How to transform food systems? Consensus, crisis, and (de)politicisation in the CAP reform policy process

Paper first received: 29 January 2025; Accepted: 22 August 2025; Published in final form: 07 November 2025
https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v31i1.701

Gianluca BRUNORI,[1] Sabrina ARCURI,[1] and Francesca GALLI[1]

Abstract

In 2024, a wave of farmers' protests shook policymaking in the EU. The protests began in reaction to national policy measures and soon coalesced into a unified movement across Europe, directed against the CAP reform (into force since January 2023). The protests took an anti-European tone and were supported by anti-system political forces. In response, European Institutions modified salient environmental aspects of the reform and withdrew, or blocked policy measures proposed within the Farm to Fork strategy. The Head of the EU Commission initiated a "strategic dialogue" with key stakeholders to develop a common vision for the future of the EU agriculture and food sector. This paper examines the relationship between crisis, (de)politicization, and polarization in the CAP reform process, with a focus on how actors mobilize strategies to politicize, depoliticize, or polarize policy debates. Drawing on a conceptual framework that integrates recent literature on (de)politicization and consensus-building, and a thematic analysis of policy discourse from 2021 to 2024, we explore how institutional dynamics and stakeholder interactions shape the prospects for transformative food system change. We argue that consensus or compromise-building is a crucial mechanism for transformational change and the very process of creating it is at the heart of debates on (de)politicization vs (de)polarization. We conclude that deliberative arenas and independent science and media can play a complementary role in this debate, by fostering dialogue, highlighting trade-offs and establishing the basis for finding compromises.

[1] Department of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, University of Pisa, Italy

Corresponding authors: Sabrina Arcuri, sabrina.arcuri@unipi.it

Biographical notes

Gianluca Brunori is full professor of Food Policy at the University of Pisa

Sabrina Arcuri is Lecturer of Agricultural Policy at the University of Pisa

Francesca Galli is Associate professor of Food Policy at the University of Pisa

Introduction

In 2024, a wave of farmers' protests shook policymaking in the EU. Farmers' protests erupted in reaction to national policy measures (e.g., subsidies for fuels in Germany, plans to reduce livestock in the Netherlands, and the removal of income tax exemptions in Italy) (Matthews, 2024). Soon, the protests coalesced into a unified movement across Europe, one directed against the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform, which had entered into force in January 2023 following a five-year decision-making process. The movement took a different configuration from past farmers' protests, which were very vocal but largely confined to sectoral concerns; it took on an anti-European tone, going beyond sporadic episodes, and with the support of anti-system political forces. In view of the European Parliament elections in May 2024, European Institutions (the EU Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament) reacted to the protests by modifying salient environmental aspects of the reform. In addition, many of the policy measures proposed within the Farm to Fork strategy -- one of the flagships of the broader Green Deal strategy -- were withdrawn, voted down, or blocked at some level of the institutional process.

The outcomes of these events are particularly striking, given that the past legislature had begun with an apparently strong agreement on the need for food system transformation. What happened to change the political scenario so dramatically? For sure, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis have played a decisive role in reshaping the policy landscape. Both crises provided all actors of the EU polity with the opportunity to reposition themselves and to adjust their discourse, and both have been instrumentalised by political forces and lobbies to obtain favourable policy concessions (Matthews et al., 2023). Farmers' protests, however, signalled something different: a link to anti-system movements willing to undermine European Integration.

This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the long and complex process that characterises Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms in the European Union. Its relevance lies in the peculiarity and "exceptionality" (Daugbjerg and Feindt, 2017) of agricultural policymaking, due to the very nature of the agricultural sector, and the traditional dependence of the policy process on negotiations among powerful interest groups (Matthews et al., 2024). In this regard, we will analyze the CAP reform process and the events that occurred after the reform through the lens of (de)politicisation, (de)polarisation, and crisis. The analysis will contribute to answering the questions: (i) What conditions enable the success of transformative policies in times of crisis and polarisation? and (ii) how do strategies of (de)politicisation and (de)polarisation influence these outcomes?

In the next section, we start with an overview of how (de)politicisation, depolarisation, and polarisation are conceptualised by different schools of thought, and how these concepts connect with consensus-building (2.1). We then propose a conceptual framework for the assessment of policy change in the CAP by applying these concepts in the agricultural policy context (2.2.) and examining how situations of (de)politicisation and (de) polarisation may arise (2.3). The methodology applied in the study is illustrated in section 2.4. In the results section (3), we extensively describe CAP reform processes that occurred in the last decades, emphasising the role played by actors, interests, and institutional arenas, before moving to the most recent farmers' protests and opportunities for politicisation, depoliticisation, and polarisation strategies by different actors. In section 4, we discuss the factual and conceptual implications of the analysis, proposing an interpretation of the events connected to the last CAP reform, before bringing the paper to a close and outlining directions for future research in section 5.

(De)politicisation, (de)polarisation, and consensus: framing the debate

Defining the concepts and their connections

According to Wiesner (2021), politicisation is "*the process by which issues enter the formal political sphere*." According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is "*the act of making something a political issue*". In the first definition,

politicisation is seen as a process and in the second as an act. While the first definition looks at the dynamics within a polity, the second definition focuses on the actors' role.

(De)politicisation can be defined as the process through which issues are strategically shifted between realms, each characterised by distinct actors, discourses, and modes of communication, in order to influence decision-making (Flinders and Buller, 2006). The outcome of such processes entails a reconfiguration of power relations surrounding the issue, with (de)politicisation serving as a deliberate strategy employed by the actors involved. Studying (de)politicisation as a process allows one to see the effects of the interaction between policy actors in relation to a given issue. For example, when political disagreement on an issue is low, decisions tend to be delegated to technical bodies who decide based on scientific evidence and expert knowledge. When solutions do not provide satisfactory answers to societal problems, or generate new problems, repoliticisation might occur. Along the policy cycle, several stages of (de)politicisation can be observed.

As Buller et al. (2019) have noted, a relevant part of the debate on (de)politicisation has focused on systemic processes triggered by politicisation, to a certain extent independent from actors' will, to explain why, in a given historical phase, the neoliberal mode of production has started to be considered as a natural law, i.e., a self-evident and inevitable order, rather than a consequence of political choice and decision-making. In this perspective, the economy is framed as a 'realm of necessity' governed by natural laws, as this naturalisation, advanced globally through the transfer of knowledge production and decision-making to specialised technical bodies, has separated the 'economic' from the 'political' and from the 'social'. The 'realm of necessity' therefore embodies the highest degree of depoliticisation, since, in liberal economies, it operates under rules set by exclusive groups of high-level experts, bureaucrats, and policymakers. Systemic depoliticisation, according to this approach, has created a condition known as 'post-politics', where alternatives to the existing neo-liberal order are kept out of the political horizon (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015). A similar conclusion has been drawn on the approach to climate change of International Organisations (Swyngedouw, 2022). Now that the 'natural law' profile of the neoliberal international order is shaken by Trumpism (see for example the conflict with the Federal Reserve), the systemic mechanisms of depoliticisation of the past era are revealed to a larger public. Differently from the first, processual approach, (de)politicisation as an act stresses the role of agency in systemic contexts (Wamsley, 2024).

