'. After the Commission has submitted a proposal, the EP can either adopt it or introduce amendments, after which the Council can decide to accept the EP's decision or amend it and returning it to the EP for a second reading (Council of the European Union, 2024b). This process can get stretched even further, but for now it is only important to

understand this basic procedure and how the different institutions interact regarding agricultural policies.

Before regulatory proposals are voted on in the plenary EP, they first go through Committees who adopt reports on the proposals and can propose amendments to the plenary EP. These Committees consist of MEPs from each political group. For regulations mainly concerning agriculture, the Agriculture & Rural Development (AGRI) Committee is designated to prepare positions for the plenary EP. Other Committees can be appointed to the same issue as ‘associated Committee’ when the issue falls within the competence of more than one Committee (Rule 57).

One way to ease this process a little is through trilogues. These are informal meetings between representatives of the Council, the EP Committee(s) and the Commission. The agreements resulting from these meetings, however, still need to go through the OLP to become formal.

4.2 Common Agricultural Policy

4.2.1 CAP Reform

During the analyzed period between 2019 and 2024, the EU has been working towards reforming the CAP for the 2023-2027 period. On the first of June 2018, the Commission presented the first legislative proposals to this end (European Commission, n.d.). However, with the Green Deal being presented at 11 December 2019, the EP made a request to the Commission to analyze the contribution of the CAP reform proposals and to align this with the Green Deal. In May 2020 the Commission came with an answer to this, combined with the presentation of the ‘Farm to fork Strategy’ and ‘Biodiversity Strategy for 2030’ (Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2020).

Meanwhile, the old CAP was set to last from 2014 until 2020. However, because of lengthy negotiations on the EU budget and the CAP reform, the new CAP was not ready yet (Milicevic, 2023). A transitional regulation had to take its place in 2021 and 2022, which was mainly an extension of the old CAP (European Commission, n.d.).

On 23 October 2020, the EP adopted its first-reading position on the legislative proposals with a text that formed the basis for trilogue negotiations. These took place between 10 November 2020 until 25 June 2021 when an informal agreement was reached. After the EU agriculture ministers had endorsed the agreement in June, on 9 September 2021 the members of the AGRI Committee in the EP voted in favor of the CAP strategic plans regulation, followed by a large majority in the plenary vote (Rossi, 2024). The agreement became formalized on 2 December 2021, after which the member states were required to submit their own strategic plans for CAP. Finally, the strategic plans entered into force at the start of 2023 after approval from the Commission (European Commission, n.d.).

4.2.2 CAP after protests

Because of the outbreak of farmers' protests in many member states at the start of 2024, the new CAP of 2023 was already undergoing a review. On the 26th of February, the member state ministers in Agriculture and Fisheries Council met to discuss the crisis in the agricultural sector. Along with short-term solutions, the Council of Ministers urged the Commission to propose targeted amendments to the CAP (Council of the European Union, 2024c).

As a consequence, the Commission published new proposals in line with the Council's suggestions on March 15, easing the administrative burden for farmers and providing more flexibility for complying with environmental conditionalities (European Commission, 2024c). Four days later, the AGRI Committee of the EP starts discussing the proposals, in which they agreed to speed up the process through an urgent procedure (Arboleas, 2024). This enables the proposals to move directly to plenary EP without prior approval by the AGRI Committee. As a result the plenary EP voted in favor of applying the urgent procedure on April 11th and accepted the proposals on April 24th, simplifying and easing the burden of the CAP on farmers (European Parliament, 2024). With the Council also adopting the review of these basic acts of the CAP on May 13 (Council of the European Union, 2024d), the CAP has undergone another transformation shortly before the elections of June 2024 as a result of the pressures from the farmers' protests.

4.3 Green Deal

The European Green Deal is a large overarching strategy in the shape of a package of policy initiatives, with the main aim of making the EU climate neutral by 2050 as part of its commitments under the Paris Agreement (Council of the European Union, 2024a). It encompasses many initiatives such as the 'Fit for 55 Package', the 'European Climate Law', the 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' and the 'Farm to fork Strategy' (Council of the European Union, 2024a). During its five year mandate, the Commission has rolled out many policy proposals as part of the Green Deal. Not all of these are relevant to agriculture which is why this research has limited its scope mainly to proposals that are part of the 'Farm to fork Strategy' and 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030'. Proposals under these strategies have been argued to negatively affect agriculture and farmers the most. Much like the CAP, any policies proposed under the umbrella of the Green Deal, also have to go through the OLP.

4.3.1 'Farm to Fork Strategy' and 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030'

The 'Farm to Fork Strategy' is first presented by the Commission on May 20th 2020 alongside the 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030', to announce how the CAP was going to become compatible with the Green Deal (Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2020). The 'Farm to Fork Strategy' encompasses an Action Plan of 27 legislative and non-legislative measures to be proposed piecemeal from then until 2024 (Šajin, 2024). The 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' is a continuation of the pre-existing biodiversity strategy to 2020, but now included under the umbrella of the Green Deal with major improvements.

On 16 January 2020, the EP already “adopted a resolution calling on the Commission to move away from voluntary commitments and design a biodiversity strategy for 2030 that sets legally binding targets for the EU and its Member States” (Halleux, 2024, p. 1). At the presentation on the 20th of May, these legally binding targets were included in the proposal.

On 28 May 2021, the EP Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted its report on the ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030’. On the 9th of June, the plenary EP voted in favor with a large majority, and even added 200 recommendations to strengthen the strategy (Halleux, 2024). On top of that, the EP “called on the Commission to submit in 2022 a proposal for a legally binding biodiversity governance framework, following a comprehensive impact assessment” (Halleux, p. 2), in the shape of a biodiversity law.

After the ENVI and AGRI Committees’ vote on the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’ in September of 2021, the plenary EP adopted an own-initiative report on the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’ on 19 October 2021, largely supporting the vision and goals of the strategy (European Parliament, 2023c). The EP also approved an amendment “on the need of impact assessment following the publication of studies on the effects of the strategy on agricultural production” (Šajn, 2024, p. 2).

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’, and the Green Deal in general became heavily debated regarding worries over food security (Šajn, 2024). As will be shown in next chapter, the EPP group also expressed its critique by arguing that the proposals under the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy’ and the ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030’ may reduce food production significantly.

Because explaining the status and historical process of each proposal under these strategies would overcomplicate this chapter, I will only discuss the two most important and controversial ones: a nature restoration law, which has been adopted; and revised rules for the sustainable use of pesticides, which had to be withdrawn (Halleux, 2024).

4.3.2 Nature Restoration Law and the Sustainable Use Regulation

On the 22nd of June 2022, the Commission presented the proposal on a Nature Restoration Law (NRL) as well as a regulation (SUR) intended to replace and improve the Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) (European Commission, 2022).

Then, the ENVI Committee in the EP, together with the Committee on Fisheries (PECH) and AGRI Committee as associated Committees, had to review the NRL proposal. Both the AGRI and PECH Committees rejected this proposal in May 2023, while the ENVI Committee “voted on amendments to the proposed text on 15 and 27 June 2023” (Halleux, 2024, p. 1). With the final vote tied, there was no majority of support for the law, which meant that the proposal had to go to the plenary EP for a vote on its rejection (Halleux). This rejection did not pass however and the EP adopted a position with a significantly amended version of the proposal, including many flexibilities, on the 12th of July 2023 (Halleux). Later in November, the co-legislators reached a deal, and on the 27th of February 2024, the plenary EP adopted this agreement on the NRL (Halleux).

The SUR was also referred to the ENVI and AGRI Committees. The ENVI Committee had appointed a rapporteur from the Greens political group on the 1st of November 2022. However the ENVI Committee adopted its report much later on the 24th of October 2023, supporting the 50% reduction target of PPPs by 2030 and including a few other requirements. The report then moved to the plenary EP on the 7th of November, where “over 200 amendments were tabled on the text” (Halleux, 2024, p. 2). However, by November 22nd the EP still rejected the proposal altogether. The amended text was rejected and neither was the text sent back to the ENVI Committee for improvements (Halleux). At that point, only the Council could determine whether the proposal would go back to the EP for a second reading. However, the Commission had already decided to withdraw the proposal in February 2024, responding to the farmers’ protests (Von der Leyen, 2024).

4.4 Timeline of events

Although the key developments of the CAP and the two selected proposals under the Green Deal have been described and explained above, it is still important to observe them within a larger context. To that end, I have built an extensive timeline with all developments regarding the domestic politicization of agriculture and the roll-out of the Green Deal.

This timeline has been maintained and updated with new developments throughout the process of writing of this thesis, which started in January 2024. Developments from before 2024 have for a large part been uncovered using a website from the European Parliament called Legislative Train (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train>). This website is a useful tool to monitor the progress that legislative proposals have gone through.

The events and developments in the timeline have been color coded based on ‘where’ they took place. The events that pertain to EU institutions have been color coded as blue, while each member state has been ascribed a different color. Events or publications that cannot be ascribed to the EU or a member state remain black. Color coding the events and developments helps with locating particularities and keeping the rather extensive timeline readable.

The timeline has been included in the appendix (Appendix C) and serves as a tool to cross-reference any findings¹.

¹ Because I am Dutch myself and therefore know more of political developments there, more events are included in the timeline that relate to developments of the politicization of agriculture in the Netherlands.

Chapter 5: empirical analysis – part 2: analysis, findings and results

5.1 Initial analysis: The (de)politicization codes applied to the EPP press releases

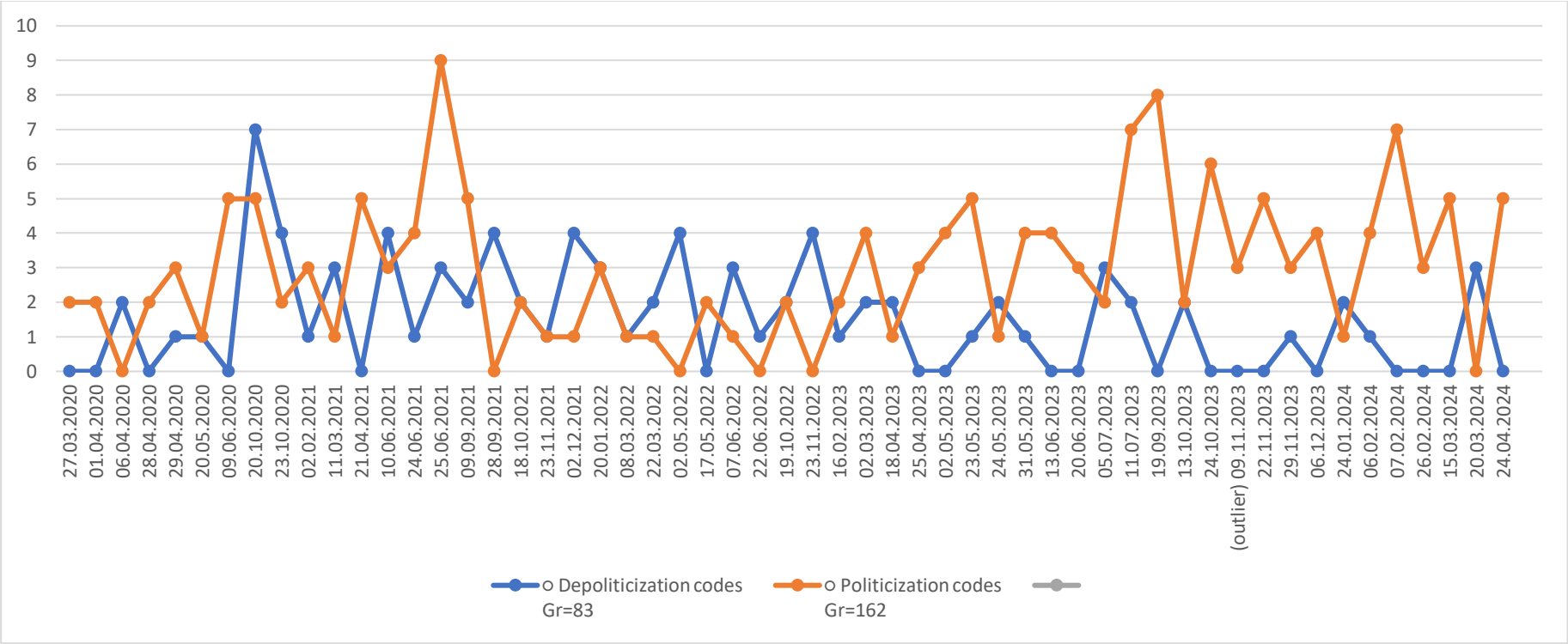
The 55 press releases have been analyzed using the coding scheme described in the methods chapter. Although I have argued that these codes cannot be responsibly quantified, it is still useful to get a first sense of the data by visualizing it. Grouping the politicization and depoliticization codes and spreading the different press releases out on the X-axis in the order of their publication, has resulted in the Figure 5.1 below. From this figure, a few careful observations may be made.

The main thing to look for when analyzing politicization, would be a trend depicting an increasing difference between politicizing and depoliticizing communication, with more of the former and less of the latter. With a few noticeable exceptions, which could potentially be considered outliers, the lines on the left half of the figure are all relatively close to each other. It is safe to assume that in this period, politicization may occur incidentally, but it does not appear consistently.

However, starting in the first months of 2023, the lines representing depoliticization and politicization start to show a diverging trend. Apart from five or six exceptions, each press release contains considerably more pieces of text to which politicization codes have been applied, compared to depoliticization codes. Although it is hard to say from this figure where exactly between March 2023 and May 2023 the politicization trend really starts, the difference between the two frequencies is undoubtedly greater after those months compared to before.

Figure 5.1

Amount of politicization and depoliticization codes applied to the press releases



Furthermore, the exception to the trend display both a lesser amount of applied politicization codes as well as a greater amount of depoliticization codes. This is an interesting observation that may offer support in the belief that the texts are more deliberately politicized or depoliticized, starting in 2023.

Table 5.1

The subjects of EPP press releases

Date of press release	Covid-19 pandemic	CAP	Green Deal Strategies		War in Ukraine	Other subjects <i>Notes in italic</i>
			SUR	NRL		
27.03.2020	X		X			
01.04.2020	X					
06.04.2020	X					
28.04.2020		X				
29.04.2020	X					
20.05.2020	X		X			
09.06.2020	X					
<i>Interval</i>						
20.10.2020		X				
23.10.2020		X				
<i>Interval</i>						
02.02.2021	X					
11.03.2021						Countryside/rural
21.04.2021						Climate Law politicization
10.06.2021						Cage farming
24.06.2021						Climate Law
25.06.2021		X				
<i>Interval</i>						
09.09.2021			X			
28.09.2021						Methane depoliticization
18.10.2021			X			
23.11.2021		X				
02.12.2021						Animal transport
20.01.2022						Animal transport
08.03.2022					X	
22.03.2022			X		X	
02.05.2022						Organic farming depoliticization
17.05.2022					X	
07.06.2022						Climate Law
22.06.2022			X	X	X	
<i>Interval</i>						
19.10.2022			X	X	X	
23.11.2022						Large predators depoliticization

<i>Interval</i>				
16.02.2023				Fertilizers
02.03.2023		X		X
18.04.2023				X
25.04.2023			X	X
02.05.2023		X	X	X
23.05.2023			X	
24.05.2023			X	
31.05.2023			X	X
13.06.2023				
20.06.2023			X	
05.07.2023				NGTs
11.07.2023				Industry emissions
19.09.2023	X			<i>Position paper</i>
13.10.2023				Glyphosate
24.10.2023		X		
09.11.2023			X	
22.11.2023		X		
29.11.2023				Industry emissions
06.12.2023	X			<i>Position paper</i>
24.01.2024				NGTs
06.02.2024		X		
07.02.2024	X	X		X
26.02.2024			X	
15.03.2024	X			
20.03.2024				X
24.04.2024	X			

5.2 Content of the EPP press releases through time.

In order to get an even better sense of the data from the press releases, I have depicted in Table 5.1 what the main subjects are of each of the texts in chronological order. In doing so, we may be able to see if the trends, or even individual outliers, are correlated to specific subjects. Four main subjects have been identified in the press releases, being: the covid-19 pandemic; the CAP; the Russian invasion of Ukraine; and the Green Deal, which splits when the SUR and the NRL, as described in chapter four, are named separately. The column on the outer-right shows the subject of the press release when it does not fit within the main subjects of the other columns.

The columns representing the subjects have been given colors. When a section of press releases within a column have been colored, that means they are connected to each other in the sense that they refer to the same issue. The CAP for example, has been divided into four groups of interconnected texts, indicated with the gray color. The first group of CAP related texts concern the debates within the EP on the CAP until the EP has adopted its first-reading position, marking the start trilogue negotiations on November 10th. The second group concerns two texts reflecting on the informal agreement that was reached in the trilogue negotiations on 25 June 2021 and when this agreement gets adopted in the EP on 13 November 2021. The third group

is different, because these concern press releases based on position papers of the EPP regarding the CAP, as indicated in the column containing notes on the outer-right. The fourth and final group of CAP related texts celebrate and reflect on the decisions and votes that simplified the CAP in reaction to the farmers' protests.

In a similar manner to the texts on the CAP I just described, the cels in the other five columns have also been color coded into groups. From this can be seen that six of the first seven texts are about the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on agriculture. These all concern calls directed at the Commission for measures to help, protect and compensate people working in the agricultural sector, including the later text on the 2nd of February 2021.

The majority of press releases from the beginning of March 2022 up until the end of April 2023 refer to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is not always the main subject, but often used as an argument for the position-taking in other issues, such as the Green Deal, by referring to the necessity of food security. The following quote from Christine Schneider, MEP and member of the ENVI Committee, found in the press release of 22 June 2022 serves as an example: "In a threatening situation in the midst of times of war in Ukraine, the Commission's proposals would result in significant yield reductions and would threaten global food security" (as cited in EPP Group, 2022, para. 6).

