



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 15, 2023

Dutch Farmers' Party Calls for "Opt-outs" From EU Environment and Migration Policies

On September 8, the Boer Burger Beweging (BBB), also called the Farmer-Citizen Movement, published its [election manifesto](#) in preparation for the upcoming Dutch national elections in November this year, proposing that the Netherlands have opt-outs from European Union (EU) policies in areas such as the environment and migration.

The BBB manifesto, together with a draft candidate list, urges the Netherlands to "negotiate an opt-out on migration and nature policy" with reference to European treaties.

The BBB has been vehemently opposed to EU policies on "climate change." In particular, the party is adamantly against the Dutch government's nitrogen restrictions and its plans to cut emissions by purchasing farmland and shutting down thousands of farms, thus decreasing livestock numbers by up to a third, to reach its nitrogen reduction goals for 2030.

Another EU policy, passed on July 12 and called the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), is poised to worsen animosities between Dutch farmers and the EU.

According to the NRL, 30 percent of European land will be earmarked as protected land. This implies that agricultural production would be banned on the land. The NRL is so extreme that it even has drawn ire from some members of the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament (EP).

Farmers in Cyprus also slammed the NRL for possibly rendering as much as 78 percent of their farmland unusable, and had opposed the law before its passing.

"Before accepting the Nature Restoration Law, we will make an analysis of the socio-economic impact of this law, so that before its entry into force we have the opportunity to adjust our implementation to the negative effects of this law," the BBB election platform reads.

The BBB manifesto also provides insight into the party's position on immigration, which had not been widely disseminated formerly. Significantly, the BBB is staunchly against widespread, uncontrolled immigration and thus urged for a quota of asylum seekers at just 15,000 annually, with numbers beyond that overseen by the EU migration deal.

The migration deal, which ended in June, was [supported by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni](#) and permits countries such as Italy that are situated on the EU border to adopt more stringent policies at the border and send rejected asylum seekers back home.

Other European countries that are not on the border will have the choice of accepting a number of migrants yearly or contributing financially to an EU fund to alleviate the burden of housing and caring for asylum seekers.



Wikipedia



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Poland, a country usually in agreement with Italy's Meloni regarding mass migration, has heavily lambasted the deal and is scheduled to [conduct a national referendum](#) on the matter in October this year, asking the Polish public if they would welcome thousands of migrants from abroad.

While the BBB supports the migration deal insofar as it permits EU border countries more room to address asylum requests at the border, the party also urged border countries to adhere to the Dublin treaty, which mandates that asylum seekers seek asylum in the first EU country they arrive in, instead of proceeding to a country of their choice.

"Currently, we see that countries at the external borders do not comply with this regulation because it does not suit them. Strict compliance is necessary to properly work together," the BBB outlined.

Based on the Dublin treaty, countries such as Germany have the right to deport asylum seekers to the first country they set foot in. However, many such deportations have failed in practice.

In 2022, Germany tried to return about 70,000 migrants under the treaty, but was [only successful in deporting 4,158](#), or about 6 percent.

Formed in 2019 in response to Dutch farmers' protests in much of the Netherlands opposing the government's climate policies, the BBB surprised many by [winning the country's regional elections](#) in March this year with 19.19 percent of the vote.

Leftist Dutch politician Frans Timmermans, labeled by some the "Climate Pope" and who has championed many of the Dutch government's nitrogen policies, is contesting the BBB in the impending November elections. Timmermans has been touted as the BBB's main ideological rival in the elections. He is expected to lead a coalition of parties in his bid to become prime minister after [resigning from his post](#) as European Commission vice president last month and being [elected leader](#) of a joint list of the Greens and the Labour Party (PvdA).

According to polling results released on September 9, Timmermans' coalition was ranked in third place, however, behind the People's Party (VVD) — the party of former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte — and the newly formed New Social Contract, a Christian democratic party set up less than a month ago. For its part, the BBB polled in fourth place.

None of the parties is poised to dominate the 76-seat parliamentary majority on their own, because the leaders in polling, the New Social Contract, have been anticipated to win just 28 seats. Observers have pointed out that although the BBB may not win the election by a majority, the party may contribute to a possible future government coalition.

The Netherlands is not the only country poised to hold elections in the upcoming months and where farmers' votes have been expected to play a part in election outcomes.

Fellow EU member state Poland has been at loggerheads with neighboring battle-ridden Ukraine regarding the issue of allowing Ukrainian agricultural imports into the country. This issue has been a key focus of Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party in the Polish elections coming up on October 15 this year.

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has in recent weeks lashed out against permitting Ukrainian grain imports to enter the country.

Amid negotiations about lifting restrictions on Ukrainian agricultural imports into the EU and the so-called solidarity lanes set up in 2022 following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, Morawiecki maintained his opposition to Ukrainian imports on social media and Polish television on September 12.



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“Poland will not allow Ukrainian grain to flood us. Whatever the decision of Brussels officials, we will not open our borders,” Morawiecki [posted](#) on X.

The same post depicted a short clip in which he maintained Poland’s support for Ukraine. “When there was a need to help our neighbors, we opened our hearts and homes. Such are Poles,” he declared. He reiterated his statements in a campaign appearance with farmers.

All parties have been wooing farmers in the run-up to the October elections, driven by rising production costs related to the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia’s blockade of the main trade route through the Black Sea has obstructed the flow of Ukrainian wheat to destination countries. In turn, the EU Commission lifted trade restrictions with Ukraine to enable the transport of Ukrainian products through so-called solidarity lanes. However, logistics were challenging, with a considerable amount of product crossing the border getting stuck, further exacerbating an already beleaguered agricultural market.

Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia opposed the opening of their borders to Ukrainian agricultural products, with the EU Commission finally permitting them to prohibit domestic sales of Ukrainian wheat, maize, and oilseeds until September 15, while such products could still transit through the countries.

It is uncertain as to whether such limitations would be prolonged, with a gathering of agriculture ministers in July revealing that member states were still divided on the subject, despite the commission being prepared to lift restrictions on the export of Ukraine’s cereals.

“We are ready to export almost everything,” EU Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski announced [during a press conference](#) at the time.

Nevertheless, [Polish Press Agency](#) reported that Wojciechowski stated on September 12 that he thought the ban on imports of selected agricultural products from Ukraine should be maintained and that subsidies should aid Ukraine for the transit of its agricultural-food products.

Called “Europe’s Breadbasket,” Ukraine is one of the top international exporters of wheat and other cereals. Although much of Ukrainian produce ends up in non-European countries, such as those in northern Africa, some EU member states such as Spain also import Ukrainian wheat.



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