

# THE GREEN ANGER: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND NEAR FUTURE OF EUROPEAN FARMERS' REVOLTS

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### THE GREEN ANGER: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND NEAR FUTURE OF EUROPEAN FARMERS' REVOLTS

Europe, which has hosted many different social movements since the past, has recently witnessed the rebellions and demands of various kind of formations and types of movements, which includes different dynamics, that come together to form different infrastructures, political groups and social segments. Political populations of Europe, which has historically contained continuous and large-scale social movements, have trying to explain themselves to the governments by using a variety of channels and tools, such as protests, actions, and press releases. These people, coming together from different backgrounds, organize demonstrations for a common purpose and try to convey themselves and their wishes to the governments. The common subject of such different formations consists of target audiences. The target audiences that shape various social movements have similarities and differences for each movement. Farmers' uprisings, also in other words "*Green Anger*", which are a new social movement that is taking place today and is still current, are among these kinds of social events. The target audience and main actors of the farmers' uprisings consist of farmers who engaged in agricultural activities. The common motive that brings everyone together has a very diverse structure, we can say. The basic infrastructure of protests and actions stems from governments' acceptance of farmers' demands such as tax reductions, changes in policies and trade regulations, and farmers' demands for improvement in their earnings and production processes. When the historical process is evaluated, the common ties of the farmers' uprisings with other social movements have the potential to turn into a larger-scale social movement in the near future.

Immediately after the decreasing effects of the stagnation in trade and economy which seen right after the pandemic, farmers, who were once again in a financial difficulty due to the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war which added to the current situation, laid the foundations of the formation in December 2023 with the aims of correcting the situation, improving the conditions of the farmers and revising the policies. The actions of farmers who came together in Germany on January 15, when the protests firstly showed themselves, and their efforts to convey their demands to local governments and the European Union can be considered as the beginning of the Farmers' Uprisings. The main purpose of the farmers that gathered in Germany was to demand of decrease in the taxes on diesel fuel used for agricultural purposes.

German farmers came to Berlin with the tractors they used in agricultural activities, which they chose as the meeting place to organize their first protest. After the first protest took place in Germany, it was reported in the press, and later on the movement began to make a splash in many other EU member countries such as Belgium, Italy, Poland, Romania, France, Spain and Greece. As a continuation of the protests of German farmers on January 15, Romanian farmers came together the next day to demand the review and reorganization of the high fuel, energy and fertilizer costs, diesel taxes, insurance prices and of EU environmental policies. Immediately afterwards, farmers in France met in front of the European Parliament in Brussels and organized a protest. The rapid spread of the movement and the fact that

the activities are organized in a way that supports each other gives the impression that it is actually the result of joint actions of all farmers in the European Union (EU) member states, rather than independent local protests.

### Upcoming Elections and Protests

If we look at in terms of scope, the biggest supporters of protests and actions stand out as centre-right parties operating in local governments. Right-wing parties in various member states openly express their support for the uprisings and protests. One of the most important reasons for this, is the upcoming elections to be held in both the European Parliament and local governments. The European People's Party (EPP) has the strongest party in the European Parliament, with a high support base due to its right-wing stance in politics. EPP carries out various activities both in local governments and within the EU in order to create a voter base for the elections that will be repeated in the near future and to complete the preparations for the election. The most obvious example can be given as the meeting of the EU Ministers of Agriculture on January 23, shortly after the demonstrations and protests, regarding to the demands of the farmers and their statements on the steps that would be taken towards this issue. In this context, it is noteworthy that the efforts made by the right-wing parties are a work for the next elections and that they are making various efforts such as preventing riots by taking rapid steps to listening the demands of the farmers which in response to their anger and maintaining balance in local politics before the election. Rising populism in the rural areas of the member countries also leads to political competition, directly

affecting decision-making mechanisms in centre-right parties. A possible decrease in the electoral base poses different risks not only for local governments but also for the European Parliament. The European Commission, which accelerated its activities in line with the reasons given, temporarily suspended some articles of the agreement due to the various regulations adopted within the scope of the European Green Deal, which came into force in 2019, that creates a great burden on farmers. As another step, the MERCOSUR Agreement, which was signed between Latin American countries and the EU and is considered the largest trade agreement for the EU today, has a negative impact on imports and market balance in the EU market for European producers, so it is making preparations to implement the necessary revisions in this regard.