The cels in the outer-right column have also been accorded a specific color when texts referring to the same subject are released in the same period. This is only the case for the proposals on the European Climate Law and on the transport conditions of live animals. Other subjects that recur are about new genomic techniques (NGT) and on industry emissions, however, because these concern only two each and are not close enough temporally, it is highly unlikely that these subjects would induce a trend in politicization, although they may fit into the trend.

Green Deal

This leads to the final columns with the press releases that focus on the 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' and the 'Farm to Fork Strategy', at a later point specifically the NRL and SUR proposals. From this column, the first group consisting of two texts contain an outspoken position against the timing of the 'Farm to Fork Strategy', which ends with a regret on the 20th of May 2020 that, despite the EPP's push for a delay, the Commission presents the 'Farm to Fork strategy' on that day. The second identified group of Green Deal related texts also consist of only two press releases. These are published in the period between the ENVI and AGRI Committees' vote on the 'Farm to Fork Strategy' and when the EP adopts its own-initiative report on 19 October 2021 as described above in chapter 4.

Then, starting on the 22 March 2022, this is followed by an extended period of interrelated press releases on both strategies and the specific NRL and SUR proposals. Notably, this group of press releases, published until around May and June 2023, were all framed with arguments referring to the war in Ukraine. However, this started to decrease during May itself and it was barely mentioned explicitly since then. This first section also covers the initial stage of the policy-process for proposals on the SUR and NRL, with the NRL proposal being rejected by

the AGRI and PECH Committees in May 2023, and the ENVI Committee reaching a tied vote in June, as described in the previous chapter.

The following period of published press releases, is characterized by less references to the war in Ukraine; the publication of position papers and conferences on agriculture by the EPP; and a few other alternating subjects such as on NGTs and industry emissions. In terms of the policy-processes described in the previous chapter, in this period the NRL had been sent to plenary EP in July 2023 where the proposal became heavily amended, followed by negotiations with the member states as co-legislators, reaching a provisional agreement in November 2023, and a final agreement on 27 February 2024 in the plenary EP. In this period, the SUR had passed through the ENVI Committee in October, going to plenary in November where it got rejected altogether that same month, ending in a withdrawal by the Commission at the start of February 2024.

5.3 Assessing a correlation between the observed trend and the policy proposals.

Combining the observations from the figure containing the (de)politicization codes applied to the press releases, with the previous section on the identified groups of content related press releases, may reveal whether a specific event or proposal has induced politicization. At a first glance, the start of the identified politicization trend in Figure 5.1 in the first half of 2023 may be linked to the SUR and NRL proposals. As described above, these proposals faced significant resistance in the Committees in this period.

Furthermore, looking at the entire period since then, it is quite striking that out of the six exceptions to the politicization trend, five focus on subjects other than the SUR and NRL. To be sure, the six exceptions found in the graph are the following press releases:

- 18.04.2023 on the war in Ukraine
- 24.05.2023 on NRL
- 05.07.2023 on NGTs
- 13.10.2023 on glyphosate
- 24.01.2024 on NGTs
- 20.03.2024 on the war in Ukraine

While this further supports the belief in a connection between the politicization trend and the SUR and NRL proposal, it must be noted that correlation is not always causation.

Therefore, the link between the observed trend of politicization in the texts and the subjects of the press releases will need to be tested more directly by diving deeper into the specific proposals, supplemented by the data produced in the elite interviews.

5.4 Elite interviews

Because the elite interviews were conducted at an early stage in the process of writing this thesis, not all questions and answers have been focused at answering the specific research questions that ended up in the final product. In this section, I will only refer to the questions and answers that have remained relevant to a certain degree.

The following comes from a pair of interviews carried out with members of the Dutch BBB party. This party is associated with the EPP party group during both the campaigning period as well as after the 2024 European Parliament elections. The first participant is referred to using a pseudonym, while the second participant shall be mentioned by name.

5.4.1 Participant 1

Date of interview: 29.04.2024

Upon asking the question whether the Dutch farmers' protests of 2019 had an effect on political parties in the European Parliament (EP), Participant 1 replied that farmers' protests in Brussels occur regularly and that people would therefore be less impressed by them. Participant 1 added that they had observed that things started moving about two years ago. This means Participant 1 was referring to 2022 or possibly 2021.

Participant 1 continued that this may have had something to do with the resignation of Commissioner Timmermans, who had been in charge of the Green Deal. Participant 1 argued that this may have offered more room for maneuvering, with political parties feeling more free and also more inclined to be a little more responsive to the farmers' objections, especially those parties whose natural constituency this was.

However, Participant 1 indicates that they are not very knowledgeable on protests and media attention for policies from the CAP, because the ornamental and horticultural sector does not receive funds from the CAP. Participant 1 only experienced those happenstances laterally.

Upon asking whether the participant had noticed that certain political parties have shifted their positions on agriculture or the Green Deal, Participant 1 indicated that this had certainly happened. The participant argued that, at the start of the Green Deal and the proposed strategies such as the 'Farm to Fork Strategy' and the 'Biodiversity Strategy', everybody was still on board to get it done. However, when these had gotten shape through specific regulations, all policies were changed and everything had to be in line with the Green Deal. This is when people realized the obstacles and problems it brought according to Participant 1.

When I asked which political groups had shifted in that sense, Participant 1 indicated that this had indeed been the EPP group, but also Renew Europe, ECR and ID groups. Furthermore, when I asked when this had reached a tipping point, Participant 1 responded that this had happened when the BBB had won the regional elections in the Netherlands with a landslide victory and were consequently received with open arms by the EPP, Renew, and ECR, and that they had realized they had to do something with their farmer constituency. Participant 1 later added that the EPP had even included some input from the BBB in their party manifesto.

These latter views need to be taken with a grain of salt, because the participant is also a member of the BBB party. As such they have skin-in-the-game and are biased to answer in a direction that is favorable to their own party.

After asking Participant 1 a multitude of questions related to the potential electoral competition the BBB party and the EPP group experience ahead of the elections, the participant indicated that they feel the most competition with the left flank, and that they are not that afraid of the rise of hard-right parties, with whom they can often cooperate. This is an indication that a position shift regarding agriculture is unlikely to be the result of a copying strategy in anticipation of hard-right success.

On another note, Participant 1 answered that lobbyists such as the participant do not ask of the politicians they speak to, to express themselves in a particular way as regards publicity. This means I can safely conclude that lobbying work is unlikely to have influenced strategic politicization. This supports the belief that deliberate politicization is the result of the political group's own self-interested behavior. However, lobbyists do aim to influence the position-taking of MEPs and in particular rapporteurs or shadow rapporteurs, also to suggest to them to propose certain amendments on behalf of a problem in the sector, according to Participant 1. Participant 1 continues by saying that when at some point a bond of trust has been built, they will even come to the lobbyist with questions whether a particular amendment indeed fulfills their needs.

Furthermore, Participant 1 indicated that when elections are nearing, lobbyists offer their views to the political parties on what the next legislative term should include as well as their views on proposals that are still on the table. In this way, political parties can include these views and positions in their party manifesto's. However, Participant 1 adds that political parties are already quite set on their positions related to agriculture. Therefore, only parties that are already more affiliated to agriculture may be influenced through these attempts.

Upon asking whether political parties change their policies when they observe an emerging threat in the polls, Participant 1 indicates that this is unlikely to be the case. The participant indicates that political parties look at salient issues, such as the current issues on migration, defense and security. Food security is an example of strategic independence, given shape by the ideas and ideology of the BBB.

5.4.2 Participant 2: Erik Stegink

Date of interview: 11.05.2024

Erik Stegink, a board member and co-founder of the BBB party, had been present at some of the talks they have had with the European political groups in preparation for the European elections of 2024. In the search for a political group to hope to join, Stegink indicated that they were mostly looking for where they feel most at home, rather than the actual content.

They had an outspoken preference to join the EPP group, although it is up to the group to determine whether the MEPs of national political parties may join the group. Stegink told me that their preference to join the group came mostly from the fact that it is a large political group,

in which you can accomplish the most. Furthermore, he argued that other political groups are not as united as the EPP, and therefore often vote divided. This would make it harder to achieve something, he argued.

Notably, Stegink also shared that the BBB had been able to adjust the EPP a little regarding agriculture, as a result of the conversations they had, which is similar to the story told by Participant 1. After asking what points they had been able to introduce to the EPP, Stegink answered along the following lines: In particular, the freedom that each country should be able to determine a bit more for itself, in the area of certain conditions for matters such as nitrogen and derogation, based on science. He continued that there should also be a more specific look at ‘measuring and knowing’, so that soil types are taken into account and so that there may be different standards based on science.

Stegink argued however, that they had observed that the EPP had already started to shift their positions on the Green Deal. Upon asking when exactly they had observed this, he answered that this was the case when different decisions were made regarding plant protection products (PPPs), at which point the winds shifted.

5.4.3 Reflections on the interviews

Regarding the specific point in time when the interview participants had observed a position shift regarding agriculture, the first participant indicated that this had happened when more specific Green Deal regulations were proposed, and not yet during the proposals of the ‘Farm to Fork’ and ‘Biodiversity’ Strategies. Erik Stegink confirmed this story by saying that this had to do with the regulation on PPPs, which is the SUR.

Both participants also explained that the most important reason for joining the EPP had been the fact that it was a larger and more united political group compared to the other political groups on the right. Therefore, the agricultural position of the EPP was not valued to the same degree, although still important considering the fact that they had watched and observed the EPP’s positional shift regarding the Green Deal and its policies affecting agriculture.

Although these two interviews confirm each other’s stories, they must still be regarded as one piece of evidence conform the process-tracing method, because they are both active members of the same political party. The fact that these two participants have answered in the same manner could still be the result of a dominant frame within the party’s discourse that the members have adopted and/or internalized.

5.5 Summary of findings

From the findings described in chapter four and chapter five, it can be safely concluded that politicization has been identified as having started at the time when the SUR and the NRL proposals were discussed and debated in the Committees of the European Parliament. By applying the coding scheme focused on politicizing communication, to the selected EPP press releases that included agriculture, a clear trend of increasing politicization has been observed.

Upon further investigation, it became clear that the beginning of this trend could be attributed to the final stages of the SUR and NRL proposals in the PECH, AGRI and ENVI Committees of the European Parliament, where the proposals were heavily contested. The supplementary interview data also confirmed that the EPP had shifted its position on agriculture and on the Green Deal with these concrete proposals, and not yet at the time of the proposals of the corresponding 'Farm to Fork Strategy' and 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030'.

While these hardened positions were initially mostly legitimated in terms of the war in Ukraine, we have observed that this frame had largely disappeared since June 2023, with only minor references to food security from then on. Because the high degree of politicization found in the press releases remained high, and two of the six exceptions to this trend are largely about the war in Ukraine, it can be safely said that the war in Ukraine had not been a constant factor alongside the politicized policies affecting agriculture which therefore does not pose an alternative explanation.

Furthermore, five out of the six exceptions of the observed politicization trend, concern policies other than the NRL and SUR. This further supports the belief that the politicization of agriculture is for the most part linked to these two proposals.

The CAP related press releases provide some analytical difficulties. In the first five texts, there has been one clear instance of a politicized press release. It is difficult to assess whether this may be considered an outlier. Furthermore, within the observed politicized period, there have been two CAP related texts that are actually press releases based on agriculture conferences that the EPP had organized. While these are clearly instances of politicization, because the EPP has sought to communicate with farmers, showing everyone that the EPP is on the side of farmers, they do not concern specific CAP proposals. Lastly, the final two press releases on CAP are published after the announcement of the easing of the CAP rules by the Commission. In both instances the EPP largely claims to fully support this decision, communicating that they understand the struggles of farmers and have always wanted the CAP to be less strict.

Because of these CAP related texts, the politicization trend cannot be wholly attributed to the NRL and SUR proposals alone. Although it may have started with the discussions on these proposals, it continued in other press releases on agriculture, except when they explicitly concerned for the most part a different policy issue

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The politicization of agriculture has been the result of resistance to specific policy proposals as part of the Green Deal. The EPP has seen this as an opportunity to politicize agriculture, against the background of the war in Ukraine. However, this politicization continued in later texts that contained less references to the war and in later texts that did not refer to the SUR and NRL. This indicates that the politicization of agriculture goes beyond these individual proposals, although these seem to have been used as a catalyst of change in politicizing behavior by the EPP.

Because the identified politicization trend was located at a point in time before the outbreak of farmers' protests in Europe, these protests could not have been the cause. While they may have further enabled the continued politicization of agriculture, they are not a key non-substitutable link in the mechanism. The first hypothesis that predicted the EPP would politicize agriculture as a form of politicization management in reaction to domestic politicization, is therefore much less likely to hold true in this case. Only if the EPP had been sensitive to the politicization of agriculture in national domestic settings before the outbreak of protests, would the politicization management theory still be applicable.

Because the timing can also be considered too early to be in anticipation of a perceived threat of rising hard right parties, the contagion effect is also less likely to hold true for this case. The politicizing trend in press releases started more than a year before the elections of 2024 and the events of that period do not look ahead to the elections yet. The only noticeable occurrence at that time seems to be the victory of the BBB in the Dutch regional elections, which was also mentioned by both interview participants. However, I have not been able to find sufficient additional evidence to significantly update the confidence in the belief that this has been the cause of the politicizing of agriculture by the EPP. Because the timing is combined with the publication of the SUR and NRL proposals, and the interview participants are politicians of the BBB, with skin-in-the-game and an interest in magnifying their role, the overall evidence is not yet strong enough and more research is needed.

Literature

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Interview protocol

Master Thesis Interview Protocol: Participant 1

Koen Bergmans (Radboud Universiteit)

Summarize the consent form verbally:

- Onderzoek zal gaan over de positionering van politieke partijen in het Europees Parlement op landbouwbeleid in de afgelopen tien jaar.
- In het interview zullen vragen gesteld worden over uw werkzaamheden en ervaringen in en rond de partijpolitiek van het Europees Parlement.
- Omdat de vragen gaan over uw huidige of vorige werkgever, kan het zijn dat u meningen uit die kritisch zijn ten opzichte van uw organisatie of andere betrokkenen, en dit kan u mogelijk emotioneel of psychologisch ongemak bezorgen.
 - o Ik zal mijn best doen om dit risico zo klein mogelijk te houden. U kunt op elk moment weigeren om vragen te beantwoorden of het interview beëindigen.
- Dat deelname aan dit onderzoek u geen direct voordeel oplevert.
- De informatie die u deelt, zal strikt vertrouwelijk blijven. De informatie die u deelt wordt alleen gebruikt voor mijn masterscriptie en alleen ik en mijn scriptiebegeleider hebben toegang tot het interview materiaal.
 - o Mocht ik de kans aangeboden krijgen om mijn onderzoek te publiceren, dan zal dit in overleg vooraf met u gebeuren.
- Uw anonimiteit wordt beschermd door het gebruik van pseudoniemen of codes wanneer u geciteerd wordt in de tekst.
 - o Voor het onderzoek is het benoemen van uw werkgever of uw politieke partij echter van belang en daarmee is het wel mogelijk dat u indirect wordt geïdentificeerd.
- Alle data worden opgeslagen op deze laptop en op mijn mobiele telefoon, beide met wachtwoord. Andere kopieën van de data zullen op een usb-stick bewaard worden in een vergrendelde lade. Dit toestemmingsformulier hou ik bij me totdat deze gedigitaliseerd wordt, waarna ik het fysieke exemplaar zal vernietigen.
 - o Alle interview data zal na het inleveren van de scriptie alleen nog op een beveiligde usb-stick staan, welke vernietigd zal worden wanneer er geen realistische kans meer is op publicatie.
- U bent niet verplicht deel te nemen aan dit interview, u kunt zich op elk moment terugtrekken of ervoor kiezen een vraag niet te beantwoorden.
 - o Als u zich terug trekt, mag u beslissen welke gegevens nog wel mogen worden gebruikt door de mij.

Dank u voor uw bereidheid om vandaag met mij te spreken. Zoals in eerdere correspondentie vermeld, werk ik momenteel aan een scriptie onderzoek over het landbouwbeleid van de politieke partijen in het Europees Parlement.

Om hier meer inzicht in te krijgen, heb ik een aantal vragen voor u over uw voorgaande werk als public affairs consultant in de EU en eventueel nog over uw huidige lidmaatschap bij de BBB.

Voordat we beginnen, wil ik er zeker van zijn dat u begrijpt wat uw deelname inhoudt en wat uw rechten zijn met betrekking tot het onderzoeksproces.

Ik heb hier een toestemmingsformulier die ik eerst kort voor u zal samenvatten (zie p. 1). Gaat u ermee akkoord dat ik het interview opneem?

[Overhandig toestemmingsformulier].

Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen voordat we beginnen?

Werk als public affairs consultant in de EU

De volgende vragen die ik u ga stellen zullen gaan over uw voorgaande werk als public affairs consultant.

(Want) in een eerder gesprek dat wij hebben gehad op een BBB bijeenkomst in Enkhuizen heeft u verteld dat u voor uw kandidaatschap voor de BBB, een lange tijd heeft gewerkt als public affairs consultant in de EU voor de Nederlandse tuinbouw. Kunt u wat meer vertellen over uw toenmalige werkgever? Wat voor organisatie was dat?

[Vervolg vragen: Wat waren uw taken toentertijd? Kunt u mij vertellen van wanneer tot wanneer u dit werk ongeveer heeft gedaan?]

(To establish rapport and clarify what exactly participant's position is or has been.)

