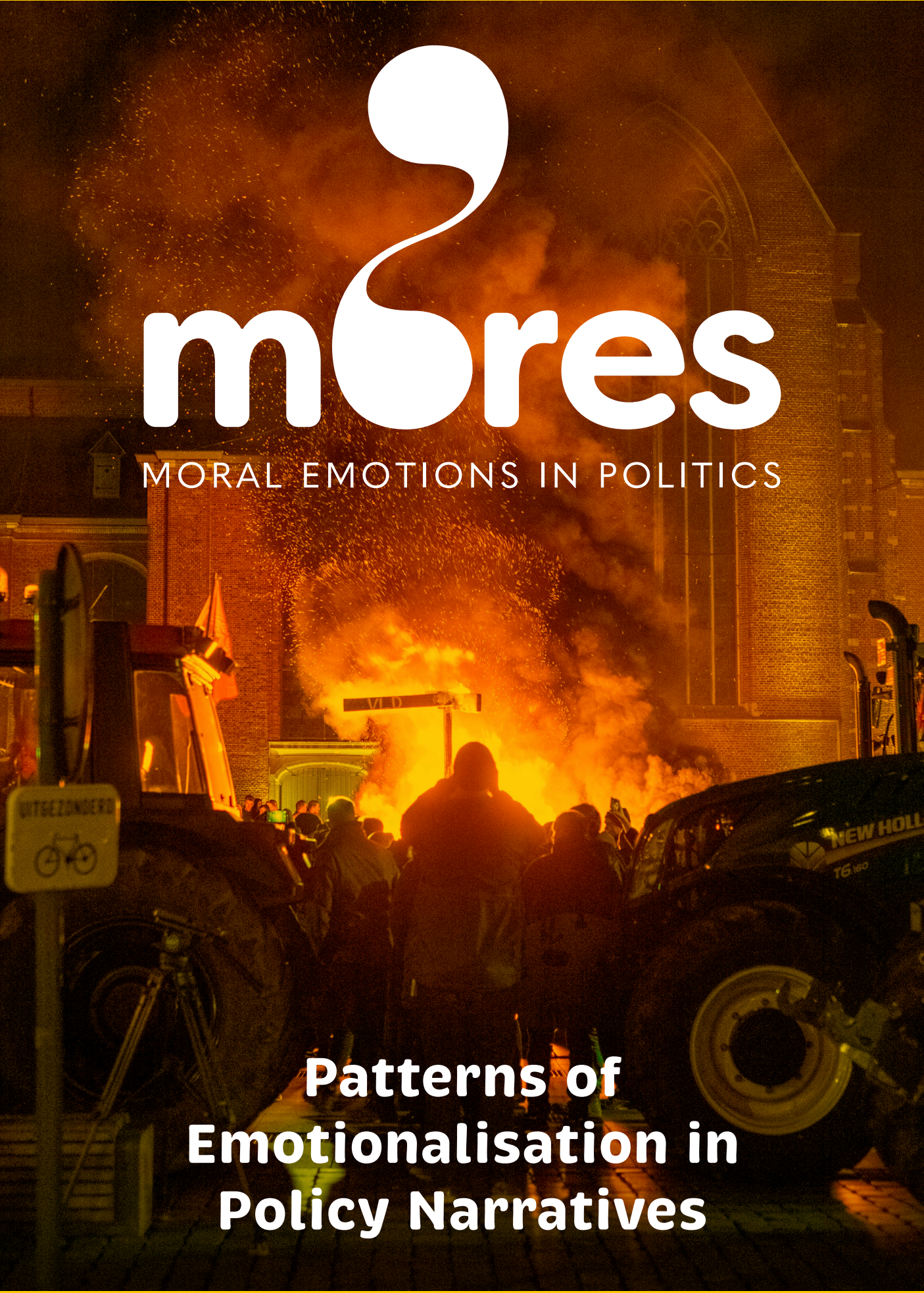




mores

MORAL EMOTIONS IN POLITICS

Patterns of Emotionalisation in Policy Narratives

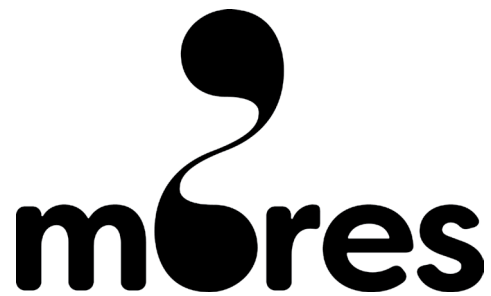
Bjorn Beheydt / via Shutterstock



Funded by
the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

WORKING PAPER SERIES



MORAL EMOTIONS IN POLITICS: HOW THEY UNITE, HOW THEY DIVIDE

Paper title: Patterns of Emotionalisation in Policy Narratives

Authors: Jonathan C. Kamkhaji¹ and Claudio M. Radaelli²

Affiliation: European University Institute

Contact: contact@mores-horizon.eu

Information: MORES Working Paper Series, 3

1 ORCID: [0000-0001-5056-5585](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5056-5585)

2 ORCID: [0000-0002-1358-926X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1358-926X)



Funded by
the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	03
2. Concepts and Expectations	06
3. Case Selection and Case Description	09
4. Data Generation and Validation	12
5. Empirical Analysis	14
5.1 Qualitative remarks	15
5.2 Quantitative analysis	18
6. Conclusions	25
References	27

Abstract

We empirically explore the drive towards emotionalisation in policy narratives in a highly technical, yet polarised, policy debate: the Farm to Fork strategy (F2F) of the EU. We do so by leveraging the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and applying it to the official statements of the Hungarian Government (opposing F2F). We first develop expectations drawing on the literature. For example, we expect correlations between NPF categories and emotions. The villain should be associated with anger and fear, the victim with compassion-empathy, the hero with pride. The plot can have different emotional associations. The doomsday should be discursively represented to elicit fear. Next, we built a corpus of 53 narratives decomposed into 794 sentences. This corpus is coded first at the level of NPF categories, then for the presence-absence of emotions and, when present, the exact type of emotion. Human coding is benchmarked against a large language model developed in the MORES project. We find that Hungary articulates its F2F position with emotional narratives bereft of empirical substance. When