In this body of literature, strategies of depoliticisation-repoliticisation are enacted by policy actors to alter the distribution of power in specific policy domains according to the context. According to the second approach, depoliticisation is "*a form of statecraft that seeks to 'place at one remove the political character of decision-making'*" (Wamsley, 2024). Through depoliticisation, in other words, governments and policymakers shift the related responsibilities away from themselves. According to this approach, (de)politicisation can have either positive or negative impacts in relation to policy change. For example, it can help politicians to distance themselves from interest groups' demands, populist pressure (Flinders and Wood, 2015), or to adopt solutions deemed beneficial in the long term but not within the electoral cycle. By putting decision-making out of the spotlight of the political game, depoliticisation strategies can help to activate policy change through compromises and solutions to complex problems (Schimmelfennig, 2021). In the present times, we observe how politicisation and depoliticisation occur in an increasingly turbulent setting, where, on the one hand, a growing number of people become disaffected with politics, while on the other hand an increasing number of issues are becoming heavily politicised. In such a context, politicisation alone is not enough to understand what is happening, and the concept of polarisation can help. According to a general definition, polarisation is a tendency of the polity to divide into opposite factions with little or no overlap across values, beliefs, and interests (Rostböll, 2024). With regard to an issue, politicisation can lead to polarisation when the differences between opposing positions are pronounced, as heightened attention and contestation tend to amplify existing divisions. However, polarisation is rarely observed in relation to a single issue. Polarisation can be ideological -- when groups have radically different visions of the world -- and/or affective – when groups tend to deny legitimacy and respect to their opponents. Moreover, polarisation can be intransigent or flexible, depending on groups' availability to reach compromises (Rostböll, 2024). In a sense, polarisation can be an outcome of unresolved

politicisation, especially when parties are unwilling to compromise. Some types of polarisation -- especially affective polarisation -- represent a denial of politicisation, as it reduces the space of communication between parts, the necessary condition to develop a shared problem framing. In polities where affective polarisation occurs, communication takes place in 'bubbles' wherein each participant has only access to the information consistent with her values (Sunstein, 2017). Polarisation also tends to reduce the diversity of positions within clusters, strengthening binary approaches (friend vs. foe) (Axelrod et al., 2021). While politicisation brings a problem into the policy arena and makes it an object open to deliberation, polarisation creates the conditions for either policy stalemate or authoritarian change.

Like politicisation, polarisation can also be seen as a process or as a strategy. With regard to the first case, Axelrod and others (2021) have built a mathematical model showing that polarisation depends on the interaction between components of a polity, and that the outcome of the interaction (measured in terms of distance between respective positions) depends on the initial distance, the exposure to others' positions, and the level of tolerance to them. When tolerance is low, interaction tends to generate repulsion. The higher the tolerance, the higher the attraction (that is, the reduction of distances). Processes of (de)polarisation, therefore, modify the space of interaction by acting upon distance, tolerance, and exposure. The study of social media has been very effective in showing affective polarisation processes (Tornberg et al., 2021).

When polarisation is studied as a strategy, research analyses how political actors take systematically, and deliberately, opposite positions on a wide range of issues in the name of group identity, playing with narratives and communication strategies that tend to decrease the tolerance to others' positions (such as, for example, hate speech or denialism). Independent knowledge-producing institutions -- media, academic institutions, technical bodies -- are seen as obstacles to polarisation because, to the extent that they are perceived as reliable sources of information and wisdom within a community, exposure to them reduces the distance between opposing positions. Strategies of polarisation tend thus to delegitimise these sources, reducing the space for 'independent' politicisation of issues.

(De)politicisation in agriculture: the state of the art

Agricultural policies are an important field for the study of (de)politicisation (Sheingate and Greer, 2021). An important contribution to this debate comes from the special issue of Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice of 2021. Feindt et al. (2021) develop a conceptual framework in which (de)politicisation is analysed in its dynamic dimension: analysing (de)politicisation as a strategy implies adopting an actor-oriented approach; considering (de)politicisation as a process can highlight the interaction between different actors and its evolution; (de)politicisation as an outcome focuses on the state of a given issue in relation to the (de)politicisation process and develops indicators for assessment. The relevance of these distinctions is related to the extent and the conditions under which (de)politicisation can generate policy change. In the same special issue, Skogstad (2021) examines Canadian agricultural marketing institutions and shows how political parties strategically play between politicisation and depoliticisation in relation to electoral goals. Vogeler (2021) illustrates how bottom-up ethical and societal pressures reintroduce normative contestation on animal welfare into a depoliticised agricultural policy, especially through the introduction of new actors in the policy arena. Zollmer (2025) claims that the threat of ballot initiatives in the animal welfare domain is a driver of policy change. Sharma and Daugbjerg (2021) analyse "coalition magnet" ideas such as food sovereignty in Nepal and Ecuador, showing how such appeals politicise agricultural debates by forming broad reform coalitions.

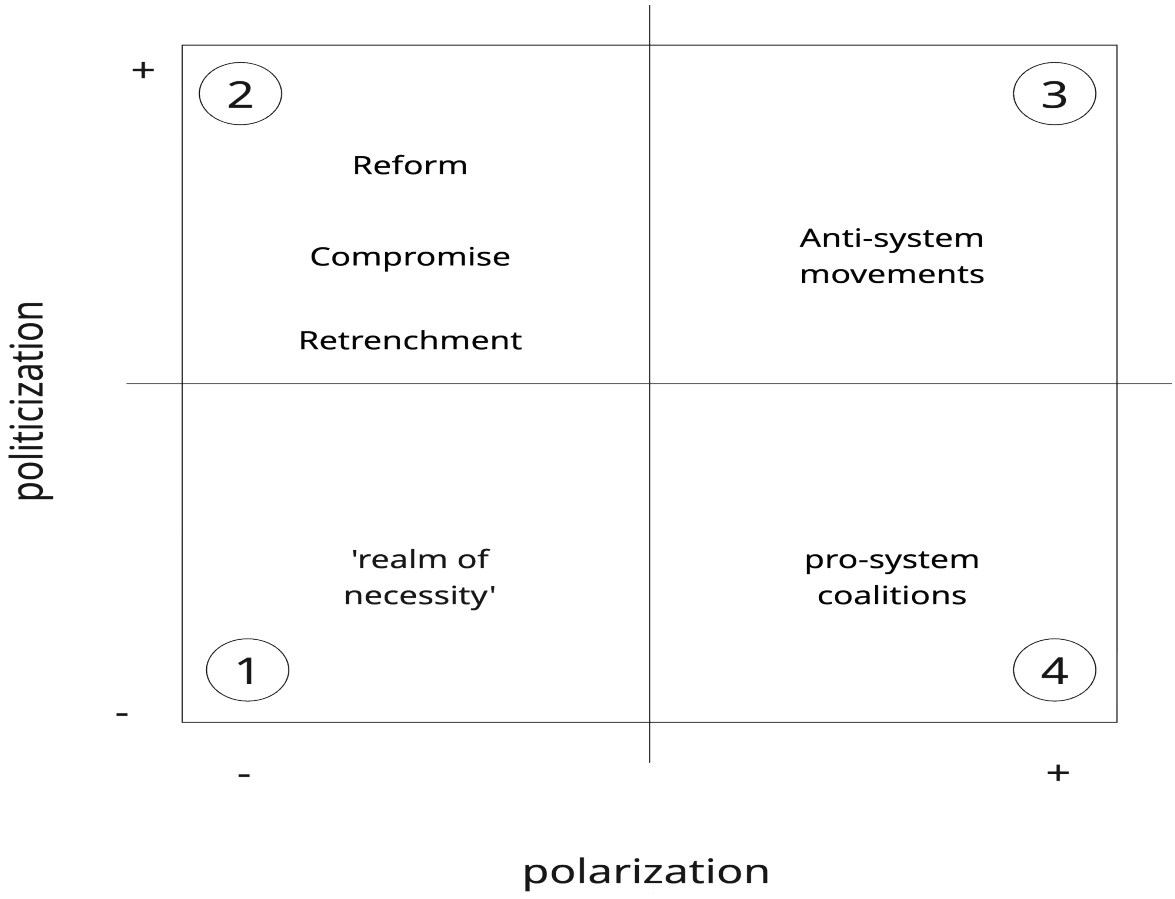
As highlighted (Feindt et al., 2021; Hay, 2007), (de)politicisation entails two interrelated domain shifts: one from the political to the technical sphere, and another from one level of governance to another that is more distant from voters, such as from the national to the European level. These shifts are mutually reinforcing, as the transfer to technical bodies often coincides with the relocation of decision-making to arenas less directly accountable to the electorate. The first kind of (de)politicisation is highly relevant to the agricultural domain,