Heeft u toen ook veel met politieke partijen in het Europees Parlement samengewerkt of benaderd? Hoe zag deze samenwerking er uit? Hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?

[Vervolg vragen: Wat waren uw methodes of werkwijzen toentertijd? Werkte u meer met individuele parlementsleden, nationale delegaties, of zelfs met de politieke groepen?]

(To get a sense of how public affairs consultants do lobbying work and where their focus lies.)

Met welke partijen werkte u of uw toenmalige organisatie het meeste samen en wat maakte deze partij(en) aantrekkelijker?

[Vervolg vragen: Ligt de focus meer op partijen die op dezelfde lijn liggen, of op partijen die nog overtuigd moeten worden? Wat voor rol speelt fractiediscipline daar in?]

(Intended to indicate what parties are affected by agricultural lobbying and under what circumstances. Can also reveal differences in party discipline of the political groups.)

Ik neem aan dat u voornamelijk intensief samenwerkt met de politieke partijen wanneer er over een belangrijk voorstel in het parlement gestemd gaat worden.

Werd er ook intensiever of anders samengewerkt met de politieke partijen wanneer er veel media aandacht voor het onderwerp is? Denk bijvoorbeeld aan de boeren protesten van 2019 in Nederland.

[Vervolgfragen: Welke politieke partijen waren er vatbaar voor om hun beleid of standpunten aan te passen temidden de media aandacht?]

(May indicate how domestic salience affects political parties' strategic politicization. Lobbying efforts can also be a confounding variable.)

Wanneer u met een Europese politieke partij samenwerkt en/of poogt te beïnvloeden, dan neem ik aan dat dit met het doel is dat de partij op een bepaalde manier gaat stemmen over een beleidsvoorstel.

Zijn er bij deze samenwerking ook andere doelen naast het beïnvloeden van alleen het stemgedrag van een partij?

[Vervolgfragen: Worden de politieke partijen ook benaderd om bijvoorbeeld anders om zich meer te profileren in de publiciteit of anders uit te drukken in het parlement?]

(Aimed at establishing whether there may be indicators of strategic politicization other than position-taking.)

Ik kan me voorstellen dat de samenwerking met politieke partijen anders verloopt wanneer er verkiezingen aankomen, zoals die in 2014 en 2019, bijvoorbeeld omdat partijen een partijprogramma moeten maken en zich er daarna zo veel mogelijk aan vasthouden.

Op welke manieren veranderen uw werkzaamheden, of pogingen om partijen te beïnvloeden, als er verkiezingen aanstaande waren?

[Vervolgfragen: Waren de partijen in die context meer of minder ontvankelijk voor uw beïnvloedingspogingen? In hoeverre merkte u dat de partijen hun standpunten meer lieten leiden door hun electoraat?]

(May indicate how close elections affect political parties' strategic politicization. Lobbying efforts are also a relevant variable.)

Heeft u ervaringen met politieke partijen die in verkiezingstijd enigszins afkijken bij rivaliserende partijen, dus met een vergelijkbare achterban, wanneer ze hun standpunten moeten bepalen vooraf aan de campagne?

[Vervolgvragen: Herkent u bijvoorbeeld dat partijen hun beleid ~~rond landbouw~~ aanpassen wanneer de opkomst van een andere partij dreigt in de peilingen? Zo ja, kunt u hier een voorbeeld van noemen?]

(Attempt to reveal a contagion effect.)

Klopt mijn beeld dat u voor uw werk op voorhand goed in de gaten moest hebben welke standpunten de partijen op een beleidsvoorstel zouden gaan innemen en waar de kansen liggen op een mogelijke verandering in de standpunten van partijen?

Zo ja, heeft u in uw lange tijd als public affairs consultant wellicht opgemerkt dat bepaalde politieke partijen door de tijd heen andere standpunten zijn gaan innemen ten aanzien van landbouw of bijvoorbeeld onderdelen van de Green Deal?

[Vervolgvragen: Welke partij(en) of politieke groep was dit en wanneer merkte u dit op? Wat denkt u dat hier aan ten grondslag ligt?]

(Intended to uncover a position shift on policies affecting agriculture by political parties in the EP.)

BBB in het Europees Parlement (?)

Ik zal afsluitend nog enkele vragen stellen over uw lidmaatschap van en kandidatuur namens de BBB voor het Europees Parlement.

Sinds wanneer bent u actief betrokken bij de BBB, en was het meteen duidelijk dat u op de Europese afdeling terecht zou komen?

[Vervolgvragen: ?]

Bent u ook betrokken geweest bij de gesprekken die gevoerd zijn met de Europese politieke groepen?

[Vervolgvragen: Wat waren de meest doorslaggevende redenen om te kiezen voor aansluiting bij de EVP? Waarom niet voor Renew of de ECR, zoals andere partijen hebben gedaan die ook claimen voor het belang van de boeren op te komen?]

Kunt u zeggen wie er gaan over de totstandkoming van de standpunten vooraf aan de vorming van het verkiezingsprogramma voor de Europese verkiezingen?

[Vervolgvragen: Hoe groot is de rol van de EVP daarin, ten opzichte van wat de individuele partijen willen?]

BBB campagne voor de Europese Parlementsverkiezingen in juni 2024

Ik zal u nu nog enkele laatste vragen stellen over uw verwachtingen van de aanstaande campagne.

Kijkend naar de peilingen van de aanstaande Europese Parlementsverkiezingen, zien we links van de EVP een verwachte krimp van Renew Europe en alle linkse

partijgroepen, en rechts van de EVP een verwachte groei van zowel ID als ECR. Met welke partijgroep verwacht u dat de EVP, over de hele EU genomen, het meest de strijd zal voeren in de campagne?

[Vervolgvragen: Op welke onderwerpen zal de EVP zich het meest proberen te profileren? Waarmee kan de EVP stemmers van andere partijgroepen wegtrekken?]

(Aims to shed light on the electoral competition, with the intent to find out whether the EPP may experience pressure from the fringe parties, indicating a potential contagion effect.)

Welke onderwerpen zullen volgens u het meest bepalend zijn voor het succes van de campagne van uw partij?

[Vervolgvragen: ?]

(To confirm whether agriculture is or will be salient. Perhaps the domestic campaign will be different from the EU-wide campaign)

Wat ziet u als de grootste dreiging, en wat als de grootste kans, in de campagne?

[Vervolgvragen: Wat kan volgens u het meeste uw uiteindelijke zetelaantal beïnvloeden?]

(Aims to find out whether fringe parties are considered a significant threat. If other threats are identified, such as voter turnout, this will have different implications.)

Hoe groot ziet u de competitie met andere nationale partijen die bij dezelfde partijgroep zijn aangesloten?

[Vervolgvragen: Hoe belangrijk is het onderscheid van uw partij met die van andere partijen uit dezelfde partijgroep in de campagne?]

(Aims to find out whether there is significant inter-group competition. High competition within the partygroup would reduce the likeliness of competition with fringe parties and therefore reduce the likeliness of the contagion effect.)

Bedankt voor uw tijd en bereidheid om mijn vragen te beantwoorden. Is er iets dat ik u niet heb gevraagd over uw ervaringen als lobbyist, of over het landbouwbeleid van de politieke partijen in het Europees Parlement, dat volgens u belangrijk is om te weten? Is er nog iets dat u met mij wilt delen om mij te helpen de standpunten en het partijprogramma van de BBB of de EVP op het gebied van landbouw beter te begrijpen?

Als u nog vragen voor mij heeft, neem dan gerust contact met mij op.

Consent form for interview participants



Consent Form Interview

Working title: Policy positions of political parties in the European Parliament on agriculture from 2019 to 2024.

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Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by ~~master's student~~ Koen Bergmans.

Purpose of the Study: The thesis examines the positioning of political groups and national delegations in the European Parliament on agricultural policies over the past decade.

Participation: My participation will essentially consist of taking part in an interview lasting approximately an hour. During the interview, I will be asked to answer questions about my experiences and practices working with or in the political parties of the European Parliament. The interview has been scheduled for _____ (date and place).

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss how my (previous) organization and I have operated and dealt with policy proposals affecting the agricultural sector. As such, I may express points of view critical of my organization or other actors involved in the process, and this may cause me emotional or psychological discomfort. I have received assurance from the student researcher that every effort will be made to minimize this risk. To this end, I can refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any point.

Benefits: My participation in this study will hold no direct benefit for me. It will, however, contribute to the advancement of knowledge on the dynamics of party politics in the European Parliament, in particular with regards to position-taking on policies affecting the agricultural sector.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of completing a master's thesis and that only the student researcher and thesis supervisor(s) will have

access to my interview material. I have been informed by the student researcher that, in the unlikely event the student will be offered the opportunity to publish the study as an academic paper, I will be consulted prior to such publication.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner: through the use of a pseudonym or code when I am cited in the final text, unless I give permission to use my name. I understand, however, that my employer or membership of a political party can be named as this is relevant to the research objectives of the study, and I understand that this may indirectly lead to the possibility of my identification. Anonymity will also be protected through the measures used to conserve data listed below. I understand, however, that if I choose to be interviewed at my office or near it, colleagues or acquaintances may be aware of my participation in the research project.

Conservation of data: The data collected, including the audio recording of my interview and notes taken by the student researcher, will be kept on the password protected smartphone and computer of the student researcher. Written consent forms will be kept on the researchers until they can be safely digitized and saved to laptops. The hard copy will be shredded. Transcripts will be saved to password protected computers. Additional copies will be kept on a password protected laptop, and/or external hard drive in the locked drawer of the student researcher. After the final submission of the thesis to the thesis supervisors, all files will be saved on one password protected hard drive, which will be destroyed when there are no longer any prospects to publication. All other copies will be deleted from the laptop, and/or external hard drive at the time of submission of the thesis.

- ▲ **Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. Individuals who may have referred me to the research or researchers will not be made aware of my choice to participate or decline. If I choose to withdraw, I get to decide which data gathered until the time of withdrawal may still be used by the student researcher.

Acceptance: I _____ (Name)
agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Koen Bergmans of Radboud University.

I agree to be audio recorded (please circle one): YES NO

I wish to remain anonymous (please circle one): YES NO

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the student researcher.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the thesis supervisor.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Student researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Timeline of key-events for analyzing the politicization of agriculture

- 1 June 2018 (EU) – Commission presents CAP reform proposals
- 14 February 2019 – EP adopts resolution on protection of animals during transport.
- 13 May 2019 (NL) – Stable occupancy in Boxtel
 - o Founding of Farmers Defence Force in the Netherlands
- 23 May 2019 – European elections
- 29 May 2019 – Start of nitrogen crisis in the Netherlands
- 9 September 2019 – Tjeerd de Groot (D66): “halving livestock numbers”
- 1 October 2019 – First farmer protests Malieveld Den Haag
 - o Carola Schouten as minister of agriculture
- 11 & 14 October 2019 – Farmer protests at provincial houses.
- 16 October 2019 - Farmer protests against RIVM.
- 11 December 2019 - **Commission presents European Green Deal.**
- 15 January 2020 – EP resolution on Green Deal
 - o Request to Commission to analyze the contribution of the CAP reform proposal, to fully align it to the goals set in Green Deal.
- 16 January 2020 – EP adopts resolution, calling Commission to move away from voluntary commitments and design biodiversity strategy for 2030 with legally binding targets for EU and member states.
 - o Including specific ones to protect natural areas and restore degraded ecosystems by 2030.
- 20 May 2020 - Farm to fork strategy and biodiversity strategy for 2030 presented by Commission.
 - o Commission adopts proposal on 22 June 2022.
 - o Reveals future CAP reform’s compatibility with the Green Deal.
- 22 July 2020 – More Dutch farmer protests against RIVM.
- 10 September 2020 – Publication of EPP Position Paper on CAP Reform
- 14 October 2020 – Commission put forward strategy to reduce methane emissions.
 - o For the agricultural sector; plans for creation of expert group to analyze life-cycle methane emissions metrics.
- 19 October 2020 – Council of Ministers adopted conclusions to the Farm to Fork Strategy.
 - o Political messages aiming to ensure sufficient and affordable food and a fair income and strong support for primary producers.
 - o Requesting the Commission to base legislative proposals on scientifically-sound ex-ante impact assessments
- 23 October 2020 - Council adopts Conclusions on the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.
- 23 October 2020 – EP adopted first-reading position on Commission’s legislative proposal for the CAP strategic plan.
 - o Adopted text as basis for subsequent trilogue negotiations with Council.
- December 2020 - Lengthy negotiations on both the EU budget and CAP reform led to the adoption of CAP transitional rules, extending the validity of existing CAP rules until the end of 2022.

- 25 March 2021 - Commission's Communication on an Action Plan for the development of organic production
- 14 April 2021 – EP AGRI Committee receives Commission's Organic Action Plan
19 April 2021 – Publication of EPP Position Paper on Sustainable Agriculture
- 18 May 2021 – EP committee ENVI presented an own-initiative report on new EU methane strategy.
- 28 May 2021 – EP committee ENVI vote on EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.
 - o 31 May: Committee report tabled for plenary.
- 7 June 2021 – Plenary debate in EP on EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.
 - o 8 June: EP Plenary vote in favor.
 - Almost 200 recommendations to strengthen it!
 - Call to Commission to submit in 2022 a proposal for a legally binding biodiversity governance framework (biodiversity law).
- 9 June 2021 – EP resolution on the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.
15 June 2021 – Publication of EPP Position Paper on Welfare of Animals during Transport
- 14 July 2021 – Fit for 55 package presented by Commission to achieve Green Deal.
- 9 September 2021 – EP AGRI members vote in favor of agreement on CAP strategic plans regulation.
 - o Plenary EP approved with large majority.
- 19 October 2021 - Own-initiative report on the 'farm to fork' strategy was adopted by Parliament.
 - o One amendment on the need of impact assessment following the publication of studies on the effects of the strategy on agricultural production was approved too.
- 20 October 2021 – EP adopted resolution on farm to fork strategy
- 21 October 2021 – EP adopted resolution on methane strategy.
 - o Calls on commission to set binding methane reduction targets and measures for all sectors. Agriculture is one of the four main themes.
- 17 November 2021 – Commission presents new EU soil strategy.
 - o Part of biodiversity strategy.
- 2 December 2021 – Adoption of agreed on texts of post-2020 CAP reform
- 6 December 2021 – EP ENVI committee held exchange of views with Commission on the new EU soil strategy.
- 9 December 2021 – EP AGRI own-initiative draft report on Organic Action Plan.
- 10 January 2022 – Henk Staghouwer becomes Minister of Agriculture
 - o Resigned himself
 - Carola Schouten once again Minister from 5 September – 3 Oktober
- 16 February 2022 – EP adopts resolution on implementation report on farm animal welfare.
- 24 February 2022 – Russian invasion of Ukraine
 - o Food security becomes a salient issue
- 31 March 2022 – EP AGRI committee passed 313 amendments(!) and adopted (unanimously) report on the Organic Action Plan.
- 3 May 2022 – EP plenary adopts final resolution on Organic Action Plan

- Emphasizing flexibility and market-driven approach and calling for incentives and innovations to promote organic farming in the EU.
- 18 May 2022 – EP Agriculture committee MEPs ask for temporary derogations to CAP environmental rules.
 - To preserve food security in light of the war in Ukraine.
- 1 June 2022 – Resolution on Sustainable Climate Future*
- 1 June 2022 – Congress Paper on EPP Group’s Positioning*
- 22 June 2022 - Commission adopts proposal for a Nature Restoration Law.
 - With specific objective to reverse decline of pollinator populations by 2030
 - Also tabled a proposal for regulation on Sustainable Pesticide Use Directive (SUD). SUD → SUR.
 - In EP to ENVI committee (and AGRI).
- 12 July 2022 – EP ENVI committee appoints rapporteur to Nature Restoration Law.
 - AGRI and PECH appoint rapporteurs as well under Rule 57
- 3 Oktober 2022 – Piet Adema as minister of agriculture
 - Context of “report of Remkes”
 - Meant to restore trust between sector and government.
 - Attempt to reach an agriculture agreement
 - Became too much politics and to little constructive cooperation
- 30 November 2022 - Commission adopted a proposal on rules on certifying carbon removals on farms.
 - Still being negotiated by Parliament and Council through trilogues.
- 19 December 2022 – Council requests Commission to submit a study complementing the existing impact assessment of the SUD proposal.
 - Notably as regards food security aspects.
- 1 January 2023 – Reformed CAP enters into force.
- 16 January 2023 – EP ENVI committee held exchange of views with Environment Commissioner Sinkevičius on COP15 outcomes.
- January 2023 – Esther de Lange (MEP for EPP) claims she submitted amendments to Nature Restoration Law, as seen in a stream of a briefing.²
- 28 February 2023 - EPP Press Briefing on pesticides: want to postpone proposal on pesticide reduction.³
- 2 March 2023 – EP ENVI committee start debate on pesticide reduction law.
- 15-17 March 2023 – BBB party wins all regional elections in the Netherlands
 - Resulting in high representation in the Senate.
- 5 May 2023 – Publication of EPP Resolution Farmers’ Deal*
- 23 May 2023 – EP AGRI and PECH committees rejected Nature Restoration Law proposal.
- 5 June 2023 – EPP announces to vote against NRL in ENVI committee
 - Press conference on 7 June
 - Said they have pulled out of negotiations and urge withdrawal of bill.
- 15 & 27 June: ENVI committee voted on amendments → final vote tied → ENVI bound to table to plenary a proposal to reject the proposal.