it is politically feasible, Hungary goes for rhetorical entrapment, asking the Commission to account for the lack of evidence-based tests and impact studies. The association NPF category-emotion works well, especially at the level of characters like the hero, the victim, and the villain. Our findings contribute to the NPF by specifying exactly how emotions map onto characters, narrators, and the overall narrative.

Keywords: Discourse, Emotions, Farm to Fork, Green Deal, Hungary, Narrative Policy Framework

1. Introduction

We empirically analyse emotionalisation of policy narratives in a highly polarised policy debate: the Farm to Fork strategy of the European Union

To claim that emotions play an important role in political life is a platitude. Scholars of rhetoric in ancient Athens and Rome told us that long ago. Turning to a more contemporary age, after a long period where the emphasis of political scientists was on the three Is (institutions, ideas, and interests) the big E of emotions has indeed taken the scene.

Their political presence is ubiquitous in the mood of public opinion, elections, the rise and fall of political leaders, international relations, and public policies. Research has evolved in at least three major directions. First, what are emotions? This strand of research has examined the nature of emotions, their definition, why they differ from sentiments and beliefs, the classification and types of emotions, and their hierarchical structure, with primary emotions leading on to other, secondary emotions. Second, we find research on emotions as a dependent variable, that is, what causes or triggers emotions, such as attitudes, socialisation, networks, and propaganda. Third, emotions have been studied as an independent variable, for example, whether emotions cause polarisation, decide elections, and explain the outcomes of negotiations. Although the quality of the answers to the research questions raised by these three strands differs, and there are differences between disciplines like political science and psychology (Marcus, 2023), together the three pathways define a popular research field—where many questions have been answered on the three research trajectories.