given its ecological, health, and social dimensions. Schwindenhammer and Gonglach (2023) analyse this in the field of nutrient policy, showing how policy has shifted towards a technocratic approach. Schwindenhammer (2020) shows the risks of (de)politicisation in the field of GM insect production, given the quasi-monopoly of private companies in the sector. Sheingate and Greer (2021) have studied (de)politicisation as a shift between levels of governance. They analyse the role of right-wing parties in the policy process in the US and in the UK, showing how strategies of politicisation of agriculture have created a stalemate in US agricultural policies, while opening opportunities for policy change in the UK, allowing the participation of new actors in the policy arena.

From (de) politicisation to (de) polarisation

From a process-oriented perspective, politicisation and depoliticisation alternate each other within policy cycles: different actors play in the policy arena to politicise and depoliticise issues. The politicisation of an issue follows its 'problematisation', consisting in the introduction into the public sphere of issues which were not considered as problems before (Maye et al., 2019). This might occur because new evidence, new ethical sensibility, new actors, or new relations of power emerge in society. Once in the public sphere, politicisation fosters alternative interpretations and solutions to a problem. When an issue has been prioritised in the policy agenda, consensus has been reached, and the time comes for policy design and implementation, the amount of expertise needed to implement the policy can lead to depoliticisation. The outcomes of depoliticisation in a policy process depend on the degree of consensus or compromise that supports it. When consensus is not sought, and depoliticisation is adopted to reduce the level of opposition to an issue, it can lead to polarisation, deepening the gap between parties. Depoliticisation of issues can generate affective or ideological polarisation. Polarisation can lead to radical opposition to higher-level decision-making and to constitutional rules, delegitimisation of independent media and technical bodies, up to denial of evidence or use of fake news in the policy debate.

Figure 1 – A (de)politicisation – (de)polarisation framework.



Source: authors' own elaboration.

When crises occur, decision-makers face the dilemma of urgency vs. consensus-building: crises confront people and decision-makers with dilemmas and trade-offs. Depoliticisation during crises, in this regard, can be effective in the short run, especially if communication is managed properly, but in the longer run it can backfire (Boin and Rheinard, 2023), generating polarised positions. Strategies of depolarisation are based on actions at least in part independent and different from strategies of depoliticisation. As depoliticisation can increase polarisation, depolarisation strategies can take the shape of 'controlled politicisation', whereby stakeholders are involved in communication frames aimed at conflict transformation. In this regard, strategies of depolarisation can learn from conflict transformation techniques (Newman et al., 2009). Based on the framework just illustrated, we can analyse processes of (de)politicisation and (de)polarisation through the four situations represented in figure 1.

Situation 1 (low politicisation and low polarisation) is the situation where decision-making occurs within the 'realm of necessity': decisions are made by unchallenged political bodies within specialised policy networks. Situation 2 (high politicisation, low polarisation) is the situation where there is a claim for policy change, which might imply either reform, retrenchment, or a compromise. These are cases where politicisation is circumscribed to specific issues. If consensus is created over an issue, policy change can occur, and a phase of depoliticisation can start to stabilise the reform. If consensus building is not successful or not attempted, polarisation emerges (situation 3, high politicisation and high polarisation). In this situation, anti-system movements grow, and the prospects for policy change are reduced, depending on the relative strength of the anti-system and pro-system fields. Pro-system coalitions can lead to situation 4 (low politicisation and high polarisation) through a strong depoliticisation process. Prevalence of anti-systemic forces can bring the situation back to situation 2 (retrenchment). Likewise, a successful depolarisation strategy can bring the process to situation 2, where compromises can be made.

Crises are key factors in processes of (de)politicisation and (de)polarisation. Crises can alter the distance, the tolerance, and the exposure of people to different information sources, ideas, positions, and thus they can either increase or decrease both polarisation and depolarisation.

Methodology

The conceptual framework illustrated above has been applied to the CAP reform process. The methodology adopted is based on a systematic collection of daily news between 2021 and 2024 from Politico Pro and Euractiv, aimed at analyzing the development of the debate on the CAP reform. The news have been selected according to relevance, and a database has been created. Text units in the news dataset have been coded for the concepts delineated in the conceptual framework. A thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) has then been conducted to identify key findings of the dataset, to summarise key features of the CAP reform process, and highlight the differences between the various approaches.

Results: politicisation, depoliticisation and polarisation in European agriculture

Politicisation and depoliticisation in the European Integration process

The politicisation and depoliticisation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reflect broader dynamics of European integration. The founding phase of the European Economic Community was characterised by low politicisation. Initially, the 'founding fathers' of the European Economic Community sought to operate out of the spotlight: high levels of politicisation could have undermined this delicate construction, as their goal was to shift powers from Member States to the new institutions. However, depoliticisation was accompanied by a 'permissive consensus' (Garcia-Guitian, 2021) of European citizens. The situation started to change in the '80s, when the creation of the common market, the new powers given to the European Parliament, as well as the approval of the Maastricht Treaty were subject to increasing politicisation (Garcia-Guitian, 2021). As van Middelaar (2019) points out, the dynamics of this process are influenced by three main actors: the EU

Parliament, the Council, and the Commission. The evolution of the European institutions reflects different visions of the relations of power between these three institutions.