² https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/briefing-epp-by-manfred-weber-president_20230711-0930-SPECIAL-PRESSER

³ <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/pesticides-epp-group-press-briefing-wednesday-1-march-at-10>

- 20 June 2023 (EU) – EU Ministers of Environment in Council vote in favor of amended Nature Restoration Law.
 - o Now proposal moves to EP
- 15 & 27 June: ENVI committee voted on amendments → final vote tied → ENVI bound to table to plenary a proposal to reject the proposal.
 - o Proposal for rejection did not pass in plenary.
 - o Voting with amendments moves to 12 July.
- 5 July 2023 – Commission tabled a proposal for a regulation on certain new genomic techniques (NGTs).
 - o To align existing legislation on GMOs with developments of NGTs including CRISPR/Cas.
- 5 July 2023 – Commission adopts proposal for a Soil Health Law and Soil Monitoring Law.
 - o Part of EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- 5 July 2023 – Commission submits study complementing the impact assessment of SUD as requested by Council.
 - o Concludes that pesticide reduction goals in proposal would not threaten food security, but rather safeguard it in longer term.
- 11 July 2023 – EPP speech/briefing to clarify their critical position and vote against the Nature Restoration Law.
 - o Reference to costs befalling to farmers.
 - o Referring to problems in the Netherlands (nitrogen crisis).
 - o Reference to problems with Natura 2000 policies in member states.
 - Question was asked on whether the BBB landslide victory in the Netherlands has played a role.
 - Denial because of first amendments submitted in January (before BBB victory).
- 12 July 2023 – EP votes in agreement over revised (watered down) version of Nature Restoration Law.
 - o Includes many elements from Council’s general approach of 20 June (flexibilities and derogations).
 - o Final agreement 9 November below
- 20 July 2023 – Timmermans announced to leave Commission.
 - o Found in Volkskrant
- 09 August 2023 – Politico article and poll: *“Right wing set for big gains in 2024 EU election, polling shows”*⁴.
- 22 August 2023 – Timmermans resigns from Commission.
 - o Green Deal handed over.
- 13 September 2023 – State of the Union address by Von der Leyen
 - o Appreciation for farmers
 - Interpreted as slowing down Green Deal
 - Euractiv: Farm to Fork program plans not on program of this year
 - Introducing the strategic dialogue on agriculture
- 18 September 2023 – EPP boss Bakolas rules out EPP collaboration with ECR or ID
 - o He prefers cooperation with socialists, liberals and greens.

⁴ <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-election-2024-polls-right-wing-big-gains/>

- In contrast with later statement (30.04.2024) by Von der Leyen, leaving the door open to cooperate with the hard-right ECR
- 19 September 2023 – First EPP event on European Farmers’ Deal in Brussels, Belgium
 - Others events at:
 - 22 February, Izegem, Belgium
 - 15 March Bulgaria
 - 15 April Italy
 - 19 April Ireland
- 19 September 2023 – EPP press conference: EPP Vision on Agriculture in Europe⁵
 - Farmers’ Deal
- 27 September 2023 – EPP meets in Split to debate 2024 European Elections priorities
 - “Besides preparation for the elections in 2024, issues like agriculture and the future of rural areas are also on the agenda”⁶
- 10 October 2023 – Publication EPP Position Paper: Farmers’ Deal
- 20 October 2023 – EPP press conference on pesticides
 - Ahead of vote on draft law aimed at reducing plant protection products in Parliament's ENVI Committee on 24 October.
- 24-25 October 2023 – BBB visit to Brussels for talks with European political groups⁷.
 - EPP and ECR
 - Not the first talks however...
 - **Quartermasters** had already been sent to Brussels at an earlier point in time.
- 24 October 2023 – EP ENVI committee adopts its report on SUR:
 - In favor: Left parties and Renew; Against: EPP and other right parties.
 - Supports reduction of at least 50 % in the use and risk of chemical PPPs.
 - Raises the reduction goal for the use of more hazardous ones to 65 % by 2030.
 - Report is tabled for plenary on 7 November 2023.
 - Resulting in over 200 amendments!
- 25 October 2023 – EP AGRI committee voted to remove the proposed provisions of using already committed CAP funds for SUD, arguing it should have come with corresponding budget to support farmers.
- 9 November 2023 – Agreement over Nature Restoration Law among EP and Member States (as co-legislators).
 - But it is a watered down version of initial proposal by the Commission
 - Council has not found a qualified majority to validate the agreement yet.
- 14 November 2023 – Publication of EPP Resolution on large carnivores
- 22 November 2023 – EP votes against new pesticide regulations (SUR) proposed by the Commission (part of Green Deal F2F strategy)
 - New (200+) amendments were not accepted by the Greens
 - Big role for EPP in watering down proposals
 - EP also voted against referring the text back to the ENVI committee for reconsideration.
- 22-23 November 2023 – PVV wins the Dutch national elections

⁵ <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/press-conference-epp-vision-on-agriculture-in-europe>

⁶ <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-meets-to-debate-2024-european-elections-priorities>

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwsbQ8QGgL0&ab_channel=RTVOost

- Also a minor victory for the BBB
- Major victory for populists and farmers
- Results in rising polls for ID group.
- 23 November 2023 – Commission publishes report to EP and Council with preliminary assessment of CAP Strategic Plans delivery on CAP objectives.
- 4 December 2023 – EPP publishes document with vision on agriculture
- 7 December 2023 – Commission put forward a legislative proposal on the welfare of animals during transport.
- 18 December 2023 (DE) – First central/national farmers’ protests in Berlin, Germany.
- 20 December 2023 – Commission proposes to change the international status of wolves from ‘strictly protected’ to ‘protected’.
- 29 December 2023 – Polls indicate possibility of right-wing majority coalition.
 - Rise of ID in polls
 - Progressive parties call for a cordon sanitaire
- 8 January 2024 – Start week of farmer protests in Berlin, Germany.
- 18 January 2024 (FR)– Start of farmer protests in France.
 - After no impact from 16 January local protest.
 - Escalated progressively over the following weeks.
- 23 January 2024 – ECFR think tank report: Sharp right turn predicted for elections⁸
- 24 January 2024 – EP ENVI committee adopts its negotiating position on NGTs.
- 25 January 2024 – Von der Leyen kicks-off dialogue with agri-food actors
 - Already announced in State of the Union address
 - Coping with increasing polarization in agriculture and food policy debate
- 28 January 2024 (BE)– Farmer protests in Belgium
- 31 January 2024 – Farmer protests in Brussels
- 31 January 2024 (IT)– Farmer protests in Italy
- 31 January 2024 (GR)– Farmer protests in Greece
- 31 January 2024 – Cap on some agricultural products from Ukraine to EU
 - In a bid to quell rising unrest among farmers
- 31 January 2024 - Commission enacted one-year pause on requirement for farmers to leave farmland fallow for sake of biodiversity.
 - 4% of land was supposed to be set aside for conservation
- 1 February 2024 – Protests in Brussels over farmers’ economic plight and against ever-stricter green rules.
- 1 February 2024 (IR) – Farmer protests in Ireland organized by IFA
 - Continues until at least 23 February
 - Earlier: 2023 government proposal to cull 200.000 dairy cows over three years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 1 February 2024 (PT)– Farmers’ protests in Portugal
- 1 February 2024 – French protests suspended after government offer.
- 5/6 February 2024 (ES)– Start of many protests in Spain (multitude of issues)
- 6 February 2024 – Von der Leyen scraps pesticide reduction bill + Commission dropped references to agriculture emission cuts in climate proposal
 - SUR as part of Green Deal (2020)
 - “SUR proposal has become a symbol of polarization”

⁸ <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/>

- EP had already rejected it (22/11/2023)
 - Greens also voted against after major watering down by right parties.
- 7 February 2024 – Plenary EP adopts ENVI committee position on NGTs: support a simpler process for NGT plants equivalent to conventional plants (NGT 1)
 - NGT 2 must follow stricter rules (similar to GMOs).
 - Total ban on patents for all NGT related stuff to prevent impact on farmers.
 - Objective is to make the food system more sustainable and resilient by developing improved plant varieties that are climate resilient, pest resistant, and give higher yields or that require fewer fertilizers and pesticides.
 - Agriculture Council fails to reach common position on this date.
- 9 February 2024 (PL) – Start of Polish farmers protests against cheap imports from Ukraine and Green Deal restrictions.
- 19 February 2024 – Von der Leyen announces re-election bid as president
- 19 February 2024 – Rutte sends letter to Von der Leyen to push for Renure as a temporary solution between animal fertilizer and artificial fertilizer (procedure of consideration needs to quicken).
 - Artificial fertilizer has become expensive
- 20 February 2024 – Polish farmers escalate protests on the border with Ukraine
- 21 February 2024 – Commission withdraws SUR proposal.
 - After no support in EP and no subsequent progress in Council.
- 22 February 2024 – Commission presents list of proposals to ease administrative burden on farmers & suggests to do something for nitrogen.
 - Commission tries to be responsive to farmers’ plight
 - Commission uses online platform until 8 March to hear farmers’ problems regarding nitrogen regulations.
 - Will be discussed on 26 February in Council of Ministers (see below).
- 22 February 2024 – Second EPP event on European Farmers’ Deal in Belgium
 - Others events at:
 - 15 March Bulgaria
 - 15 April Italy
 - 19 April Ireland
- 24 February 2024 – Farmers in France have broken into Agricultural Fair before opening.
 - Macron was present
- 25 February 2024 – Spanish tomato farmers protesting against cheaper imports.
- 26 February 2024 – Mostly Belgian protests in Brussels
- 26 February 2024 – EPP revised their manifesto, proposing to revisit the Natura 2000 regulations.
 - CDA initiated this proposal in the EPP.
 - Arguing it has put the Netherlands on lockdown.
 - Role of BBB?
 - Commission has been reluctant to alter borders of Natura 2000 areas.
- 26 February 2024 – EU-AgriFisch Council meets to discuss fertilizer market, pressure of regulations and Mercosur (“crisis in agricultural sector”)
 - Ministers agree that CAP needs to be reinvented.
 - Despite new CAP of last year.
 - Spokesperson of Council:

- Administrative burden/load should be reduced by 50%
 - Agreed that there will be more lenient controls and fines
 - The term ‘force majeure’ would be clarified
 - 26 February 2024 – Representatives of member states supposed to meet to discuss European support for Ukraine
 - At the invitation of Macron
 - 27 February 2024 – MEPs in the EP approve Nature Restoration Law.
 - Agreement from 9 November with member states.
 - Fierce opposition by the EPP, who had already watered it down.
 - Failed in July after some conservatives rebelled and broke ranks to vote in favor of draft law.
 - This allowed it to move to the Council and reach a provisional agreement in November.
 - Although the law was heavily watered down in negotiations with member states.
 - Law will now go to Council where member states hold a final vote.
 - Normally a formality, now sabotaged by member states withdrawing support.
 - 6-7 March 2024 – EPP party congress in Bucharest
 - Adopting new party manifesto
 - Including recalibration of Natura 2000 areas
 - Brought forth by CDA
- 7 March 2024 – Publication EPP Resolution on Rural Mobility and Agriculture Competitiveness
- 9 March 2024 – Polish government promises reduction of cereal surplus, but farmers continue protests.
 - 9 March 2024 (AU) – Farmer protests in Austria
- 4-10 March 2024 – EPP Congress adopting 2024 Manifesto
- 11 March 2024 – Large majority in Dutch parliament voted in favor to appeal to the cabinet to vote against the nature restoration law in the EU (Council of Ministers).
 - 11 March 2024 – EP ENVI committee adopted legislative report on soil monitoring law.
 - 12 March 2024 – COPA-COGECA campaigning outside of EP to voice the opinions of the agricultural sector ahead of 3 key votes in EP regarding IED, Green Claims and ATMs.
 - 14 March 2024 – Young farmers in Flanders region of Belgium plan to block ports in protest.
 - No involvement of main agricultural interest organizations.
 - 15 March 2024 – Commission publishes new proposals to drastically reduce green requirements and revise the CAP with urgency.
 - In response to farmer protests who decried CAP’s environmental requirements for accessing the direct payments and the red tape.
 - Proposal aims to amend CAP Strategic Plans Regulation and CAP Horizontal Regulation to address these two issues.
 - Commission and Council still need to agree on amending the EU-laws ‘prematurely’.
 - Von der Leyen indicates preference before the EP elections.
 - Proposals mostly come from EU Ministers of Agriculture.

- 18 March 2024 – Council swiftly starts discussing CAP in Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA).
- 18 March 2024 – Polish farmers block traffic on German border.
 - o Against import of agricultural products from non-EU-members as well as against environmental prescriptions.
- 19 March 2024 – EP AGRI committee discusses proposal to break open CAP.
- 19 March 2024 – EP AGRI committee adopts report on PRM & FRM regulations proposed by Commission.
- 22 March 2024 – Commission made significant step in allowing Renure as green alternative for expensive artificial fertilizers.
 - o See letter from Dutch prime-minister Mark Rutte mentioned above
- 26 March 2024 – Council (SCA) have accepted Commission’s proposal to break open CAP without significant alterations.
 - o EP accepts on April 24th
 - o If all goes well, the redacted rules will enter into force at the beginning of June, just before elections.
 - o Council also sealed hardline deal on Ukrainian agricultural products.
 - Beefed-up provisions as result of farmers’ protests.
- 10 April 2024 – EP adopts first reading position on ENVI report on soil monitoring law. New amendments adopted in plenary (toning it down significantly).
- 11 April 2024 – EP plenary voted in favor of applying an urgent procedure for CAP.
- 16 April 2024 – Dutch Agractie plans to protest in Brussels demanding derogation for manure placement be suspended
- 24 April 2024 – EP accepts Commission proposal to break open CAP and simplify it.
 - o Quickly done through ‘urgent procedure’.
- 27 April 2024 – 6F protest in Valencia
 - o Joined by organizations from 10 different EU countries
 - o To devise joint strategy for EU elections and organize demonstration on June 4th.
- 29 April 2024 – Von der Leyen in Maastricht Debate: EPP open to cooperate with ECR.
 - o In contrast with previous statements ruling out collaboration with hard right parties.
 - o Depends on composition of ECR, but she is open to deal with Meloni
- 13 May 2024 – Council adopted targeted review of certain basic acts of the common agricultural policy (CAP)
- 22 May 2024 – ID leader Anders Vistisen says in an interview that there is no substantial political rift between ID and ECR.
 - o He thinks the two may unite in the future.
- 27 May 2024 – European Milk Board (EMD) protest in Brussels.
 - o Farmers protest against inequality in food production chain.
 - Unfair pricing.
 - o Structural reshaping of CAP
 - o Involve agricultural organizations in shaping and implementing Green Deal.
- 4n June 2024 – Protest by multiple European Farmers organizations.
 - o Prioritizing products produced in Europe over import.
 - o Ending green policies
 - o 2030 agenda

- Ending trade agreements (grain from Ukraine and Mercosur)

Appendix D

Analyzed EPP press releases on agriculture

Press releases from [eppgroup.eu](https://www.eppgroup.eu) website:

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom>

Search term (results): farm (179); agriculture (67); food (232)

Publication period filter: past 5 years

- 27.03.2020

- Postpone new rules for farmers during coronavirus pandemic
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/postpone-new-rules-for-farmers-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

The EPP Group calls for another postponement of the planned European "Farm to Fork" Strategy "until at least after the summer". The strategy would impose new rules and restrictions on farmers across Europe, who are currently coping with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and have to ensure food production in Europe at the same time.

It is surely not the right moment to impose additional rules on farmers. We are facing the biggest crisis that the agricultural sector has seen in decades. European farmers are confronted with new and unforeseen challenges and find themselves in situations of great difficulty", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, who is the EPP Group Spokesman for Agriculture and Rural Development.

"The entire agriculture sector is heavily affected by the spread of the coronavirus, but the wine sector and the fresh product sector suffer the most. I firmly believe that during the following months we need to help the agricultural sector to recover from this crisis as quickly as possible", said Dorfmann.

Initially, the "Farm to Fork" Strategy was to be announced in March. However, the European Commission revised its calendar and postponed the strategy to April. The EPP Group wants this to be further postponed.

"We have to give farmers security and must not create additional uncertainties. In this crisis, we should let farmers produce the food we need in a serene atmosphere. We should postpone the "Farm to Fork" Strategy until at least after the summer. Now, it is essential to use our energy to find adequate measures to help our farmers and to re-establish good working and market conditions for them", Dorfmann concluded.

- **01.04.2020**

- Guarantee food supply during pandemic
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/guarantee-food-supply-during-pandemic>

EPP Group Members of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee have called for measures to guarantee food supply during the coronavirus pandemic. “Free movement within the Single Market of foodstuffs must be ensured”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group’s Spokesman on agriculture.

“This is why we ask for a full review of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on farming and food production, including on farm input supply chains”, said Dorfmann.

“Food supply in Europe is at stake. We have to pay special attention to our farmers. We have to help them, for example, with their liquidity problems. We need accurate agricultural market observation and rapid interventions, especially in high-risk sectors like restaurants. We also need to very swiftly conclude the negotiations on the multiannual EU budget to give farmers more certainty in the uncertain months to come and to ensure that there will be no cuts in the future CAP”, stressed Dorfmann.

“The EPP Group welcomes the European Commission's promise to use remaining funds from the Rural Development Programmes to direct payments and to secure the mobility of seasonal workers, also to help farmers hit by the coronavirus crisis”, said Dorfmann.

- **06.04.2020**

- Saving the harvest needs working hands
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/saving-the-harvest-needs-working-hands>

“The harvest won’t wait, and feeding Europe needs skilled hands. The European Commission and the EU Member States must take immediate and urgent action to facilitate seasonal workers’ mobility”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman for Agriculture and Rural Development.