### Examples from Around the World: Yellow Vest Movement and Farmers' Revolts in India

When the dynamics of the Farmers' Revolts movement is examined, its similarities with other social movements that took place in previous periods around the world are striking. The Yellow Vest Movement, which started in France in 2018 and then spread to other EU countries, is an example of this. Actors of the Yellow Vest movement came together on various issues such as high living costs, fuel prices and tax reforms. Since the movement consists of people coming together from different backgrounds, it is difficult to reduce it to a definitive base or group. In addition, the Farmers' Revolts, in their current form, have not yet included other social groups; The movement is mostly led by farmers and with their participation. Unlike the current formation of the Farmers' Revolts,

the Yellow Vests moved towards different areas and progressed as a fragmented and complex structure as a result of the increase in both scope and number of members. The Yellow Vest movement, which has gradually expanded and become a mass movement, has been integrated into different issues over time, and as the number of participants increased, and started to include issues such as freedom, equality and women's rights. However, due to the diversity of the number of participants, it was observed that various radical attitudes such as Islamophobic and homophobic thoughts and anti-immigrant sentiment were also expressed in some demonstrations. This example gives us the experience that social movements that have become massive and have seen rapid increases in the number of members are also experiencing a process of rupture and separation within themselves. When two movements that formed in the same region at different times are examined, the same scenario does not yet seem possible for the current formation of Farmers' Revolts, both in terms of infrastructure, demands and ways of expressing themselves, and the political support they receive from centre-right parties. For now, the Farmers' Revolts movement only focuses on issues such as production, costs, taxes and trade. However, in the case of angry farmers cannot find any response to their demands, if environmental policies are not changed, and many other obstructive decisions continue, it does not seem possible for the rebellions and protests to calm down or end spontaneously over time, without any exact solution to be reached. For this reason, both local governments and the European Parliament should work in cooperation, and in line with the demands from farmers, such as fallow obligation, pesticide (insect poison) ban, limitation of water use and strict control in animal

breeding, which create a great burden on farmers and directly negatively affect the production processes financially. It has a huge importance to remove the restrictions and prohibitions that affect the movement or to create new policies that will facilitate agricultural production in order to achieve a result of the movement and prevent it from turning into a mass movement.

Another example of a social movement similar to the Farmers' Revolts in Europe is the Farmers' Revolts that recently took place in India. Indian farmers, who came together in Delhi in 2020, organized protests and actions against the government for similar reasons. The demands of Indian farmers were supported by left-wing parties, in contrast to the formation in Europe. With the support they received from left-wing parties, farmers protested against the right-wing, authoritarian and nationalist Indian government. The actions and protests of farmers, who came together underlining various reasons such as the centralization of power in India and the transfer of activities such as food production, transportation and retail sales to companies known to be close to the authoritarian right-wing government, continued until 2021. Despite the obvious difference in political orientation between the farmers' movement in India and the European farmers' movement, there were still deep similarities between these two movements. Both movements actually represent a growing discontent with urban biases in agricultural policies that eventually erupted. The reasons for this movement coming from a common social base become more understandable since it includes combination of the heavy tax burden, the dominance of the EU market by cheap products from Ukraine and

especially the regulations adopted by the Green Deal within the scope of EU environmental policies which restricts the production activities of farmers in terms of agricultural production.

### **Effects of the Russia-Ukraine War on the Movement**

Another issue that brings farmers together is agricultural trade. Following the changing balance of power after the Russia-Ukraine War, the EU took many different initiatives in order to reduce the war burden, to support the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian people, whose large part of territory was directly occupied by Russia, and to end the war by reducing the tension in the region. In this context, various supportive initiatives were taken by the EU, such as financial aid support, visa exemption for Ukrainian citizens, mediation initiatives and support the processes of Ukraine's NATO and EU membership. Agricultural exports with Ukraine are just one of them. Duty-free exports of various agricultural products, especially grain, produced by farmers in Ukraine to the EU countries have resulted in a decrease in the demand for agricultural products produced by farmers in EU member countries over time and also their replacement with cheaper Ukrainian products. So, this situation greatly affected the circulation of farmers' products both in local markets and in the EU market, resulting in reduced competition and Ukrainian goods dominating the domestic market. For this reason, the farmers who came together demanded duty-free grain exports from Ukraine to be stopped and so that products produced by farmers in member countries can move more easily within the EU market. In this regard, the decisions taken by the EU in line with the