Decision-making within the Council of the European Union, a body constituted of "*a representative of each Member State at ministerial level, who may commit the government of the Member State in question and cast its vote*" (art. 16 TEU), was initially based on the rule of unanimity, which implied giving a veto power to each Member State, but also provided a method of government based on consensus. Once the rules are set, the Commission oversees implementation, and the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors control their application. Van Middelaar (2019) identifies this pattern as a form of 'depoliticisation through law'. When new issues arise - especially when a crisis demands exceptional measures - the Commission and the Council do not have the authority to change the rules. In such situations, the Heads of Governments must intervene with political decisions, beyond the reach of the Commission and of the Council. Consequently, throughout the evolution of European integration, politicisation has tended to coincide with moments of crisis, as exemplified by the 2012 financial crisis and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Van Middelaar, 2019).

Before 1974, the Heads of Governments had met sporadically. That year, the European Council (not to be confused with the Council of the European Union) was formally established, composed of the Heads of the Member States and chaired on a six-month rotation basis by the head of the government of the presiding Member State. The establishment of the European Council meant having a body that would set a political direction for European policies.

Decisions at the level of the European Council reduce the degree of freedom of Member States: in this sense, the European Council can be seen as a depoliticisation body if seen from the Member States, but a politicisation body if seen from the Commission. Thus, an increasing politicisation at the European level corresponds to a depoliticisation at the level of Member States.

Before 1979, the members of the European Parliament were designated by national parliaments: people hardly knew who the national components of the EU parliament were and what their role was. Progressively, with the Nice, Maastricht and Lisbon treaties respectively, the European Parliament has expanded its powers and, starting from 1979, its members have been directly elected by EU citizens. Since 2014 (based on the Lisbon Treaty) the 'co-decision' process was also introduced: new laws, drafted by the EU Commission, are decided in a complex interaction between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. When the Parliament and the Council take different positions on a legislative proposal, a co-decision process is activated. This process, having a strong technical component, is normally kept out of the spotlight, and ends up in compromises, which sometimes water down the innovativeness of the initial proposal by the Commission (Lovec and Erjavec, 2015).

(De)politicisation and European agricultural policies

The history of the CAP is interlinked with the evolution of the governance of the European Union. In fact, it is one of the first policies of the European Economic Community, a post-war political project to create steady conditions for peace in Western Europe after World War II. The main principle of this project was to remove the root causes of inter-state conflicts through economic and political interdependence (Archer, 2008). Established in 1962, the CAP became the testbed for the creation of the Single European Market: a political experiment whose importance went much beyond sectoral relevance. Free circulation of commodities and people, and common political institutions would have followed suit. Being the outcome of negotiations between Member States, who were asked to yield their sovereignty to a higher governance level, its construction was based on a strong level of depoliticisation (van Middelaar, 2019). For example, to guarantee farmers a minimum price for their products, complicated mechanisms of financial support, barriers to trade and physical intervention (i.e., withdrawal of products) were created for each commodity. This, in turn, generated a complex monitoring system, a tight policy network hardly permeable

to actors outside the sector, and a vocabulary understandable only to experts in the field. Given the electoral weight of farmers, especially on conservative parties, farmers' lobbies had a privileged access to policymaking, and most negotiations occurred behind closed doors. However, when necessary, politicisation occurred, for instance in 1971, when farmers interrupted a meeting of the Member States by entering with their cows into the building, claiming higher minimum prices for their products (Sotte and Brunori, 2025).

As the CAP -- and the related consensus of Member States -- was based on a conspicuous public expenditure (the amount of which depended on the level of minimum support prices established by the Council), it was soon clear to political élites that a reform was necessary. But given the strong political pressure that the farmers' lobbies could exert on national governments, attempts at CAP reform by the European Commission were halted.

The first reform that changed the mechanism of minimum product prices occurred in 1992. On that occasion, the reform was approved under the pressure of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, which ended in November 1992 with the Blair House agreement (Sotte and Brunori, 2025). In this case, the shift of decision-making to a higher institutional level -- the GATT – had partially depoliticised the issue at the European level and it was presented to stakeholders as the outcome of rules that were decided elsewhere. With the reform, farmers' unions and Member States accepted the introduction of the 'decoupling' of payments: once tied to the volumes produced, the CAP subsidies were from then on (and still are) given 'per hectare', reflecting the historical payments once received by farmers. This compromise consolidated the distribution of resources and power among farms. Still today, 80% of funds goes to 20% of farms, and attempts to change this distribution have so far failed.

Politicisation and depoliticisation in the CAP reforms

Almost all new Commissioners for Agriculture have proposed reforms to the CAP. After 1992, Commissioner MacSharry introduced a set of 'structural' instruments co-funded with Member States; the 'second pillar' of the CAP was introduced in 2003 by Commissioner Fischler (the first was based on per-hectare payments), opening the season of Rural Development policies. An attempt to strengthen the 'green' objectives and to redistribute the subsidies from large to small farms, and from product-based subsidies to green payments, was made by Commissioner Cioloș (in the 2014-2020 term), although the resulting compromise, after more than 50 rounds of trilogue meetings, was much less ambitious (Lovec and Erjavec, 2015). According to Lovec and Erjavec (2015), the co-decision represents a 'trap' for reformers, given the strong sectoral components of the negotiations: in fact, the AGRI committee and the Agricultural Ministers of the Member States are heavily influenced by the pressure of farmers' interests and sectoral policy networks. By keeping the grip on the area of competences defined by sectoral boundaries, the AGRI Committee and the Agricultural Ministries have always been able to attenuate the reform proposals through which the Commission aimed to open agricultural policies to environmental, health, landscape and societal challenges.

The latest attempt to reform the CAP was initiated during the 2014-2019 legislature, under Commissioner Hogan. Hogan had no intention to reopen the CAP reform agenda, as the last reform had just been implemented. However, under the push of the 2015 CoP21 agreements and of Agenda 2030, the European Commission was encouraged to revise some of its tools. Under Hogan's mandate, a proposal for CAP reform was developed by the Commission and published in 2018. The main changes were not related to the specific measures, but to the management philosophy, which would shift from a 'compliance-based' to a 'performance-based' approach. In theory, a performance-based approach would imply a contract with farmers who pledge to achieve specific results and a payment in relation to the results achieved. In practice, this approach has been adapted at the Member State level, which implied giving Member States the freedom to define the strategies (based on a National Strategic Plan) meant to achieve a set of commonly agreed targets. Regarding the policy instruments of the CAP, the most important novelty were the 'eco-schemes', a set of voluntary schemes for payment of green practices that Member States must introduce into their Strategic Plans.

For some, this was the beginning of a renationalisation of the CAP: that is, of a re-politicisation at national level. It is important to recall that, at that time, an anti-European sentiment was rising, and one of the main targets of this sentiment was the top-down, red tape approaches that the CAP was accused of embodying. A performance-based approach would give, in the intentions of the Commission, much more voice to national actors.

With the end of the legislature in 2019, the reform proposal represented a legacy for the new Commission, chaired by Ursula Von Der Leyen. However, as mentioned previously, Von Der Leyen had launched a very ambitious program of transformation of the economy, i.e., the Green Deal. The Farm to Fork, a key component of the Green Deal, had set very ambitious targets: 50% reduction of use and risk of chemical pesticides and antimicrobials, reduction of nutrient losses in the soil by 50%, achievement of 25% land under organic farming. Moreover, the Farm to Fork proposed a system approach to policies, aiming to break sectoral barriers by addressing all actors and activities related to food. This also opened a new policy area: food policy. It soon became clear that the 2018 reform, which was taken as the basis for the co-decision process, was not coherent with the ambitions of the Green Deal.