“All over Europe, from north to south, farmers are dependent on seasonal workers during the peak periods of the growth season. These workers are professionals who, year after year, provide critical planting, harvesting and tending. Without their help, a good part of the harvest may be lost”, explained Dorfmann.

He welcomed the European Commission's guidelines on free movement of workers and underlined that “these guidelines could be enforced if the Commission would list the whole agricultural sector as a critical sector”.

“Many of the workers also come from third countries outside the EU, which should not be forgotten”, recalled Dorfmann.

“There is no time to wait. EU Member States must implement these guidelines immediately and do their best to facilitate the travelling of seasonal workers to, from and through their territories”, stressed Dorfmann.

“We also welcome all efforts of the Member States to mobilise local working forces. During these times, Member States should allow people who cannot work at their normal job because of the pandemic to work in agriculture”, added Dorfmann.

- **28.04.2020**

- Don't penalise farmers for lack of agreement on EU budget
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/don-t-penalise-farmers-for-lack-of-agreement-on-eu-budget>

“There is a moment to reform Europe's Common Agricultural Policy, but it's not now”, said Alvaro Amaro MEP ahead of today's vote in the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee on the rules for the transition period to the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) supposed to start next year.

“We need the smoothest and shortest transition possible to ensure that the Regulation provides farmers with the legal certainty they need during the ongoing crisis”, Amaro underlined.

The law voted on will establish a legal framework from 2021 for one or two years until the new CAP enters fully into force.

“The EPP Group's intention is to avoid a reform which would render the CAP more complex. We need rules for the transition, because farmers cannot be penalised for the political incapacity of Member States to conclude the next Multiannual Financial Framework, or to strike a deal regarding the future of agricultural policy”, concluded Amaro.

- **29.04.2020**

- Help for wine, flower, cheese producers and many other sectors not enough
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/help-for-wine-flower-cheese-producers-not-enough>

The EPP Group in the European Parliament has criticised the planned help for European farmers during the Corona pandemic as "not enough". In particular, in the wine, flower and cheese producing sectors, "millions of jobs are in danger", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman in Parliament's Agriculture Committee, and Anne Sander MEP, Parliament's negotiator of the rules governing Europe's agricultural market.

“With this crisis package, the Commission has made a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. Without fresh money we cannot address the deep and serious problems that the European farm and food sector faces, millions of jobs are jeopardised all over Europe”, stressed Dorfmann.

“We ask Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski to come to Parliament with stronger, well-funded and more effective measures than the ones presented last week”, he said, ahead of tomorrow's debate in Parliament. The Commissioner will present the package of crisis measures to the Agriculture Committee on Thursday.

"Some rules of the private storage schemes need to be reviewed. Requirements for operators are way too strict and exclude some products like veal, curd cheese or sheep and goat meat which have already been stored. The measures fail to target those who would need it the most", said Sander.

"It is clear that the Commission has not yet fully taken stock of the crisis in the wine sector. We need more regulatory flexibility and a true financial response from the EU to help winemakers while the closing of restaurants has cut European wine consumption by a third and on top of that, exports are expected to fall significantly. This applies equally to the sales of flowers and live plants, which have almost stopped. These two sectors together employ three million Europeans", she concluded.

The measures require Parliament's agreement to enter into force.

- **20.05.2020**

- Commission must measure all consequences of Farm to Fork
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/commission-must-measure-all-consequences-of-farm-to-fork>

The EPP Group regrets that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission is pushing for deep changes to the EU's food production policy and calls for a thorough impact assessment before starting any reforms.

"We regret that the European Commission is hurrying its Farm to Fork strategy now when farmers all over Europe are facing huge insecurity over their future", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman in the European Parliament's (EP) Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

The European Commission is expected to present the Farm to Fork strategy today, which is the agriculture and food part of the so-called Green Deal, the EU's flagship initiative for an ecological transformation of Europe's economy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, the EPP Group and the EP Agriculture Committee have asked the Commission to postpone the strategy.

"The least the Commission must do now is a thorough impact assessment of the legislative proposals that will follow the strategy, including the economic impact. The Commission must measure all consequences of the Farm to Fork strategy", demanded Dorfmann.

"The differences in farming conditions across Europe are huge and many farmers already work in a very sustainable way. When the Commission later drafts the legislative proposals, it needs to remember that one size does not fit all. The measures must be well considered and targeted to improve our food security", concluded Dorfmann.

- **09.06.2020**

- We are making farmers' voices heard
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/we-are-making-farmers-voices-heard>

“The EPP Group is making farmers’ voices heard because we have made the European Commission come up with additional emergency measures for wine producers”, said MEPs Herbert Dorfmann, Anne Sander and Norbert Lins, EPP Group Members of the Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

“The Corona pandemic has hit European farmers hard and the EPP Group has asked the European Commission for stronger, well-funded and more effective measures to safeguard our family farms. To demonstrate this urgent need, we objected to a delegated act in committee last week as it was insufficient. With the promise of additional measures heard today, we hope to take a step forward”, said Dorfmann, EPP Group Spokesman in the Agriculture Committee.

“I am glad that the European Commission is preparing new regulatory and budgetary measures to help wine producers. These will include increased co-financing rates for promotion, green harvesting and restructuring measures, the extension of the planting period for the year 2020 until July 2021 and the triggering of the crisis cartel measure to allow actors to adopt agreements on quality requirements and joint promotion”, said Sander, Parliament's negotiator of the rules governing Europe's agricultural market.

“We very much welcome the move of the Commission to present a new delegated act. The European Parliament and the EPP Group have once again proven that we are fighting for our farmers. We hope for substantial improvements to the new rules to help European agriculture in these times of crisis”, said Lins, Chair of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

- **20.10.2020**

- EPP Group protecting both farmers and the environment
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-protecting-both-farmers-and-the-environment>

The EPP Group wants to keep European farms strong and sustainable to guarantee high quality food for all Europeans at an affordable price. The European Parliament will debate today and vote in the coming days on the planned reform of the EU’s agricultural policy.

"We want a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that is good for farmers, consumers and for nature. We believe that without such a balance, we cannot secure European food production and farming", said Peter Jahr MEP and Anne Sander MEP, who negotiated the reform on behalf of the EPP Group.

“We have reached a fair compromise with which we can protect millions of family-run farms all over Europe, keep rural communities alive and secure jobs in the agri-food sector”, said Jahr, who is also Parliament's Rapporteur for the so-called strategic plans of the agricultural policy.

“On ecological issues, this compromise is even more ambitious than the European Commission’s initial plans. It has a good balance between societal demands and a high level of ambition for the climate and the environment as well. It will enable farming and life in rural communities, and will not desert them to become conservation areas”, Jahr underlined.

“With this deal, we are making sure that European quality food reaches every table. The alternative - imposing even more green conditions - would lead to the closing down of many farms and more food imports from outside Europe”, explained Jahr.

”The new CAP provides better tools to keep agricultural markets fair for everybody, help farmers cope with the crisis and support the development of EU agriculture. It also provides tools to promote agricultural products under quality labels”, said Sander, who is the EPP Group's Shadow Rapporteur for the two laws which govern the financing and management of CAP and regulate the agricultural markets in Europe.

“We want less bureaucracy for farmers. In the past, CAP rules have grown far too complex. Now we want simplification. The new CAP will also ensure equal treatment among farmers”, concluded Sander.

- **23.10.2020**

- Parliament votes to protect both farmers and the environment
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/parliament-votes-to-protect-both-farmers-and-the-environment>

The EPP Group welcomes the outcome of today's final vote on the planned reform of the EU's agricultural policy. "We adopted a solution today that will protect both farmers and the environment in the future”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman for Agriculture and Rural Development.

“With today’s vote, the Parliament has adopted a strong balanced position for a good start for negotiations with the EU Member States. We are glad to ascertain that a majority in the House respected the compromises found and didn't cave in to the pressure of email campaigners and social media pundits”, Dorfmann said.

“Our goal in this reform is to have a stronger and evermore sustainable farming sector in Europe that can guarantee high-quality food for all Europeans at affordable prices. We want to protect millions of family-run farms all over Europe, to keep rural communities alive and to secure jobs in the agri-food sector. This is a pure EPP reform”, Dorfmann stressed.

"The EPP Group in the European Parliament is and will continue to be the voice and defender of European farmers and our rural communities. We see agriculture as a strategic sector", Dorfmann concluded.

- **02.02.2021**

- As the pandemic continues, we support our farmers
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/as-the-pandemic-continues-we-support-our-farmers>

“We welcome the decision to continue with the support and flexibility measures for wine producers adopted in spring 2019”, said Anne Sander MEP, European Parliament negotiator for the implementing rules governing Europe's agricultural markets after today’s vote in Parliament’s Agriculture Committee on additional help for farmers.

“The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been tough for everybody, especially many farming sectors where the closure of restaurants and cuts in exports have hit hard. On top of the pandemic, the impact of US tariffs that Washington imposed during the term of the previous American President has added to the burden of European winemakers”, Sander explained.

“We will continue all efforts to make sure this help decided today reaches farmers as swiftly as possible. They need legal security and flexibility to cope over the prolonging period of huge uncertainty”, Sander continued.

“To secure the future of millions of jobs in the European agri-food sector, the European Commission must come up with a diplomatic solution to the current trade war with the US and with stronger and well-targeted support measures to compensate the most hardly impacted wine operators. We stand firmly by our farmers’ side”, concluded Sander.

- **11.03.2021**

- Living countryside is the heart of Europe
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/living-countryside-is-the-heart-of-europe>

A living countryside provides our quality food, forms the green lungs of our continent and is home to every third European. To create the best living and working conditions in these areas, the EPP Group asks the European Commission to deliver a long-term vision for rural areas. The European Parliament will debate the future of rural Europe this afternoon.

“We need the Commission’s vision and plan soon as it is tightly linked to a new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that is under negotiation. A long-term strategy for rural areas and the CAP go hand-in-hand. We need a holistic approach”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman in Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

“For us, a living countryside is a multifunctional economic system where agriculture is a central tool. Farming, forestry and businesses related to it are the core of the rural communities. Families and businesses need a stable and forward-looking vision for the future. Therefore, we are asking the Commission to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community and to pay attention to rural areas with all their handicaps, as is stated in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union”, explained Dorfmann.

“The needs of different areas differ from one region to another. We should use the best practises of successful regions and good concepts like Smart Villages for new technologies and innovations to support the quality of life. Be it for modern farming, for business or for domestic life, connectivity is key for jobs and the development of rural areas”, Dorfmann underlined.

“Local communities and regions need their own governance. Their voices need to be heard. Regional and local authorities are the key players for overcoming challenges such as climate change or social and economic difficulties. Rural areas are developing communities and not to be conserved like museums. To make this happen, we must give space to local governance”, concluded Dorfmann.

- **21.04.2021**

- Historic agreement on Climate Law: 55 percent net is very ambitious
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/climate-law-55-percent-net-is-very-ambitious>

Negotiators of the European Parliament and EU Member States reached a breakthrough early this morning on the so-called Climate Law, which is a main part of the European Green Deal, Europe's plan to become climate neutral by 2050.

"Today's agreement is historic. The obligation to become climate neutral is now legally binding for the European Union and it is the first time that climate targets have been agreed by co-decision with the strong involvement of the Parliament. The agreement is very close to the EPP's position and far away from the unrealistic position of the majority of the Left and the Greens", said Peter Liese MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman for Health and Environment.

"55 percent is a very ambitious target. To say it is not overlooks the reality. In the last 30 years, we have reduced 25 percent of greenhouse gases. Now, we have to save an additional 30 percent in the next nine years. This is a huge task that no-one should underestimate", Liese explained.

The EPP Group has three priorities to achieve Europe's climate neutrality by 2050: saving jobs, relying on market-based measures and supporting carbon sinks like sustainably managed forests. Forests, other vegetation and oceans naturally bind CO₂ and can play an important role in preventing carbon emissions going into the atmosphere.

On jobs, Liese stressed that the EU can only lead the world if it keeps industry in Europe. "That's why it is good that the EPP Group's amendments on avoiding carbon leakage - supporting SMEs and creating climate partnerships with industries - are part of the Climate Law."

On market-based measures, Liese said that "to achieve climate neutrality we will need market-based incentives such as emissions trading, also for the transport and heating sectors, instead of bans and interdictions."

On the better use of carbon sinks, Liese explained: "It is very important that the target is a net target. The efforts of forest owners, farmers that behave in a climate-friendly manner and modern technologies to reduce CO₂ need to be included. We need to work on this part of the climate policy much more than in the past", concluded Liese.

The deal reached early this morning sets the target at 55 percent net. It has however been clarified that the main efforts should come from emissions reduction. The remainder is to be achieved by carbon sinks.

- **10.06.2021**

- [Help farmers to end cage farming](#)
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/help-farmers-to-end-cage-farming>

"We strongly support the Citizens' Initiative 'End the Cage Age' for farm animals. Together with 1.4 million Europeans we ask the Commission to propose the right measures to end cage farming," says Michaela Šojdrová MEP, EPP Group Member of Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

“Animal welfare can be best guaranteed when farmers get the right incentives for it. We support a smooth transition from cages to alternative systems within a sufficient transition period that is considered for each species specifically,” says Šojdrová.

As the European Commission has promised to propose new animal welfare legislation in 2023, Šojdrová underlines that an impact assessment must be done before, by 2022, including the costs of the required transformation in both the short and the long-term. “As different species, laying hens or rabbits, require different conditions, the proposal must cover these differences with a species by species approach, by 2027. Farmers need transition periods and a compensation of the higher production costs,” she says.

“To guarantee animal welfare and to not disadvantage our European farmers, we need effective control if imported products respect EU animal welfare standards. Imported products must comply with European animal welfare standards so that our high-quality production will not be replaced by low-quality imports,” emphasises Šojdrová.

- **24.06.2021**

- Climate Law: irrational, foolish and absurd if Greens vote with far-right
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/climate-law-absurd-if-greens-vote-with-far-right>

The EPP Group will vote today in favour of the historic milestone agreement on the European Climate Law.

"We want to be ambitious while fighting climate change, but we also want to stay realistic. With the agreement we will vote for today, we will more than triple the speed of CO2 reduction. In the last 30 years, Europe reduced on average less than 1 percent of its CO2 emissions every year. Now, until 2030, we will have to reduce by more than 3 percent every year. This is very ambitious. To say it is not, overlooks the reality", said Liese.

The agreement on the law had been informally reached in April and will today be formally adopted by the European Parliament. It carves into law that the EU must become climate neutral by 2050.

Liese calls on the Greens in the European Parliament to vote in favour of the new law. "It would be totally irrational, foolish and absurd if the Greens voted with the extreme right, as they did while approving the agreement in the Environment Committee. Not supporting this milestone agreement which, for the first time ever, clearly puts climate protection into law, would be total ideological blindness", he stressed.

The EPP Group wants part of the emission reduction targets also to be achieved through the so-called carbon sinks, like sustainably managed forests. Forests and other vegetation naturally bind CO2 and can play an important role in preventing carbon emissions going into the atmosphere. "It is important that the efforts of forest owners and farmers who behave in a climate-friendly manner, and modern technologies which reduce CO2 are included. We need to work on this part of the climate policy much more than in the past", explained Liese.

The Climate Law sets the target for 2030 at 55 percent net compared to 1990. It has, however, been clarified that the main efforts should come from emissions reduction. The remainder is to be achieved by carbon sinks.

- **25.06.2021**

- New reform brings brighter future for farmers and for food
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/new-reform-brings-brighter-future-for-farmers-and-for-food>

Negotiators of the European Parliament and EU Member States agreed this morning on the reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

“The agreement on the new CAP was urgently needed. We managed to defend the European model of family farming so that our farmers have confidence in the future, security to invest and we have, overall, a brighter future for the European agricultural sector. The new CAP will keep our food affordable, guarantees quality and combines the economic, social and ecological sustainability of European farming”, said EPP Group MEPs Peter Jahr, Anne Sander and Herbert Dorfmann.

"For the first time in the history of the EU's agricultural policy, we managed to set a figure for a mandatory redistributive payment for smaller farmers. This 10 percent clearly shows our support for small and family farms”, explained Peter Jahr MEP, who negotiated the CAP strategic plans on behalf of the European Parliament.

Moreover, with the new CAP, the multi-functionality of our farmers does not only get more appreciated but also financially supported. The increased funding for ecological measures is unprecedented. "25 percent is more ambitious than what the Member States initially wanted. We should also remember that the European Commission did not even foresee an earmarking for eco-schemes at all", underlined Jahr.

"The EPP Group pushed hard to impose a new philosophy on controls. We increased risk-based rules for organising controls and introduced for the first time the possibility for national administration to correct errors made in good faith by farmers. We strengthened the rules on transparency and tools to avoid conflict of interests, to fight against fraud and to root out corruption. The CAP is the best financially-managed policy of the Union and must remain so. We need to safeguard its reputation against fraud and we will closely follow the use of new data mining tools (Arachné)", explained Anne Sander MEP, who is the EPP Group's negotiator for the two regulations which govern the financing and management of CAP and regulate the agricultural markets.

“The EPP Group ensured that the agri-food sector will benefit from new tools to strengthen the position of farmers in the value chain. We revised the market and crisis management tools and set up a fully functioning €450 million crisis reserve to allow the Union to respond promptly when farmers face dire times", she said.

"Lower quality imports must not replace our farmers' work on our tables. The Parliament, the Council and the Commission recognised in a joint declaration that reciprocity of standards is essential for protecting our European model of the family farm. We will ensure that this commitment is kept", stressed Sander.

"We increased ecological sustainability without forgetting economic sustainability. The EPP Group advocates a European farming model that keeps the family farm at the centre. Family farms are a cornerstone of our rural areas and the secret of high quality food. With today's agreement, farmers will get much needed confidence to invest in the future", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman on Agriculture.