requests from farmers has critical importance. In the event of a possible termination of the export agreement, Ukraine could lose the vast majority of its export revenues, and this scenario could directly affect the course of the war. The change in the course of the war, the possibility of decrease in EU support for Ukraine and the decrease in export revenues will negatively affect the balance of power in the region, creating the danger of Russia gaining an advantageous position and causing Ukraine to become defenceless, which also might lead to the loose its territories. If Russia annexes the entire Ukrainian territory due to the reason of changing balance of power, it is possible for Russia to become a clear and direct target for the EU as its influence and threat in the region will increase. The possible change in the balance of power in the region gradually increases the possibility of an attack from Russia, and this causes the political tension in the region to increase.

### **Conclusion**

Considering all these supporting reasons, the Farmers' Revolts movement has the risk of turning into a wider movement in the future, but when evaluated with its current infrastructure and actors, the radicalization process will be different from the Yellow Vests and Indian Farmers' Revolts, and also if they find answers to their demands it can also be predicted that the mass impact of the movement will gradually decrease and its regional expansion will cease. The main source of this inference can be considered as the movements, collaborations and initiatives of local governments and the European Parliament, working with the aim of not losing the target audience they have gained in line with the upcoming elections. The

movement, which has received support from centre-right parties in local politics and the public since the day it first emerged, has made progress in finding answers to its demands as it continues to spread and expand. Acting in cooperation with local governments in line with the demands from farmers, the European Parliament responded to the demands with various solutions such as improving the production conditions and purchasing power of farmers, reviewing the limitations and prohibitions affecting the production process, and suspending restrictive policies. Although the steps taken by the parliament have eased the burden on farmers for a short time, there are still bigger problems waiting to be solved. Chief among these is the tendency of the high consumption of the agricultural products that come from Ukraine as duty-free which are cheaper compared to products produced by member country farmers. One of the main reasons for the anger of farmers participating in the movement is that the goods produced by farmers remain in their hands and therefore their value decreases. The limited storage life of unsold goods and the risk of the harvest being completely wasted if there is no demand, drags farmers into a serious economic crisis. On the other hand, the high demand and free movement of goods from Ukraine in the market causes the dominance of imported goods in the local market, which is causing imbalance in the market. The continuation of this situation, which also hinders competition and equality of opportunity, has the potential to expand by targeting a wider audience in the future. The facilities and aid provided by the EU and its member states to Ukraine during the war began to create discontent among the people, as they negatively affected the situation of the EU member states and their people. In fact, if the

actions and protests become radicalized, they may combine with the influence of radical nationalism, which is on the rise in European politics today, and might result as turning into a race-based movement. In order to avoid such a danger, the EU may attempt to respond to the demands of the angry public by giving up the privileges it has granted to Ukraine or reducing its supportive initiatives. A decision taken by the EU against Ukraine could directly affect the balance of power in the region and put Ukraine in a weaker position vis-à-vis Russia. The decrease in support for Ukraine will facilitate Russia's movements in the region and lead to an advantageous position in the war. Russia's increasing power in the region may also pose a threat to the EU and raise security concerns for EU member states. This situation may bring to mind again the effort to establish the European Common Defence Union with the participation of all member states, which was discussed throughout the war.

Considering the scenarios and possibilities examined so far, we can see that the European Union may face different problems in the near future. Among the main problems, we can give examples such as the increasing radicalization and expansion of Farmers' Revolts, the decrease in the electorate, inflation and imbalance in the European market. In the face of these problems, the European Parliament can be expected to strengthen infrastructure preparations for the upcoming elections and re-evaluate the demands of farmers by regaining control of the movement with faster and more effective steps in order to strengthen decision-making mechanisms. In this regard, it can be predicted that the European Parliament will establish closer cooperation with local governments as

soon as possible and adopt new policies targeting the problems that cause protests.

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+90 216 310 30 40 info@dipam.org

+90 216 310 30 50 www.dipam.org

Merdivenköy Mah. Nur Sok. Business İstanbul  
A Blok Kat:12 No:115, Kadıköy/İstanbul

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Şuheda TEKE**, graduated from Istanbul University, Department of Political Science and International Relations in 2023. Then, in the same year, she enrolled in Istanbul University International Relations Master's Program and she is still continuing her education here. She is interested in the European Union and Turkey-EU relations as her field of study, and she is also working in the field of European Union within the scope of DİPAM Internship.