At the start of the new legislature, the first decision to be taken was the allocation of the budget to all EU policies. Once the Council defined the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (under unanimity rule) and the Parliament approved, the CAP reform process could start. In the negotiation over the MFF in July 2020, Charles Michel, the chair of the Council, stated that "*as a general principle, all EU expenditure should be consistent with Paris Agreement objectives and the 'do no harm' principle of the Green Deal*". This would imply that an important share of CAP budget should have been allocated to environmental objectives. Moreover, considering that the policy areas of the EU were growing, the agreement on the MFF implied a cut of 46 billion over the preceding framework.

Once the CAP budget was agreed by the financial ministers, Agrifish -- the body of the Council gathering agricultural ministers -- could discuss the draft reform. According to the Treaty, the co-decision procedure starts when the Commission submits a proposal to the European Parliament, which in turn formulates its position and transmits it to the Council. In turn, the Council formulates its own position. If the positions of the Council and of the Parliament do not match, then the negotiation procedure starts.

In the initial roundtable, many ministries expressed their concern over the goals of the Farm to Fork, clarifying that it was not legally binding. Meanwhile, the first signals of farmers' protests appeared. The *Land schafft Verbindung* (Land Creates Connection or LsV) movement announced a common front against the European Green Deal with farmers' groups in nine other European countries. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, a first demonstration by tractors took place in August 2020.

The discussion in the European Parliament saw initial disagreements between the European People's Party (EPP) and the Green party, with the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) and RENEW Europe parties holding intermediate positions. An agreement between these parties allowed a compromise which obtained the majority in the Parliament, while Greens and 16 S&D members of the Parliament voted against. The position included a 30 percent ring-fence for the new CAP's eco-schemes, 35 percent of 'green spending' in the second pillar, a 5 percent target for non-productive land use under the CAP's conditionality, and 'capping' of subsidies above 100k euros.

As for the Council, the areas of disagreement with the Commission's initial proposal were clear: a) the 'green architecture', with the proposal to 'earmark' a minimum share of the budget for the 'eco-schemes'; b) the 'conditionality', that made crop rotations compulsory and a share of uncultivated farmland; c) the 'new delivery model', that implied the setting of performance indicators and procedures. The official position of the Council was set on 20% ring-fencing, exemptions of farms below 10 ha in the adoption of crop rotations,

'capping' on a voluntary basis (i.e., decided by the Member States), and a substantial limitation in the number of performance indicators to be monitored.

Table 1 - Positions of the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council at the beginning of the trilogue, and the final compromise.

	European Commission	**European Parliament**	**Council**	**Final agreement**
Ring fencing[1]	30 (art. 86)	30	20	30
Crop rotations	Crop rotation	Crop rotation or alternative practices	Crop rotation or alternative practices	Crop rotation or diversification, exemption <10ha
Capping[2]	60k (art. 15)	100k	60k voluntary	100k 100%, 60k voluntary
Monitoring	32 benchmarks Gap >25% à action plan with remedial actions	32 benchmarks	22 benchmarks No action plan	22 benchmarks No action plan

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Despite these differences, both positions of the Parliament and of the Council had consistently watered down the initial proposal by the Commission, which was already quite far from being consistent with the Farm to Fork strategy, while the expected results of the trilogue were even worse. Being in charge of the Farm to Fork dossier, vice-president Timmermans threatened in an interview to withdraw the Commission's proposal if other EU institutions intended to water down its environmental ambition too much.[3] This statement made the confrontation between the three institutions evident. In reply to Timmermans, the German chair of the EU Agrifish Council (and German Minister of Agriculture), Julia Klöckner, accused him of disrespecting democracy.[4] Ursula von der Leyen subsequently intervened, stating that while the Commission has the right to withdraw a proposal in the case of serious divergences from the Green Deal, this was not the current situation, and she pledged to resolve the mismatch during the legislative process.[5]

As the trilogue continued behind closed doors, with minimal information leaking about the ongoing negotiations, another aspect of the interinstitutional conflict emerged. The Chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee stated that if the final negotiations moved too close to the Council's position, a majority in Parliament for final approval might not be attainable.[6]

In June 2021, after several technical and political meetings, a compromise was achieved. Ring-fencing was established at 30%, and a 'social conditionality' mechanism was introduced to acknowledge the requests of the S&D party. Both Frans Timmermans and the Chair of the European Parliament's environment committee expressed their satisfaction with the outcome. Only the Greens, along with many civil society organisations and scientists, were critical. They criticised the compromise on the conditionality rules, which were made

[1] Ring-fencing in the CAP means setting aside a mandatory share of agricultural funds for specific objectives — particularly environmental and climate actions — to ensure that these priorities receive guaranteed and protected funding.
[2] Capping in the CAP means limiting the total amount of direct payments a single large beneficiary can receive, in order to make EU agricultural support more balanced.
[3] PoliticoPro Morning agriculture and food, 13 Nov 2020
[4] PoliticoPro Morning agriculture and food, 17 nov 2020
[5] PoliticoPro Morning agriculture and food, 18 nov 2020
[6] PoliticoPro Morning agriculture and food, 18 dec 2020

less stringent in the final version of the reform—specifically, the possibility for Member States to replace crop rotation with crop diversification and the exemption for farms below 10 hectares.

From politicisation to polarisation: the impact of farmers' protests

The CAP reform fell far short of the expectations raised by the Green Deal; nevertheless, it established the rules under which the Commission could exert its power to align the implementation processes of the Member States. Officially approved in June 2021, the new CAP was set to apply from January 2023, following the Commission's approval of the National Strategic Plans. A new cycle of depoliticisation had begun. In fact, with the 'new delivery model', Member States gained greater flexibility in defining strategic objectives, but they were required to demonstrate the coherence of their plans with their committed objectives, and the Commission retained the power to review the National Strategic Plans. Moreover, the Commission enforces controls to ensure that farmers respect the conditionality rules.

The war in Ukraine began before the new rules were implemented. The sanctions on Russia and the interruption of imports from Ukraine exposed Europe's vulnerability due to its dependency on energy and energy-based products, such as fertilizers. Furthermore, the European Union was a major importer of animal feed from Ukraine. Agricultural prices rose, and farmers' lobbies raised concerns about food security. Timmermans responded that "those who did not like Farm to Fork to start with, used the war as a pretext to return to their old positions and try to stop Farm to Fork from happening."[7] As a matter of fact, food security has always been an argument used to support a productivist approach and to postpone or hold back agri-environmental policy goals (Maye and Kirwan, 2013). Despite evidence indicating no risk to food security (European Commission, 2022), the Commission, in agreement with the Council, passed a derogation in July 2022 to a conditionality clause already in force under the previous CAP, notably the obligation to set aside 5% of land to restore biodiversity. Even before it entered into force, the green architecture of the CAP was undermined, albeit temporarily. Societal polarisation encouraged political polarisation, giving voice to the Eurosceptic components of the European Parliament. Factions within the Popular Party, afraid of losing farmers' support to anti-system parties, began to question the principles of the Green Deal which they had previously endorsed. In the end, the Popular Party backed proposals from farmers' representatives, which aimed to make the derogations permanent. In May 2024, the regulation amending the conditionality measures, proposed by the Commission in March, was approved by the Parliament and the Council.