- **09.09.2021**

- Carrots, not sticks for sustainable farming
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/carrots-not-sticks-for-sustainable-farming>

The EPP Group supports European farms and farmers to be sustainable so that they can guarantee high quality and healthy food for all Europeans at an affordable price. The European Parliament's Environment and Agriculture Committees vote today and tomorrow on their input to the so-called 'Farm to Fork Strategy', which is the European Commission's plan on how to do just that.

"We must make sure European farmers can supply food without experiencing unfair trading practices. They should receive incentives and fair payments for products produced sustainably, instead of experiencing hurdles. We must make food security a priority", said Christine Schneider MEP, responsible for the file for the EPP Group in the Environment Committee.

"Without economic sustainability there is no environmental sustainability either", underlined Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman in the Agriculture Committee and Parliament's lead negotiator on the file. "Instead of burdens, bureaucracy and blame for the farmers, we need to support innovation to offer solutions for a sustainable food chain. For the best and most efficient solutions against climate change, we need to take local conditions and different national approaches into account and fit the measures into those. One size doesn't fit all", Dorfmann recalled.

For the EPP Group, it is important to listen to consumers. "If people buy local and sustainable food, this creates an opportunity for farmers. Farm to fork does not only mean eating healthier food, but it also means relying on everyone: consumers, farmers and nature. We believe that without that, we cannot secure European food production and farming", concluded Schneider and Dorfmann.

- **28.09.2021**

- Reduce cow burps with technology and innovation
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/reduce-cow-burps-with-technology-and-innovation>

The EPP Group wants to slash methane emissions released into the atmosphere to fight climate change. "Cutting methane emissions is crucial in the fight against climate change. As the European Parliament agreed on reducing carbon dioxide from the air, it must also agree on cutting methane. This is the only way to achieve the goals Europe committed to in the Paris Agreement", said the EPP Group's Maria Spyra MEP, the European Parliament's lead negotiator of a Report setting out a strategy to cut methane.

"Methane is the second-most responsible greenhouse gas for heating the planet. It is a greenhouse gas over 80 times more potent than CO₂, over a 20-year period. It is largely released into the atmosphere through the burps of cows and other animals. We must not only just blindly regulate and impose new rules, but actively find a way to help farmers deal with the issue", she explained.

With the measures which the Report proposes, Spyraiki wants to rely first on technology and innovation rather than prohibitions. Amongst others, the Report calls to make sure that the mandatory leak detection and repair is done on fossil fuel infrastructure, both in the EU and for the energy we import. In the Report, there are also measures to reduce the landfilling of waste, especially biodegradable waste, and to introduce new technology in agriculture such as feed additives to limit emissions from ruminant animals.

The EPP Group sees the way forward in innovation. "We must encourage innovation and incentivise our industries to adopt the best practices and cost-efficient technologies. We have no time to lose. The time to act is now", concluded Spyraiki.

- **18.10.2021**

- Timmermans, stop hiding information about Farm to Fork Strategy!
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/timmermans-stop-hiding-information-about-farm-to-fork>

"It is scandalous that Commission Vice-President Timmermans has tried to keep the study on the consequences of its Farm to Fork Strategy a secret just because the results were not what he wanted! We insist on a thorough impact assessment on the effects of the strategy before we agree on any new EU laws", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman in the Agriculture Committee and Parliament's lead negotiator on the file.

"We want Europe to do more to protect the climate, and we want all sectors to contribute to this goal. The proposed Farm to Fork Strategy is at the heart of the European Green Deal which will make European food production more sustainable and climate-friendly. We agree with the goals, but we need alternatives for how to reach these goals, for the best interests of consumers, farmers and the environment", said Christine Schneider MEP, responsible for the file for the EPP Group in the Environment Committee.

For the EPP Group, it is crucial that new rules for food production do not lead to less food being produced in Europe or being dependent on food imports from outside the EU.

"If we replace European quality food with imported food, we will be shooting ourselves in the foot. Importing food from abroad means exporting our carbon footprint outside Europe. Actions that lead to fake greening are not a solution", underlined Dorfmann and Schneider, recalling that the EPP Group has been asking for an impact assessment on the Farm to Fork Strategy since spring 2020.

The European Parliament will debate today and vote on Tuesday on its input to the European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy.

- **23.11.2021**

- Support for new farm policy is support for local food
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/support-for-new-farm-policy-is-support-for-local-food>

"Today's decision on the agreement on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is vital to European food production", underlined EPP Group MEPs Peter Jahr and Anne Sander, who negotiated the law package which sets out new rules for European agriculture for the next seven years.

"The CAP gives European farmers confidence for the future and provides incentives to take advantage of climate and environmentally-friendly farming methods", said Jahr, who negotiated the CAP strategic plans on behalf of the European Parliament.

"The increased funding for ecological measures is unprecedented. Support for the new agriculture policy is support for local food. Our work will also help young farmers and small farms and will support European rural areas", he said, recalling that the CAP is not ready yet. "As a next step, we are waiting for the Member States to put it into practice with the national strategic plans without adding unnecessary administrative burden."

"This vote in favour of CAP will help to keep our food affordable and its production in Europe close to consumers. It guarantees the quality of our European products and ensures a balance between the economic, social and ecological sustainability of European farming", said Sander, who was the EPP Group's negotiator for the two regulations which govern the financing and management of CAP and regulate the agricultural markets.

"We have seen some political attacks from the far-left and the Greens trying to vote this CAP down. Doing so would only cause unnecessary uncertainty for farmers all over Europe, would go against the objective of European food autonomy and increase food imports. That alternative is neither social nor sustainable", concluded Sander.

- 02.12.2021

- Better conditions for animals in transport
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/better-conditions-for-animals-in-transport>

The EPP Group demands better conditions and control for live animal transport. "The work of the Protection of Animals during Transport Inquiry Committee has shown that current legislation is not properly put into practice and we need improvements for better animal welfare", said the EPP Group's Daniel Buda MEP, parliament's negotiator of the committee's final report.

"One of the sad problems is animals suffering from extreme high or low temperatures during transport. We are firmly in favour of ensuring the right conditions for animal welfare concerning the transport temperatures. Special attention needs to be given to the transport of vulnerable animals. Farmers have to be helped to be able to ensure the right conditions", he said.

"Improving the quality of transport vehicles is a key factor. Also, better monitoring of the transport and using the expertise of veterinarians is crucial to achieve better conditions for animals. This is especially important for transporting animals beyond the EU borders. There, we also need fast-lane solutions for borders and monitoring up until the final destination", Buda emphasised.

“We need better support for local slaughterhouses, which would shorten the transport distances and benefit the farmers. Also, in many regions, shortening the transport times cannot be done and thus the rules cannot be followed without improvements of infrastructure”, Buda recalled.

“The well-being of animals in transport is a mutual interest for farmers, consumers and the whole food-chain alike. Forbidding live animal transportation in Europe would mean the shutdown of a good part of small and medium-sized farms and would benefit the importers only”, Buda concluded.

- **20.01.2022**

- Animal transport rules should protect animals, not punish farmers
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/animal-transport-rules-should-protect-animals>

The work of the parliamentary inquiry committee which looked into the protection of animals during transport has shown that we need better transport conditions for live animals, says the EPP Group's Daniel Buda MEP, Parliament's negotiator of the committee's final report.

"We need to improve infrastructure, promote local slaughterhouses and introduce smart rules that take different circumstances into account", said Buda, criticising the Greens' proposals that would push many farms out of business.

“Setting an absolute maximum transport time without any flexibility would punish all farmers - particularly small family farms in remote areas with the least possibilities to compensate the loss of their income. Instead of putting these small farms out of business, we need to cut the transport times by investing in improvements of infrastructure and supporting local slaughterhouses”, added Buda.

“The committee looked closely into transport conditions and unfortunately found lots of room for improvement. We must pay attention to transport temperatures and the transport of vulnerable animals. We also need faster border crossings with special lanes and expert monitoring up until the final destination. Farmers have to be helped to be able to ensure the right conditions”, Buda said.

"Last but not least, transport to third countries must continue, respecting the highest standards of animal welfare", concluded Buda.

- **08.03.2022**

- Putin's war calls for EU food safety plan
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/putin-s-war-calls-for-eu-food-safety-plan>

"Putin's war against Ukraine calls for a European strategic food safety plan", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman in the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

"The Russian attack on Ukraine will most likely strongly affect European food security and create difficulties for our agri-food markets. Some of the difficulties are part of the sanctions

such as diminishing export of wines, fruit, vegetables and other food products. But an even more serious consequence is the disruption in the supply of wheat, soybeans, vegetable oils and chicken meat of which Ukraine is an important producer", said Dorfmann.

"It is conceivable that these supplies will slow down in the coming months, not least because the 2022 harvest in Ukraine will be severely compromised by the war. Tracks of Russian tanks in Ukrainian fields won't carry harvest any time soon."

"I therefore ask the European Commission for a European strategic food safety plan with reliable forecasts and concrete measures to address this situation on a sector by sector basis. I share the French proposal to use set-aside areas for the production, but this is certainly not enough", Dorfmann said.

"We must give the European population the certainty that this war will not lead to empty plates in Europe. Access to food for all is a principle on which we don't compromise. We can already see a disproportionate increase of the price of some agricultural products. To avoid this, we must act in advance and together as it would also put some of our citizens in very difficult situations", underlined Dorfmann.

"The EPP Group asks the Commission to submit such a food safety plan to Parliament as soon as possible. At the same time, the Commission should avoid presenting other legislative proposals that have negative impacts on European food security", demanded Dorfmann.

- **22.03.2022**

- Increase European food production now
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/increase-european-food-production-now>

"The European Commission must take a clear line to support European farmers to grow as much food as possible now", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

"The Russian attack on Ukraine has caused a global food crisis. The two countries produce a third of the world's wheat, not to mention other grains and oilseeds. When a good part of that production is cut from the global markets, the poorest are the first to suffer. Europe is a net food exporter, but we need to do our best to increase our own production by all means available", said Dorfmann.

"We have called on the European Commission to postpone all legislation that could reduce food production. The Commission must review the targets and timetable of the Farm to Fork and the biodiversity strategy law proposals, notably the ones concerning plant protection products, nature restoration and supply chain due diligence. The Commission must also conclude a thorough impact assessment of these proposals, as the EPP Group has been demanding for a long time", Dorfmann underlined.

"In light of the current market circumstances, the ambition of reducing production areas by 10 percent cannot be implemented", Dorfmann pointed out. "We welcome the decision to use ecological focus areas for food production as the Commission has proposed. But to be productive, farmers must also be allowed to use plant protection products and fertilisers in these areas."

“The Commission must take a clear line to give our farmers security. Only such security can safeguard our future harvests.”

Tomorrow, on an EPP Group initiative, the plenary of the European Parliament will discuss food security in light of the Russian war on Ukraine.

- **02.05.2022**

- Organic farming grows if the market grows
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/organic-farming-grows-if-the-market-grows>

“The EU must support farmers to increase organic production and also consumers to find their way to these products”, said Austrian EPP Group Member Simone Schmiedtbauer, the Parliament’s author of the [EU Action plan on Organic Agriculture](#). “Organic farming is good for people, animals, biodiversity, the environment and the climate and should therefore be given more space in Europe, but it will only grow if the market for organic products grows.”

“The market should determine the extent of the growth of the organic sector, not any pre-set target figure. We need to focus on practical issues of supply and demand as proposed by Parliament’s Agricultural Committee”, underlined Schmiedtbauer.

“Administrative barriers to the development of the sector must be removed and the CAP should reward organic farmers for the public goods they deliver. In addition, we need to support short, regional and seasonal supply chains. This secures the incomes of organic farmers, creates jobs in the regions and contributes to greater animal welfare, environmental protection and biodiversity. These, together with advisory services, research and innovation would help farmers to increase organic production.”

“Clear labelling and certification together with proper controls on imported organic products are ways to increase consumer trust in organic products and trust is needed to increase the demand”, continued Schmiedtbauer.

“The EU should have a strong regional focus in this action plan. Every region knows best where additional adjustments can be made and every region has a different starting point. Member States are in very different situations as the share of organic production varies from 0.5% to more than 25%. Therefore, we need sufficient flexibility for tailor-made, national organic strategies”, Schmiedtbauer concluded.

The European Parliament will discuss the EU Action Plan on Organic Agriculture today (Monday) in Strasbourg. The plenary vote will take place tomorrow (Tuesday).

- **17.05.2022**

- Europe has a humanitarian obligation in global food crisis
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/europe-has-a-humanitarian-obligation-in-global-food-crisis>

Russia's war in Ukraine has caused a global food crisis. "When Russia weakens the world's food security, it is the obligation of the EU to help the people in Ukraine and in the rest of the world", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee. The committee will debate the global food security situation with Members of the Ukrainian Parliament today.

A significant amount of Ukrainian food production is being cut from the global markets, and prices of wheat, other grains and some vegetable oils have jumped. This particularly hurts the poor in many African and Middle Eastern countries. "It is also crucial that the global markets stay open. In this sense, the decision of the Indian Government to block exports is a further problem", said Dorfmann.

"Increasing our own European production in this situation is our humanitarian obligation. The EPP Group constantly recalls that this is not the time to introduce any new legislation that may cut European food production. On the contrary, farmers need further predictability and security in times of rising production costs", underlined Dorfmann.

"Russia has destroyed and blocked several of Ukraine's ports along the Black Sea thus blocking Ukrainian exports. Alternative transport routes must be opened up from Ukraine to Europe, like the Commission is proposing in its Solidarity Lanes action plan. We call on Member States to put this plan into action without delay", Dorfmann demanded.

"Furthermore, we should help provide Ukraine with the necessary inputs like pesticides, fertilisers and seeds to increase its agricultural production. We must open up green transport corridors to and from Ukraine to allow these agricultural exchanges", Dorfmann concluded.

- **07.06.2022**

- o Every sector, every Member State must protect the planet
- o <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/every-sector-every-member-state-must-protect-the-planet>

The EPP Group wants everyone, every economic sector and every Member State to contribute to protecting the planet, including agriculture and forests. "We want to safeguard our planet and hand it over to the next generation in good shape. Cutting CO2 emissions by 55% by 2030, compared to 1990, is ambitious, but necessary to achieve climate neutrality towards 2050", said the EPP Group's Jessica Polfjärd MEP and Norbert Lins MEP.

Lins represents the EPP Group in talks on the new Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry Regulation (LULUCF), whereas Polfjärd negotiated the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) on behalf of the European Parliament.

"If you and I decide to run a marathon, it won't be enough if I run 2 kilometres and you run 40. The same goes for our climate work. Europe will not be able to reach our climate goals unless every Member State contributes. No country or sector should rely anymore on others to do the job", said Polfjärd.

"One cannot protect the climate by teaming up against farmers and forest owners, but only by teaming up with them instead. We must support our farmers and forest managers to remove CO2 from the atmosphere. We therefore need a carbon sink target for 2030 that is realistic, ambitious and based on the most up-to-date figures and scientific analysis. Our policy should be in line with sustainable active forest management, incentivising carbon storage and the

substitution of fossil fuels. Herewith, we can unlock the full climate potential of our forests and soils to achieve climate neutrality", concluded Lins.

- **22.06.2022**

- Now is not the time to cut food production
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/now-is-not-the-time-to-cut-food-production>

“Now is not the right moment for the proposals on pesticide reduction and nature restoration”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in the European Parliament’s Agriculture Committee.

“As we are in the middle of the worst food crisis of our century, the European Commission shouldn’t introduce new legislation that may cut food production in Europe”, he underlined.

The European Commission is set to publish a proposal later today for EU-wide binding targets for pesticide reduction and nature restoration. The proposals are estimated to reduce European food production.

“Since the Farm to Fork strategy was first introduced, the EPP Group has constantly asked the Commission for a thorough impact assessment. So far, we haven’t seen one. How can the Commission expect the Parliament to approve new legislation without knowing the impacts?”, asked Dorfmann.

“We have to take steps towards better controlled and targeted use of plant protection substances, but measures without wise consideration may only deepen the problems of our domestic food production and lead to growing imports. This is not in our common interest”, Dorfmann added.

"In a threatening situation in the midst of times of war in Ukraine, the Commission's proposals would result in significant yield reductions and would threaten global food security", said Christine Schneider MEP, member of the Environment Committee.

"Europe must live up to its responsibility in the world, especially now. Farmers need the appropriate toolbox to ensure our food security and to produce healthy food", she concluded.

- **19.10.2022**

- It is Europe’s duty to safeguard food production
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/it-is-europe-s-duty-to-safeguard-food-production>

“We need to increase our European autonomy in food production”, underlined Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in the European Parliament’s Agriculture Committee, as the Parliament today discusses global food security due to the Russian war in Ukraine.

“We have managed to take important steps in safeguarding parts of the food transports from Ukraine, but more must be done. Where we are still dragging our feet is the future of our own food production. Rising costs for energy and fertilisers are threatening our food production in the short-term. This is why we have called on the Commission to prepare a new strategy”, explained Dorfmann.

“In the longer term, the threat is the law proposals which would cut European food production and increase farmers’ costs. The EPP Group will push back on certain proposals that are harmful to our consumers and businesses. In the area of agriculture, these are the law proposals for nature restoration and the reduction of plant protection products”, said Dorfmann.

“The EPP Group supports sustainable production but that mustn’t mean cutting food production”, he underlined. “Maintaining food production in Europe is not only in farmers’ interest, but also in the consumers’ interest.”

“The Russian war and violence have already threatened global food security and caused more malnutrition. It is our European duty in this situation to safeguard food production, the functioning of the global food markets and to fight against protectionism. We need to do our best at home to grow more food and to guarantee our food security”, concluded Dorfmann.

