EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Agricultural anguish

Across Europe, farmers have staged massive protests in major cities to express displeasure with local-, national-, and EU-level regulations affecting their industry, while decisionmakers try to find a balance between pursuing green policies, promoting trade, and appeasing the farmers' demands.

European Headlines is a weekly newsletter from the European Movement International highlighting media perspectives from across Europe. Click here to subscribe.



City slickers

Farmers throughout Europe are taking their tractors to the streets in recent weeks to make their displeasure with national and EU agricultural policies known – as residents in many European capitals can attest. Brussels, in particular, is feeling the squeeze during this week's European Council summit. According to *NRC*, their main issue is with EU agricultural regulations, which they say have become increasingly harder to comply with to receive subsidies. Of the most controversial new rules is one that requires farmers to leave 4% of their land untended, which was due to come into force this year. Farmers from mainly eastern countries have also been protesting the suspension of import duties on Ukrainian products, which they say has disrupted their market, and now the European Commission is working toward a compromise. It may not be enough; farmers want even fewer green measures, more restrictions on Ukrainian products, and to stop the EU-Mercosur agreement. Though leaders are searching for compromise, with the far right slated to do very well in June's elections, the outlook on a climate-neutral Europe is looking ever more complicated.

Read the full article



Stubborn as a mule

In Spain, the largest agricultural associations have agreed to return to the streets until they get an improvement on the conditions of the sector, asking for measures at the European, national and local level. *El País* puts in parallel the announced protests with the march of farmers in France and with last week's uprising by the sector in Germany, which denounces cuts in fuel subsidies. Protests are also reported in Belgium, Italy, Romania and Poland. Spanish associations have highlighted that they are going to demand the suspension of the negotiations of agreements that the European Union has underway, such as the EU-Mercosur agreement, the non-ratification of the agreement with New Zealand and the negotiations with Chile, Kenya, Mexico, India and Australia. On the other hand, the organisations have demanded the modification and expansion of the law to prohibit unfair practices so that farmers' prices cover production costs. The unrest in France on the same topic has also caused clashes between the two countries. The protests in France blocked the border in La Jonquera and Irún and several French workers attacked trucks coming from Spain, destroying and burning the loads, with losses amounting to €12 million.

Read the full article



From the horse's mouth

Amidst the farmers' protests throughout Europe, *Il Post* explains the European Commission's proposal to find an agreement with their agricultural aggressors. One of the main points of protest is the new provision that in order to receive funding from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), farmers must leave 4% of their fields uncultivated to promote biodiversity. The CAP is about one-third of the EU multiannual budget, measuring €387 billion between 2021-27 and delivering subsidies to the agricultural sector due to factors such as the industry's limited margins, susceptibility to climate change and energy costs, and competition. The 4% rule was only adopted in 2023 and never came into effect – it was suspended due to ripple effects from climate change events and Russia's war in Ukraine. As the regulation does not allow for two years of extension, this week the Commission proposed allowing the cultivation of specific crops on the 4% in question that can be beneficial to the land and have a smaller impact. Described as a compromise by the Commission, environmental organisations are not happy with the idea – BirdLife Europe called it "shameful" and "irresponsible". The proposal would still need to be approved by the Council of the European Union, and if so, would be retroactive from 1 January 2024.

Read the full article



French beef

Le Monde provides an explainer on why the EU-Mercosur agreement is triggering the anger of farmers across the European Union, including in France, where they have been protesting for the last two weeks. This free trade agreement was approved in 2019 after almost 20 years of negotiations but has not yet been ratified. It aims to facilitate trade between Europe and South America by gradually eliminating almost all customs duties applied to EU exports to the four countries of Mercosur (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay). In France, farmers denounce the threat that the massive arrival of South American foodstuffs would pose to French agriculture, in particular when it comes to beef. The French government has reiterated that it is against ratifying the deal and is calling for mirror clauses to guarantee reciprocity of health and environmental standards between the two blocs. The executive even assured this week that negotiations in Brussels had been interrupted due to opposition from France. The conclusion of this agreement is considered essential by several European capitals and a majority of EU countries are in favour of this agreement. Experts, however, assess that there is almost no chance for it to be signed before the EU elections in June.

Read the full article

Copyright © The European Movement International, all rights reserved.
The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

This is a weekly newsletter from the European Movement International.
Click here to subscribe.