The crisis, however, not only drove the re-politicisation of agricultural issues but also acted as a driver of political polarisation. In the Netherlands, as early as 2019, national environmental policies had generated violent farmers' protests, with an increasingly anti-state and anti-European tone (Van der Ploeg, 2020). In the same country, the Farmer–Citizen Movement (BBB) won the provincial elections in 2023, undermining the stability of the government. In Germany, farmers' protests were strongly backed by the Alternative for Deutschland.[8] In this polarised environment, the CAP was not the only object of contestation. The Nature Restoration Law, another pillar of the Green Deal proposed by the Commission, came under attack both within the Parliament and the Council, backed by Popular and Conservative parties. The Nature Restoration Law establishes targets for the re-naturalisation of land and sea and imposes on Member States the duty to submit a National Restoration Plan. The proposal, initially submitted in June 2022 and reformulated after discussion in the ENVI committee, was approved in the Parliament's plenary session in February 2024. Popular Parties broke the consensus on the Green Deal by voting against it, but the law passed thanks to some EPP members of Parliament who voted against their official party position.

This vote made the division over environmental policies even more acute. The Council, which included many Member States opposed to the law, took three months before approving it[9] with a qualified majority. The

[7] PoliticoPro Morning agriculture and food, 29 Apr 2022

[8] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67976889?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[9] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/env/2024/06/17/

conservative Austrian government was decisive in this outcome, as it surprisingly voted in favour of the law.[10] Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Italy voted against, and Belgium abstained.

Aware that the increasing polarisation had environmental policies as its main focus, Ursula von der Leyen announced in her State of the Union address in September 2023 the launch of a "strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture,"[11] bringing together 29 key stakeholders—representing a wide range of interests and values in the field of food and agriculture—to develop a common vision for the future of the EU's agriculture and food sector.[12] As she declared in her address, "[W]e need more dialogue and less polarisation," adding that, "[T]he time is ripe to forge a new consensus on food and farming among farmers, rural communities and all other actors on the EU agri-food chain. Farmers are confronted with a wide range of challenges, ranging from climate change, to inflation, to volatile market impacts. With this Strategic Dialogue, we are creating a forum to deliver a clear vision for the future, to the benefit of all."[13]

The strategic dialogue process was led by Peter Strohschneider, an academic who had carried out a similar exercise in Germany, and was organised around a series of plenary meetings and a set of 'exchanges with science', to which experts were asked to contribute on four guiding questions: 1. How can our farmers, and the rural communities they live in, be given a better perspective, including a fair standard of living? 2. How can agriculture be supported within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystem? 3. How can better use be made of the immense opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation? 4. How can a bright and thriving future for Europe's food system be promoted in a competitive world?

After six months of meetings, in September 2024, the group unanimously approved a document of principles and recommendations.[14] The document proposes a vision for the future of agriculture, claiming that "[T]he time for change is now" and that "[C]ooperation and dialogue across the food value chain are critical". It assigns a key role to agriculture in the sustainability transition and stresses the need for considerable resources to support the transition, primarily to compensate farmers for their losses. One of the key recommendations concerns a governance change, based on "a new culture of cooperation", to "ensure practicability and consistency between the different policy areas and overcome silo-thinking". This consensus constituted the basis for the "Vision for Agriculture and Food", which the new Commissioner, Hansen, presented to the newly elected parliament in February 2025. The document, laying out the principles for a new CAP, attempts to retain some of the principles that characterised the previous legislature but shifts the emphasis to keywords such as competitiveness and security, and stresses the need to reward farmers for environmentally friendly practices rather than imposing targets and sanctions. In a situation of ongoing polarisation, the search for a compromise is based on much less ambitious goals than in the preceding legislature. Critics emphasise the lack of a genuine food systems approach, warning that this limits progress toward an integrated and sustainable transition (van Zanten et al., 2025).

This shift raises a key question in relation to politicisation and polarisation over environmental issues: are planetary boundaries, and the risks implied by transgressing them, real? If they are, which policy objectives belong to the 'realm of necessity' and which ones can be adjusted in relation to societal values and interests? Were the Green Deal targets justified in relation to planetary boundaries? Could top-down measures have been replaced with incentives, as the Strategic Dialogue suggests? A democratisation of the 'realm of necessity', with a fruitful interplay between facts, values, and interests, is needed to address these questions.

[10] https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/06/17/nature-restoration-eu-approves-law-italy-votes-against-chaos-in-austria/
[11] https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2023-state-union-address-president-von-der-leyen-2023-09-13_en
[12] https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/food-stakeholders-get-back-to-work-on-much-awaited-dialogue-on-agriculture/?utm_source=Euractiv&utm_campaign=ce538ea1ed-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_10_06_03_39_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-672dc7a2b9-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D
[13] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_24_417
[14] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/171329ff-0f50-4fa5-946f-aea11032172e_en?filename=strategic-dialogue-report-2024_en.pdf

This reflection brings the concept of the 'realm of necessity' back to the core of the analysis, showing that even domains traditionally treated as technocratic inevitabilities—such as food security or planetary boundaries—can and should be reopened to democratic deliberation.

Discussion

The series of events described shows that politicisation and polarisation are key components of contemporary politics. The development of the CAP reform demonstrates that (de)politicisation not only shifts a policy issue from the political to the technical sphere, but also between various other domains: from the political to the stakeholders' sphere, from the sectoral to the multisectoral, from the European institutional level to the Member State level, from Parliament committees to the plenary, from the Parliament to the Council (and to the trilogue), and from one Commission Directorate-General to another.

As each of these arenas features a distinct distribution of power, actors often leverage their influence in one arena to shape decisions in others. However, when polarisation emerges, decision-making becomes paralyzed, and the scope for policy change can narrow considerably, as it depends on unstable majorities. As illustrated by the CAP case, polarisation does not necessarily halt decision-making; rather, it often results in reactive or short-term measures aligned with dominant or conservative pressures. These decisions may resolve immediate tensions but tend to undermine the continuity of transformative agendas. Several 'green' measures were repealed following the protests, as the conservative stance ultimately prevailed within the coalition that had supported Ursula von der Leyen.