- **23.11.2022**

- Change wolves' protection status
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/change-wolves-protection-status>

Growing numbers of wolves and bears in Europe are threatening traditional pastoral farming. Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman in Parliament's Agriculture Committee, and Alexander Bernhuber MEP, responsible for the topic in the Environment Committee, are calling for a modification of the protection status of wolves based on a scientific reassessment of their populations.

In France alone, more than 10,000 sheep are killed by wolves every year. In Germany, wolf populations are growing by 36% every year. 6,000 bears roam in the Romanian mountains.

"Growing populations of large predators are threatening the traditional way of farming in several European countries, not only in mountainous regions where pastoralism is an important part of agriculture. They also have a wider effect on rural communities and on tourism", said Dorfmann.

"Current measures to protect livestock and herds, such as fences and dogs, are insufficient for European farmers. We call for a change of the protection status of wolves in accordance with the Habitats Directive. It is time for a sound scientific reassessment of the European wolf population", confirms Bernhuber.

"When populations change, their conservation status must follow", Dorfmann stressed.

- **16.02.2023**

- Bring down fertiliser prices, bring down food bill

- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/bring-down-fertiliser-prices-bring-down-food-bill>

The EPP Group wants to ensure food security and affordability. “The availability of all types of fertilisers and fertiliser production is essential for the supply of food to EU citizens and for global food security”, recalled EPP Group Members Norbert Lins MEP and Colm Markey MEP.

The European Parliament will today discuss the availability of fertilisers in the EU and will vote for a list of proposed measures.

"The EPP alarm woke the Commission up, but we need more action to bring down fertiliser prices", said Lins, Chair of the European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. "Measures set out by the Commission in November are still far from sufficient."

"We urgently need to secure an adequate supply of fertiliser for our farmers", underlined Lins, calling on the Commission to address the distortions in fertiliser markets and to develop a long-term EU fertiliser strategy.

"We need multiple solutions for the short and long-term", stressed Markey. "Replacement and complementation of mineral fertiliser by nutrients from organic source and temporary lifting of anti-dumping measures for foreign imports should be in the toolbox. We also need better functioning, transparent fertiliser markets. There is also a growing need to increase financial support under the Common Agricultural Policy for farmers suffering from increased costs."

"Securing the supply of fertilisers means driving down food prices", Markey concluded.

- **02.03.2023**

- Green proposal will decrease wheat, apple, olive, tomato production in Europe
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/green-proposal-will-decrease-food-production-in-europe>

The EPP Group wants to postpone the law proposal on pesticide reduction in its current form because it will jeopardise European food production during the war in Ukraine. "When there is a war in Europe, we cannot do business as usual. The current law proposal is not fit for purpose", said Alexander Bernhuber MEP, the EPP Group's chief negotiator on pesticides.

The EPP Group firmly opposes proposals of the Green Group in the European Parliament, which are led by pure ideology as opposed to science. "Showing off with totally unrealistically high pesticides reduction targets will not lead anywhere. The Greens have no plan on what to do next. They will not make food healthier or more available, but just more expensive and more difficult to produce", stressed Bernhuber.

"The Greens are trying to criminalise pesticides. We want to reduce them without jacking up prices. We all want fewer pesticides on the table, but sometimes the best choice is not the most obvious one. If they simply ban the use of pesticides, this will result in food shortages", warned Franc Bogovič MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman on the topic in Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

Bogovič points to studies that show pesticide reduction in Europe could result in certain sectors producing up to 30 percent less food in Europe. In the worst case scenario, Europe would be producing on average 30 percent less apples and olives, 23 percent less tomatoes and 15 percent less wheat, which would have to be substituted by imports from third countries with much lower production standards compared to the EU.

"If these numbers are confirmed by the European Commission's impact assessment, which the EPP Group has been demanding, this is insanity. The pesticides law proposal was designed before the war. That is why a re-evaluation, a reassessment and an impact study are the reasonable and urgent next steps", Bernhuber and Bogovič concluded.

- **18.04.2023**

- Blocking Ukrainian grain is helping Russia
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/blocking-ukrainian-grain-is-helping-russia>

Don't do anything that weakens Ukraine. Make sure that Ukrainian grain reaches Africa. Don't take unilateral action infringing EU law. These are the messages of the EPP Group to the Polish, Hungarian and Slovakian Governments who announced a unilateral block of Ukrainian grain from entering the European Union.

"European governments must not act in detriment to solidarity for Ukraine during the war. Before unilaterally deciding to block export ways for Ukrainian goods, we need to have detailed information on why this grain or other products were not transited further out of Europe and what is the exact amount of the Ukrainian grain or other products stocked in European warehouses. We also need to know what the requests are of the protesting farmers in the Member States. Any unilateral action by Member States will only be a move in favour of Russia", said Sandra Kalniete MEP, who is responsible for the European Parliament's position on the temporary trade liberalisation of Ukrainian products.

"The problems of farmers in Ukraine's neighbouring countries are real and the Commissioner for agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, needs to provide concrete solutions for the problems. He needs to see that the neighbours get help. The so-called solidarity lanes were established to help transport Ukrainian food into third countries when Russian aggression closed the Ukrainian harbours. We ask the governments of the Member States to properly implement these lanes so that the transports end up where they should. The grain is meant to go to destinations outside the EU market. We must avoid market disturbances inside Europe. Blocking transports won't help either Ukraine or those outside Europe who are suffering most from rising food prices", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman on agriculture.

- **25.04.2023**

- Green Deal mustn't jeopardise food security

- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/green-deal-mustn-t-jeopardise-food-security>

“Food security and long-term resilience of EU agriculture should be a top priority for the European Commission”, says Marlene Mortler MEP, who drafted the European Parliament’s Report on food security. The Report will be voted on today in the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

“The European Commission should ensure that our farmers are able to produce and supply high-value agricultural commodities”, she continued.

“The objectives of the Green Deal must be implemented in such a way that food security is not compromised and that sustainability is ensured in environmental, economic and social terms. Now it looks as if the European Commission has difficulties hearing the problems of farmers”, she remarked.

“The war in Ukraine and rising costs are creating the fear that supply chains may become geopolitical tools. At the same time, several law proposals by the European Commission are either cutting agricultural production or diminishing the arable land area.”

“The Parliament proposes several measures to strengthen the position of primary producers in the food chain, support young and female farmers, and encourage investments. Instead of creating new burdens for farmers, the EPP Group calls on the Commission to take steps to protect the future of farmers and food security”, Mortler concluded.

- **02.05.2023**

- European Commission, listen to farmers!
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/european-commission-listen-to-farmers>

"European farmers are being hit from all sides. The economic hardships due to the Russian war in Ukraine are cutting farmers’ incomes, and the European Commission’s greening plans are threatening their future. There is an urgent need to listen to and respect our farmers when shaping EU policies. The EPP Group is calling for a debate at the plenary session of the European Parliament next week”, said Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group.

"The support of rural communities and our farmers in particular are crucial to succeed in the environmental and climate challenges we are facing. This means the European Commission should listen to them and show the respect they deserve for the crucial work they do for all Europeans. Instead of adding more bureaucracy and restrictions, we expect the Commission to work on a hopeful future perspective for farmers around Europe", Weber underlined.

“The Commission’s green deal proposals are cutting production and making investments insecure. Unsustainable cuts of plant protection products without realistic alternatives means a significant cut of the yields. Nature restoration on the other hand means a cut of the land area used for farming. Together, they will make a big hole in the already very thin farmers’ budgets, will endanger availability of European food and will increase inflation”, added Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in Parliament’s Agriculture Committee.

“These two proposals are lacking a proper economic impact assessment and their combination can be poisonous for the future of our farming”, concluded Dorfmann.

- **23.05.2023**

- Reject laws which are bad for European agriculture
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/reject-laws-which-are-bad-for-european-agriculture>

On the initiative of the EPP Group, the European Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture this afternoon rejected the planned nature restoration legislation.

“This rejection is a strong signal to the European Commission as this proposal was seen as a provocation in the Agriculture Committee”, said Anne Sander MEP, who negotiated the law on behalf of the EPP Group in the committee.

“We say no to degrowth and inconsistency. We have always supported a strong environmental ambition but with this proposal, the European Commission is ignoring the common sense and realities of European food production”, underlined Sander.

"With today’s vote, we are stressing that the EPP Group will strongly resist any law proposals which are a danger to farmers’ work and the food security of European citizens”, said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group Spokesman in the Agriculture Committee.

"Mr Timmermans, we don’t need badly drafted proposals where even the Commission itself is not able to tell what the economic and social impacts are on farmers and rural areas. We can reach the goals proposed by the Commission for nature restoration with fitted local and national measures", Dorfmann underlined.

"We do not accept the blackmail methods by the Commission that stop important new regulations such as new genomic technologies. We underline that the Parliament is a democratically-elected institution and cannot tolerate such methods", stressed Dorfmann.

The Environment Committee, which is the lead committee on the proposal, is expected to vote on the law in June.

- **24.05.2023**

- Mr Timmermans, withdraw this law!
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/mr-timmermans-withdraw-this-law>

The EPP Group in the European Parliament calls on European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans to withdraw the nature restoration law proposal, after Parliament's Fisheries Committee rejected the planned legislation this morning. Parliament's Agriculture Committee voted against the same law yesterday.

"Two parliamentary committees have now voted to reject the proposal for nature restoration. This is an exceptional step and shows that the Parliament is not ready to accept a proposal that only increases costs and insecurity for farmers, fishers and consumers. We support biodiversity, but this proposal is not fit for purpose and should be withdrawn following the

decisive votes in two parliamentary committees", said Siegfried Mureşan MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for budget and structural policies.

"The EPP Group in the Fisheries Committee voted for a rejection as we demand that the European Commission makes a better and more practical proposal. We want to protect and restore nature but we must actually work within reality so that the objectives are feasible and all stakeholders can achieve them", said Niclas Herbst MEP, who negotiated the law on behalf of the EPP Group in the Fisheries Committee.

"There are currently up to 23 regulations related to nature restoration and more than 40 texts taking communications, strategies and regulations into account. One more additional text will bring no added value. The European Commission should have made other suggestions creating consistency with existing legislation", he added.

"We want to help Member States restore ecosystems while securing jobs, especially in sectors like the EU fishing sector that has proved to be strategic, ensuring food security in Europe during Brexit, the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The European fishing sector is more sustainable than the fishing sector in most third countries", Herbst stressed.

Should the legislation not be withdrawn, it will be voted on in June by the Environment Committee, which is the lead committee on the proposal.

- **31.05.2023**

- [EPP Group withdraws from negotiations on nature restoration law](#)
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-withdraws-from-negotiations-on-nature-restoration>

The EPP Group has decided to withdraw from the negotiations on the planned nature restoration law after another round of negotiations with other political Groups. "The proposal was bad in the first place and our concerns remain unanswered", said Chairman Manfred Weber MEP and the EPP Group Chief Negotiator on nature restoration, Christine Schneider MEP.

From the start, the EPP Group has raised serious concerns about the Commission proposal. Weber continued: "The nature restoration law in its current form will lead to less food production in Europe, pushing food prices even higher, risks undermining food security in Africa even more and blocking infrastructure projects that are crucial for our climate transition. This is simply not acceptable for us. We cannot continue as if nothing has happened to our economy since the start of the war and the excessive pressure it puts on our rural communities and our farmers. The EPP Group is in favour of nature protection and restoration, but this law is simply not good enough."

Christine Schneider MEP added: "The law was poorly drafted in the first place and is an attack on European agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Some proposals, such as the prohibition of deterioration, have already failed rural communities in Europe's Natura 2000 legislation. Why repeat the same mistakes? We have to take our farmers, foresters, fishermen and all citizens on board."

"The European Commission cannot expect the EPP to simply accept the proposal without a comprehensive impact assessment on food security, reduced farmland and the renewable energy roll-out. This is not negotiable. If the Commission is serious about nature restoration, it should come up with a new proposal as soon as possible", she concluded.

- **13.06.2023**

- New burdens for farmers threaten food production
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/new-burdens-for-farmers-threaten-food-production>

"European farmers and the whole agri-food sector have shown exceptional resilience during the hardships of the pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine. Now, we must secure the future of our food production", said Marlene Mortler MEP, author of the European Parliament's Report on Food Security set for plenary vote on Wednesday.

"The EPP Group stands firmly on the side of farmers and we ask the Commission to do the same instead of creating additional new burdens for them. We can ensure food security only if our farmers have a strong, viable position in the food chain and they can invest and innovate for the future", Mortler said.

"The rising costs of farm inputs add to already high production costs and endanger farmers' revenues", Mortler underlined.

"The Parliament proposes several measures to strengthen the position of primary producers in the food chain. That includes support for young and female farmers and encouraging investments and innovations to create a positive prospect for European farmers and their future generations to ensure food security."

"The Commission should also proceed without hesitation with its proposals on new breeding techniques", Mortler added.

- **20.06.2023**

- Canfin intentionally delayed vote to prevent rejection of Nature Restoration law
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/canfin-intentionally-delayed-vote-on-nature-restoration-law>

Ahead of today's meeting of Environment Ministers, the EPP Group calls on EU Member States to reject the planned Nature Restoration law. "Last Thursday's vote in Parliament's Environment Committee has shown that there is no majority for the law in the European Parliament. The vote was a slap in the face for European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans. It is only because of the delaying tactics of the Chair of the Environment Committee, Pascal Canfin, that the final vote has not yet taken place. The Council should reject a law which is badly designed and has an uncertain impact", said Christine Schneider MEP, the EPP Group's Chief Negotiator of the Nature Restoration law.

Schneider warned against the deliberate misrepresentation of last week's voting procedure by the Greens and the Socialists. "If a law proposal does not secure a majority of the votes cast in committee, then the proposal is rejected. The committee Chair abused his role and first delayed, then interrupted and finally postponed the vote on the entire law package, because he feared a rejection. In last week's vote, most of the amendments were tied. This would have led to a non-adoption in the final vote. The fact that Canfin delayed the final vote is manipulation. The last word has not yet been spoken", Schneider said.

Before the vote in Parliament's Environment Committee, the law had already been rejected by the Agriculture and Fisheries Committees.

"The debate on nature restoration is all about the discord of European Liberals. Renew Chairman Stéphane Séjourné should start listening to his Party boss Emmanuel Macron in Paris. We will watch closely how the Council votes today", stressed Schneider.

The final vote on the Nature Restoration law in Parliament's Environment Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 27 June. Plenary will most probably vote on 11 or 12 July.

- **05.07.2023**

- No greening without new genomic techniques
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/no-greening-without-new-genomic-techniques>

Europe urgently needs new innovative solutions to produce more food. The EPP Group stands behind the green transition of Europe's economy, but this cannot be done with the old tools. The EU needs new practical solutions that serve both European food security and the environment.

"The situation is clear: we need to produce more food in Europe. We strongly disagree with the Greens in the European Parliament, who want to sabotage the new law, hindering food production in Europe. It is time for other political Groups to give up their out-dated resistance to innovation and technological progress. We need new technologies to secure sustainable food production", stressed Jessica Polfjärd MEP, welcoming the anticipated biodiversity and food package from the European Commission.

"The EPP Group has been asking the Commission for a long time to deliver a proposal for new genomic techniques, so we are pleased to finally see this action", said Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group Spokesman in the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. "Europe has dragged its feet for too long, sticking to an old Regulation that prohibits the development of the new low-risk technology in plant breeding."

"To achieve the goals of the Farm to Fork Strategy, including the reduction of pesticides, farmers need new tools. The Regulation of new genomic techniques is essential. We urgently need legislative clarity for research and innovations for plants that are more nutritious, can better adapt to changing climate conditions and are more resilient against pests and diseases", underlined Dorfmann.

"Our work does not stop here. If done right, this proposal will ensure European competitiveness, lower emissions and more food globally. Everybody should be able to support those objectives", Polfjärd concluded.

- **11.07.2023**

- Family farms are not industrial polluters
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/family-farms-are-not-industrial-polluters>

The EPP Group wants to slash industrial emissions, but wants to do it together with industry, farmers and SMEs, not against them. This is the line the EPP Group defended in the vote on the so-called Industry Emissions Directive earlier today.

"We want less pollution, but more innovation. The new Industry Emissions Directive will protect nature without creating more paperwork for businesses", said Radan Kanev MEP, the European Parliament's lead negotiator on industry emissions.

The EPP Group significantly improved the European Commission's law proposal. "We pushed for fast-track procedures and flexible environmental requirements for companies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and farmers. We insist that the European Green Deal must be both 'green' and a 'deal'. This must go hand in hand", said Kanev.

For the EPP Group it is crucial to support family farms, which should not become collateral damage of the new rules. "We want to balance different legitimate goals. We want to reduce emissions. But food production, the social fabric of rural areas, and farmers' families must also be protected", said Benoît Lutgen, the EPP Group's responsible MEP for the topic in the Parliament's Agriculture Committee.

Under the original European Commission proposal, family farms with 150 livestock units of cattle, pigs and poultry would have been classified as 'industrial installations'. The Parliament kept the current rules of 750 livestock units for pigs and poultry and refused to extend the rules to cattle farms. "Today's vote is good news for European family farms which guarantee our sustainable food production. The Parliament didn't allow the farms that breed cows to be listed as big industrial polluters and we avoided setting a new administrative burden for them. This was a good step in favour of our farmers and food security. Let farmers farm, not do paperwork", concluded Lutgen.

- **19.09.2023**

- EPP Group: Stop taking our farmers for granted!
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-stop-taking-our-farmers-for-granted>

"Instead of taking European farmers for granted, we need to support them and include them more in the decision-making on the future of Europe. We must respect them, make sure they can make a decent living, stop overloading them with new bureaucracy and finally appreciate

the strategic importance of food production in Europe. The EPP Group will always support our farmers and vibrant rural areas as they are an essential part of our European way of life”, said Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group.