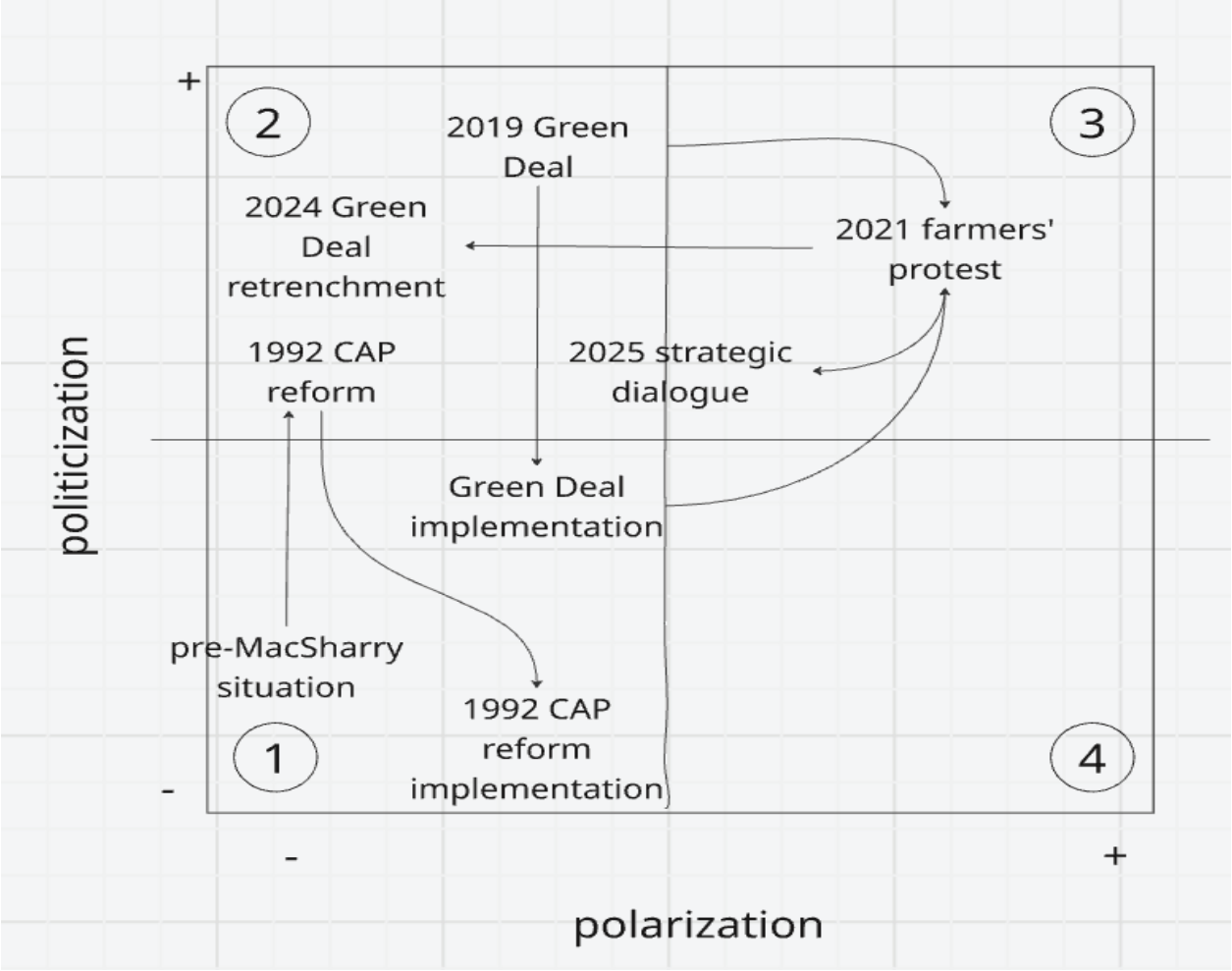
Until the MacSharry reform, the CAP existed in a state of low politicisation and low polarisation (Situation 1, Figure 2). The MacSharry reform itself was a mix of politicisation and depoliticisation. On the one hand, the reform was driven by international agreements (the GATT in 1992), which were beyond the direct reach of individual Member States and even of the EU itself. On the other hand, the MacSharry reform opened spaces for re-politicisation, primarily by linking agriculture to environmental concerns and inviting a broader set of stakeholders to engage with the topic (Situation 2, Figure 2). The Green Deal has followed a similar pattern: the CoP21 agreement and Agenda 2030 played a depoliticising role by providing an external, global rationale, while the introduction of a systemic approach, linking agriculture to the environment and nutrition, represented a repoliticising force (Situation 2, Figure 2). After the trilogue, which resulted in a compromise between conservatives and reformers, the implementation of the CAP reform initiated a temporary process of depoliticisation (Situation 1, Figure 2).

The farmers' protests have marked a new phase of heightened politicisation and polarisation (Situation 3, Figure 2). They have not only repoliticised the sustainability debate but have also generated a broader narrative—amplified by the media—framing the conflict as "farmers versus European bureaucrats and ideological environmentalists." This framing exemplifies affective polarisation, strategically mobilised by Eurosceptic groups to reinforce political divisions. Polarisation has hidden the different nuances of the protests and emphasised only certain aspects, like the anti-European tone, at the expense of politicising other relevant issues such as power distribution in the supply chain, low prices for farmers, and labour exploitation. The CAP case therefore shows that politicisation and polarisation are analytically distinct: while politicisation expands the space for deliberation and contestation, polarisation constrains it by reducing communicative exchange and mutual recognition among actors.

On the other hand, the Strategic Dialogue initiative is an example of a depolarisation strategy, aiming to reduce the level of polarisation while maintaining a high level of politicisation. It has had, so far, the merit of trying to create a space for deliberation to address agricultural issues in their complexity by unpacking the multiplicity of values and interests at stake, with a specific brokering role assigned to science. At a moment of heightened salience and heated debate on the issue, central matters that had remained unspoken between

the polarised poles—for example, ensuring adequate living conditions for farmers in the face of necessary transition costs while remaining within planetary boundaries—have been addressed through the Strategic

Figure 2 – Analysis of CAP reforms under the (de) politicisation – (de) polarisation framework.



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Dialogue. It goes without saying that what is referred to as a "new culture of engagement" (Strategic Dialogue, 2024) will need to be embraced by European institutions and the involved stakeholders to function as a space for depolarisation and to foster the necessary change.

As Bobbio (2017) explains, many scholars (Urbinati, 2014; Mouffe, 2005) tend to see deliberation as opposed to politics, with deliberation tending to depoliticise conflicts. Bobbio (2017), on the contrary, claims that deliberative arenas provide new tools for politicisation: they "have a hybrid nature that can counteract the continuous fluctuations between (hyper)politicisation and (hyper)depoliticisation". They "form a third way between politics and expertise, consensus and truth, politicisation and depoliticisation" (p. 631). If complemented by representative institutions, deliberative arenas can play a transformative role through the achievement of a localised consensus. They encourage stakeholders to focus the discussion on specific issues rather than on identity, and in this way, to gain autonomy from the runaway forces of partisan politics.

Consensus or compromise building, in this regard, is a practice that can help to break down silos and local (sectoral) power concentrations, and it activates platforms for choice, social interaction, and deliberation. The consensus-building process should be, in our view, at the core of the (de)politicisation-(de)polarisation debate, as it is an essential component of transformative change in democratic contexts. Studying the characteristics of deliberative arenas—their participants and procedural mechanisms—becomes of central importance. Who

is involved and who is left outside of deliberation arenas? Should consensus building hide internal differences of visions and interests, or, on the contrary, should it make these differences visible?

Conclusions

In this paper, we have analysed the process of CAP reforms through the lens of (de)politicisation and (de) polarisation, focusing in particular on the last reform, which occurred between 2018 and 2022. We have shown the complexity of this process and identified some of the critical points that could be addressed to promote transformative policies. The ecological transition, and the related food system transformation, extends beyond political cycles. It is linked to significant power imbalances and global injustice, and it is evident that the potential for transformation depends on a wide consensus regarding its objectives. We argue that depoliticisation can be seen as a stabilisation strategy, the purpose of which can be either to consolidate policy change or, vice versa, to avoid it. When depoliticisation is used to avoid change, it can lead to polarisation. The polarisation that characterises our polities, within a context of crisis, has the power to block any attempts to promote transformation, even when it is widely accepted that such transformation is needed and urgent. In this regard, polarisation is not akin to politicisation: on the contrary, it can undermine the transformative role of politics, and as we have seen in recent circumstances around the world, it can lead to reactionary situations. The multiplication of arenas for deliberation, in this context, can be part of depolarisation strategies, as issues are problematised and politicised, and the facts, interests, and values at stake are represented fairly, made evident, and clearly distinguished from one another.

Throughout the paper, we have mentioned the role of scientists, experts, and independent media in politicisation/depoliticisation and polarisation/depolarisation processes. They can play a key role in both and determine the transformative power of the policy process: indeed, by providing evidence and supporting the development of shared values, they can increase tolerance and reduce the distance between positions through dialogue. Given that consensus building needs to consider the facts, interests, and values of the involved actors (Deconinck, 2023), scientists and independent media can, depending on the situation, provide accurate facts, analyse and map the interests at stake, and detect the values embodied in narratives and claims. When important matters are not debated at the political level, independent science and media can provide evidence to problematise and politicise issues. In the presence of highly polarised debates, they can use their capacity to navigate different values and interests to highlight the trade-offs, establish the basis for win-win solutions or, more likely, compromises (Brunori et al., 2024), and in doing so, clearly assess the distribution of costs and benefits of the proposed solutions. However, in a polarised society, the role of science and independent media is under attack. Denial of the value of scientific evidence and the delegitimisation of independent media converge in reducing trust in these institutions, which may ultimately fuel polarisation. In a polarised world, building trust in science and in free, independent information is a key priority.

References

Archer, C. (2008) *The European Union*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Axelrod, R., Daymude, J.J. and Forrest, S. (2021) 'Preventing extreme polarisation of political attitudes', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(50), p. e2102139118.

Brunner, G., Carzedda, M., Iliopoulos, C., D'Haese, M., Lanfranchi, M., Lerro, M., … and Troiano, S. (2024) 'Has transformation of food systems reached an impasse? Considerations on the role of agri-food research', *Agricultural and Food Economics*, 12(1), p. 26.

Buller, J., Dönmez, P.E., Standring, A. and Wood, M. (eds) (2019) *Comparing Strategies of (De)Politicisation in Europe: Governance, Resistance and Anti-politics*. New York: Springer International Publishing.

Deconinck, K. (2023) 'Facts, interests, and values', in: Resnick, D. and Swinnen, J. (eds) *The Political Economy of Food System Transformation: Pathways to Progress in a Polarized World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. [Include page numbers if available].

Feindt, P.H., Schwindenhammer, S. and Tosun, J. (2021) 'Politicisation, depoliticisation and policy change: A comparative theoretical perspective on agri-food policy', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), pp. 509-525.

Flinders, M. and Buller, J. (2006) 'Depoliticisation: Principles, tactics and tools', *British Politics*, 1(3), pp. 293-318.

Flinders, M. and Wood, M. (2015) 'When politics fails: Hyper-democracy and hyper-depoliticisation', *New Political Science*, 37(3), pp. 363-381.

Hay, C. (2007) *Why We Hate Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lovec, M. and Erjavec, E. (2015) 'The co-decision trap: How the co-decision procedure hindered CAP reform', *Intereconomics*, 50, pp. 52-58.

Matthews, A. (2024) 'Farmer protests and the 2024 European Parliament elections', *Intereconomics*, 59(2), pp. 83-87.

Matthews, A., Candel, J.J.L., de Mûelenaere, N. and Scheelbeek, P.F. (2023) 'The political economy of food system transformation in the European Union', in: Resnick, D. and Swinnen, J. (eds) *The Political Economy of Food System Transformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 310-337.

Maye, D. and Kirwan, J. (2013) 'Food security: A fractured consensus', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 29, pp. 1-6.

Maye, D., Kirwan, J. and Brunori, G. (2019) 'Ethics and responsibilisation in agri-food governance: The single-use plastics debate and strategies to introduce reusable coffee cups in UK retail chains', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 36, pp. 301-312.

Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Newman, E., Paris, R. and Richmond, O. (2009) *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. and Moules, N.J. (2017) 'Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), pp. 1-13.

Rostbøll, C.F. (2024) 'Polarisation and the democratic system: Kinds, reasons, and sites', *Perspectives on Politics*, pp. 1-17. [Online ahead of print]

Schimmelfennig, F. (2021) 'Politicisation management in the European Union', in: *Strategic Responses to Domestic Contestation*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 14-33.

Sheingate, A. and Greer, A. (2021) 'Populism, politicisation and policy change in US and UK agro-food policies', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), pp. 544-560.

Skogstad, G. (2021) 'Political parties and policy change in Canadian agricultural marketing institutions', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), pp. 561-575.

Sotte, F. and Brunori, G. (eds) (2025) *European Agricultural Policy: History and Analysis*. Cham: Springer.

Sunstein, C.R. (2017) *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Swyngedouw, E. (2022) 'Climate change consensus: A depoliticized deadlock', in: *Handbook of Critical Environmental Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 443-455.

Törnberg, P., Andersson, C., Lindgren, K. and Banisch, S. (2021) 'Modeling the emergence of affective polarisation in the social media society', *PLoS ONE*, 16(10), p. e0258259.

Van der Ploeg, J.D. (2020) 'Farmers' upheaval, climate crisis and populism', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(3), pp. 589-605.

van Middelaar, L. (2019) *Alarums and Excursions: Improvising Politics on the European Stage*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

van Zanten, H.H., Duncan, J., van Meijl, H. and Heimovaara, S. (2025) 'Scientific reflection on the European Commission's vision for agriculture and food', *Nature Food*, pp. 1-4. [Online ahead of print]

Vogeler, C.S. (2021) 'Politicizing farm animal welfare: A comparative study of policy change in the United States of America', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(5-6), pp. 526-543.

Wamsley, D. (2024) 'Revisiting the theoretical foundations of depoliticisation: A Gramscian state theory approach for an era of crisis', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Epub ahead of print 21 May 2024. DOI: 10.1177/13691481241305976.

Wiesner, C. (ed.) (2021) *Rethinking Politicisation in Politics, Sociology and International Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilson, J. and Swyngedouw, E. (eds) (2015) *The Post-political and Its Discontents: Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Zöllmer, J. (2025) 'Race to the top of farm animal welfare policies in US states: What can explain the new development? A qualitative comparative analysis', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, pp. 1-19. [Online ahead of print]