The EPP Group has gathered more than 800 farmers and other experts on agriculture in the European Parliament today to discuss the future of farming at a [conference](#) on the 'European farmers' deal: EPP vision for agriculture in Europe'.

“We want to make European villages attractive to young people. We believe that rural areas have to be further supported - by investing in infrastructure, in digitalisation, in innovation, and healthcare services - so that living in any village in Europe offers the same quality of life as living in a city”, underlined Siegfried Mureşan MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group.

“One of the most important tasks for the next Parliament and Commission is to decide on the future CAP for the period after 2027”, added Norbert Lins MEP, Chairman of the Agriculture Committee.

“In CAP we need a strong economic pillar that enables the transition to more sustainable farming practices, supports generational renewal and protects farmers better in a highly volatile global market. But before the next CAP, we need to fully evaluate the CAP we have. Planning the next one is a job for the next Parliament and Commission”, stated Lins.

“We demand a renewed focus on agricultural research and innovation in all Member States. We need more investment in technology. We will also support all measures enabling young people to secure the sector’s future and furthermore, we stand for a level playing field for all EU farmers within the Single Market”, Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Spokesman in the Agriculture Committee, emphasised.

“We reject any attempt by large non-agricultural enterprises to set themselves up just to exploit the CAP for financial benefit. This money belongs to active farmers”, Dorfmann concluded.

- **13.10.2023**

- [Greens' glyphosate ban will increase food prices](#)
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/greens-glyphosate-ban-will-increase-food-prices>

Ahead of the vote on Friday among Member States to renew the approval of glyphosate use, the EPP Group advocates for its renewal. Christine Schneider MEP, who negotiated the file on behalf of the EPP Group, stated, "We want to reduce pesticides. But as long as there is war in Europe, we will not support any laws which hinder farmers from producing more food”.

Schneider further explained, "A total ban on glyphosate would have a seriously negative impact on food production and prices. Many people are currently suffering from increased food prices already. A ban on glyphosate - like Greens and Socialists want - would make this situation even worse”.

"We must listen to the scientists. If the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) tells us that glyphosate is safe to use in farming, our reaction cannot be to request to phase it out." Schneider continued.

At the same time, the EPP Group stresses the importance of the responsible use of glyphosate. "Glyphosate must be used by those trained to use it. Its use must never become everyone's hobby. Even though the use of glyphosate is already strictly regulated, even forbidden in protective areas, our researchers must continue to work towards finding appropriate, effective and affordable substitutes", she concluded.

In September, the European Commission proposed renewing the approval of glyphosate for the EU market beyond its current expiration date of 15 December 2023. Member States are expected to approve this proposal on Friday.

- **24.10.2023**

- Let countries choose how to reduce plant protection products
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/let-countries-choose-how-to-reduce-plant-protection-products>

The EPP Group will not support laws that hinder farmers' ability to produce food or reduce overall food production.

"At a time of multiple crises and global food shortages, we should ensure food security and not hamper food production in Europe. We all want fewer plant protection products on our plates. However, reducing them without suitable low-risk alternatives while simultaneously placing additional burdens on farmers is not a sustainable solution. New legislation must not make food more expensive, must not reduce food production in Europe and must not lead farmers quitting their business," said Alexander Bernhuber MEP, the EPP Group's chief negotiator on 'Plant Protection Products', following today's vote in the Environment Committee.

"The EPP Group is on the side of farmers, consumers and technological progress. Several Member States have already achieved significant reductions; Slovenia, for example, has cut plant protection products by 25 percent compared to 2015-2017. European countries must be able to choose their own trajectories, practices and priorities when it comes to reducing pesticides. This is why the current proposed law is simply not fit for purpose. It is crucial that these Member States who have made substantial strides in reducing plant protection products are not penalised," stressed Franc Bogovič MEP, the EPP Group's Negotiator of the law in the Agriculture Committee.

"Farming is about the future, not the past! If farmers are restricted from using plant protection products, they must be allowed to embrace new breeding techniques to enhance food production," Bogovič added.

"We also cannot agree with the Greens' demands for increased bureaucracy. It is just not realistic to ask farmers to announce on a website every time they use plant production

products. Farmers must be allowed to do their work in fields instead of filling in forms and stockpiling paperwork," concluded Bernhuber.

- **09.11.2023**

- Negotiations finalised on strongly revised Nature Restoration Law
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/negotiations-finalised-on-strongly-revised-nature-law>

Late this evening, negotiators from EU Member States and the political groups in the European Parliament finalised negotiations on the Nature restoration law.

"I want to thank my colleagues for their work and the positive changes that have been made to the text. We welcome the fact that the final text on this law has little to do with the original proposal from the Commission," says Christine Schneider MEP, who took part in the negotiations for the EPP Group.

"The Commission's proposal was ideologically driven, practically infeasible and a disaster for farmers, forest owners, fishermen and local and regional authorities, especially in densely populated areas. Moreover, it threatened to slow down the roll-out of key infrastructure and renewable energy, vital to achieving our climate targets. We are glad to see that the other political groups have moved in our direction on many of the key concerns we have," emphasises Schneider.

"The EPP Group will now seriously check the outcome of today's negotiations before the environment committee and the plenary votes, keeping in mind that nature restoration and achieving our climate goals go hand-in-hand with agriculture and forestry. Only then we can secure Europe's food security," says Schneider.

Notable improvements in the text of the law, among others:

- There is no more requirement to renature 10 per cent of farmland, which would have considerably reduced farmland and contributed to inflation.
- An effort-based approach on the non-deterioration principle, instead of the mandatory top-down approach that the Commission proposed.
- Food security has been defined as a central objective of the law, which is needed to bring down food prices.
- The EU's agriculture and fisheries funds (CAP and CFP) will not be used for nature restoration measures.
- The new rules do not apply to renewable projects or key infrastructure works.
- An emergency brake to freeze farmland targets, if food security or production are threatened.
- The controversial goal of restoring nature to its state in the 1950's has been deleted.
- Peatland restoration is voluntary for farmers, not mandatory.
- Member States must prioritise Natura 2000 areas, not farmland.
- For farmers, it's the efforts that will count, not the results.

- **22.11.2023**

- [Parliament rejects extremism on plant protection products](#)
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/parliament-rejects-extremism-on-plant-protection>

There will be no European ban on plant protection products. Today, the European Parliament rejected the extremist approach of the Greens and Socialists to impose more and more bans and excessive regulations that would reduce food production in Europe.

The EPP Group voted to find compromises on the sustainable use of plant protection products, but the left parties continued to push for extremes. As a result, no majority was reached and the legislative proposal was rejected altogether.

"The EPP Group does not support measures that reduce food production in Europe or impede farmers from producing food. Let farmers farm! Before we move towards an outright ban on plant protection products, we must find suitable alternatives", said Alexander Bernhuber MEP, the EPP Group's negotiator on the new rules on the use of plant protection products, following today's vote in the European Parliament.

"We all want fewer plant protection products used on farmland. But reducing them must not jeopardise food production in Europe, make food more expensive, or lead to farmers quitting their businesses," Bernhuber said.

"Farmers must be allowed to do their work. We must not increase the bureaucratic burden on farmers but ensure food security," he concluded.

- 29.11.2023

- [EPP prevents family farms from being classified as industrial polluters](#)
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-prevents-family-farms-from-being-classified-as-polluters>

The EPP Group welcomes the agreement between the Parliament and EU Member States not to consider cattle farms as industry plants.

"We want less pollution, but more innovation. The new Industry Emissions Law will protect nature without creating more paperwork for businesses. We want to slash industrial emissions, but want to do it together with industry, farmers and SMEs, not against them," said Radan Kanev MEP, the European Parliament's lead negotiator on the Industry Emissions Directive after this morning's informal agreement.

The agreement is a success of Kanev, who managed to uphold the most important part of the Parliament's mandate in the negotiation, given by a broad cross-party plenary majority.

"We kept cattle out of the scope of the Industry Emissions Directive. The European Commission must now make a new impact assessment and communicate fairly and transparently with farmers before coming back to Parliament with a new legislative proposal on cattle inclusion. We need safeguards for EU farmers, the so-called 'reciprocity clause', said Kanev.

The reciprocity clause provides assurance that in the future, imported agricultural products will comply with comparable environmental requirements as those in place for European farmers under the Industrial Emissions Directive.

- **06.12.2023**

- EPP Group listens to farmers
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-listens-to-farmers>

Stronger financing, help for generational renewal and investments for innovations are amongst the policy proposals put forward by the EPP Group to protect European farming and food production, as outlined in the position paper 'The EPP vision for Agriculture in Europe' adopted today.

"With this position paper, the EPP Group clearly shows its full support for farmers and vibrant rural areas as an essential part of our European way of life," says Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group. "We listen to farmers, and we treat them with respect while working towards a more innovative, more competitive and more sustainable agriculture in Europe," adds Weber.

"The EPP Group protects Europe's food security by standing for a competitive European agricultural model based on families and professional farmers. We will consistently defend a strong, well-funded Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and insist on a bigger CAP budget with more fairness and less complexity and bureaucracy. Only in this way, can our farmers face the many challenges that lie ahead," says Siegfried Mureşan MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in charge of budget and structural policies.

"We insist that efforts are stepped up to combat the alarming lack of generational renewal in agriculture, especially by making rural areas more attractive to the younger generation. We call for a renewed focus on agricultural research and innovation, and we must lower the environmental impact, without reducing our agricultural production," stresses Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group's spokesman in the Agriculture Committee.

The EPP Group position paper 'A European Farmers' Deal - The EPP Vision for Agriculture in Europe' is available via this [link](#).

- **24.01.2024**

- Allow for genome editing to make agriculture more sustainable
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/allow-for-genome-editing-to-make-agriculture-more-sustainable>

The EPP Group wants to make agricultural plants more sustainable and resilient to climate change. "We must also allow for innovation in European agriculture," says Jessica Polfjård MEP, the European Parliament's lead negotiator on the new rules regarding genome editing, ahead of the vote on the law later today in the Parliament's Environment Committee.

"If we want to make agriculture more sustainable, more resistant to pests and extreme weather conditions, if we want to produce more food in Europe and increase food security, then we need new genomic techniques. They will enable the development of improved crop varieties more precisely and quickly than any other traditional method," stresses Polfjärd.

Polfjärd explains that the current legal framework, which does not allow European agriculture to benefit from ground-breaking innovations such as CRISPR/Cas9, is hopelessly outdated. "With this vote, my colleagues from all political groups have the opportunity to take a clear stance in support of science, innovation and sustainable European agriculture," Polfjärd concludes.

- **06.02.2024**

- Scrapping pesticides law is "overdue, reasonable and relieving"
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/scrapping-pesticides-law-overdue-reasonable-and-relieving>

Alexander Bernhuber MEP and Franc Bogovič MEP welcome the "overdue, reasonable and relieving" announcement by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to withdraw the legislative proposal on pesticide reduction in its current form.

"This is a first good sign that the Commission will work with farmers to tackle climate change rather than against them. We have always said that it would be irresponsible to jeopardise European food production in the face of current crises through unrealistic requirements and bureaucracy. We are ready at any time to work together with the Commission for effective climate protection and a secure food supply," says Alexander Bernhuber MEP, the EPP Group's chief negotiator on pesticides.

"The proposed law was simply not fit for purpose and did not take into account the past efforts of European farmers. For farmers to keep feeding Europeans, they need reasonable regulation and encouragement, as well as access to modern technologies, such as new breeding techniques or precision farming. Farming is about the future, not the past," adds Franc Bogovič MEP, the EPP Group's Spokesman on pesticides in the Agriculture Committee.

- **07.02.2024**

- Act Now for Farmers, Not Just Talk
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/act-now-for-farmers-not-just-talk>

Farmers around Europe need strong support, as the future of their economy is at risk. "In times of insecurity and with Russia's war at our borders, European food production is a critical asset that the EPP Group defends," says Siegfried Mureşan MEP, EPP Group Vice-Chair in charge of agriculture.

"Defending our food security and rural way of life, the EPP Group has continuously opposed any proposals that would cut our food production and farmers' income, and we have a solid track record in this," underlines Herbert Dorfmann MEP, the EPP Group spokesman in the Agriculture Committee.

“We welcome the withdrawal of the proposal on cutting the use of plant protection products. We stand by Ukraine, but we have pointed out the weaknesses of unlimited food imports, and we are waiting for them to be fixed. At our request, the Commission will continue the derogation of the rule that forces farmers to set aside part of their arable lands. And also due to our strong push, the revision of the protection status of wolves and bears has moved forward,” reminds Dorfmann.

“As we need further actions, we welcome that other political groups now share our line for the future: no new burdens, but fair and solid income for farmers through a strong Common Agricultural Policy. Sustainable agriculture, but together with our farmers, not against them. Only through actions, not empty words, we truly stand alongside our farmers,” Mureşan concludes.

- **26.02.2024**

- EPP Group will vote against Nature Restoration Law
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/epp-group-will-vote-against-nature-restoration-law>

The EPP Group in the European Parliament today decided to vote against the Nature Restoration Law in tomorrow's plenary vote, which was heavily revised during negotiations last autumn.

“The EPP Group continues to have serious concerns about the Nature Restoration Law. We do not want new and more forms of bureaucracy and reporting obligations for farmers. Let farmers farm,” said MEP Siegfried Mureşan MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in charge of budget and structural policies.

“There are fears that many Member States will use the law to introduce bureaucracy and far-reaching monitoring and reporting obligations for farmers and foresters, while claiming that the EU is forcing them to do so. As a result, the affected farmers and foresters would once again look to Brussels with resentment, when the problem is homemade and lies with the respective national governments,” Mureşan continued.

“We welcome the fact that the revised legal text bears little resemblance to the original proposal from the Commission. The Commission's proposal was ideologically driven, practically unfeasible and a disaster for farmers, forest owners, fishermen and local authorities. It threatened to slow down the roll-out of key infrastructure and renewable energy. The revised text is now better. But it is still better to start from scratch and put farmers' interests first,” concluded Mureşan.

- **15.03.2024**

- Ease rules for farmers now
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/ease-rules-for-farmers-now>

The EPP Group welcomes the easing of the rules of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It has been the EPP that has asked for more simplification and more flexibility for farmers for a long time. Today's package is a step in that direction.

“The measures must be put into force now without any hesitation. All delays would mean that farmers would have to wait months to know what the new rules would be and would not be able to plan their production,” says Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group spokesman on agriculture.

“We listen to our farmers, and we understand that with the current global circumstances, we need our farmers to produce more and not less to ensure our food security and affordability,” he underlines.

“The EPP consistently opposed the extremely strict conditionality regime introduced in the CAP 2023-27. The concerns we had about its impact on food security and the ability of farmers to earn a decent income were fully justified. This was especially the case in the context of the pandemic and then the war in Ukraine,” Dorfmann reminds.

“The need to improve the position of farmers in the food supply chain has long been a major priority for the EPP. In its announcements today, the Commission clearly recognises this,” Dorfmann underlines.

- **20.03.2024**

- Support Ukraine and protect our farmers
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/support-ukraine-and-protect-our-farmers>

Leading EPP Group MEPs welcome the deal that was struck overnight to extend the suspension of import duties and quotas on Ukrainian exports to the EU, while also strengthening the safeguards for sensitive agricultural products. "The deal is proof that we will continue to support Ukraine until it is victorious. Russia's targeting of Ukraine and its food production also affects EU farmers. The Parliament has heard their concerns. As well as extending the trade measures, MEPs today also backed safeguards to alleviate the pressure on EU farmers should they be overwhelmed by a sudden surge in Ukrainian imports. A good balance has been struck between continued support for Ukraine and the necessary protection of our markets," says Sandra Kalniete MEP, the European Parliament's lead negotiator on the Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs) for Ukraine.

"The compromise on Ukrainian food imports is important for many food sectors suffering from market disruption. However, as the farmers are struggling with the sinking market prices, it is a pity that wheat has not been included in the deal," emphasises Herbert Dorfmann MEP, EPP Group spokesman on agriculture.

The deal expands the import caps from sugar, poultry and eggs to honey, maize, oats and groats. There will be no explicit cap on wheat, but the Commission has agreed to introduce safeguard measures for wheat in case of market disruptions.

- **24.04.2024**

- Simplification of agriculture rules is victory for farmers
- <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/simplification-of-agriculture-rules-is-victory-for-farmers>

The EPP Group welcomes the simplification and easing of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rules, which have been adopted by the European Parliament today.

“The result of the vote is a victory for European farmers and our food security,” says MEP Norbert Lins, the Chairman of the Parliament’s Agriculture Committee.

“As farmers will no longer be required to dedicate a minimum part of their arable land to non-productive areas, the result will ease the economic burden of the farms and also improve our European production,” Lins says. “For small farms, it is fair to have an exemption from the controls and penalties under the conditionality regime,” he adds.

“The EPP Group stands with the European farmers and rural communities. We have strongly advocated for relaxing CAP conditionality rules and removing unnecessary bureaucratic burdens and have been calling for more simplification and flexibility for farmers for many years,” says MEP Herbert Dorfmann, the EPP Group's Spokesman on Agriculture

Dorfmann underlines that today’s decision will also reduce centralism by giving Member States more flexibility to decide which soils to protect and in which season. Each country can also decide to replace crop rotation with crop diversification.

“The EPP Group has consistently opposed the extremely strict conditionality regime introduced in the CAP 2023-27. The decision shows that under our leadership, the EU can improve its food security and farmers’ ability to earn a decent income,” underline Lins and Dorfmann.