At the margin of the field, and therefore in need of more conceptual and empirical work, are questions about the ‘how’ and the ‘where’, so to speak. We know a lot about the ‘do’—like ‘do emotions cause polarisation?’ or ‘does populist electoral discourse arouse anger?’—but less about how exactly emotions emerge and are articulated in the official public discourse issue by issue. This can be done in various ways, of course. We make this choice: given the strong relationship between emotions and public discourse in contemporary debates about what public policies should do about the major social problems, we examine how emotions play a role in policy narratives.

The ‘where’ is also interesting. This can mean two different things. One aspect concerns the ‘where,’ that is, the level of observation. Many studies,

The policy process of the EU is often portrayed as a political, power-based clearing house

often with an experimental research design, emphasise the level of the individual. This is the micro level of analysis of emotions in individuals and their behaviour. Of primary importance here is the connection between emotions and beliefs. A bit less known are the meso and macro levels. The unit of analysis here is a group (for psychologists) and, for political scientists, a coalition, or a policy process, or a country. This is the level we wish to explore, in sync with recent literature. For instance, Guo et al. (2024) draw on socio-legal and psychological theories on compliance to test the role of emotions in obeying pandemic restrictions. Ravazzi (2023) embeds emotions in organisational theory to make sense of different levels of resiliency that emerge in emergency response processes where improvisation, not standard operating procedures, is the main pattern of behaviour. Gabehart et al. (2023) apply the Advocacy Coalitions Framework (ACF) and discourse analysis to study legislative testimony from four policies debated during the 2021 Colorado Legislative Session. They find that the expressed emotions are coalition-specific and align with beliefs. Finally, Pierce et al. (2024) blend the ACF and the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to evaluate the role played by, and effects of, specific emotions—such as fear and anger—in strategising opposing coalitions’ policy narratives.

But we said that the ‘where’ has another dimension. Do we look at a country, a multilateral organisation, or the subnational level? On this, we wish to shed light on what apparently is a hard case for emotional policy processes: the European Union (EU). Indeed, the policy process of the EU is often portrayed in social media and the news as a political, power-based clearing house. Will Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán be silenced by the other 26 leaders at the next EU summit? Or, thinking of another example, can the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni leverage her good relationship with US President Donald Trump to tip the balance of EU decision-making in her favour? In this image, then, EU decisions emerge as a consequence of the power forces of the big players, including not only the heads of state but also the European Commission and the European Parliament. One needs to have power, resources, and a sense of strategy, rather than emotional appeal, to win the day. Emotions are of course displayed, but power matters more.

Another tabloid version of the EU, fuelled among other things by the rhetoric of the European Commission about evidence-based policy and ‘better regulation’ (Radaelli, 2023), is that the EU develops policy proposals in a technical mode. After all, only experts understand complicated issues like the Common Agricultural Policy and the Excessive Deficit Procedure. The legislative train of the European Parliament lists 100 measures already adopted for the Green Deal, with 25 more already announced. In this version, the EU policy process, whether it is in the early stages when the Commission makes proposals for legislation or in the phase of delegated and implementing acts, is more likely to be dominated by arguments about science, data, and evidence in general. Outside the limelight, the daily grind of the policy process (Wincott, 1995: 603) does not exactly look like the archetype of an emotional showcase. Where is the room for emotional policy processes in impact assessment, policy appraisals, and technical working groups, then? This intriguing question justifies our choice of the EU processes, especially



“Emotions are ubiquitous in politics, but we know less about how and where they surface in official policy discourse”

Claudio Radaelli

MORES co-investigator at
European University Institute

the highly technical ones. We hasten to add that technical processes can also be contested and affectively polarised.

To recap, we contribute to the literature on emotions with the following choices in research design: on the ‘how’, we conceptualise and observe how emotions work in narratives; on the ‘where’, we work on the meso-level of a policy sector of the EU. This is not to deny that power and expertise matter—of course they do. Nor is it to make causal claims about emotions—like emotions cause changes in public policies. Rather, our choice invites us to explore, as we said, the space for emotions in the EU policy process. A space that one could argue is constrained between high politics and evidence-based argumentative walls. Since we are interested in the policy process and in discourse, narratives are an obvious choice. We need a conceptual hook on narratives, however. Our hook is the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), which is one of the established lenses on the policy process (Kuenzler et al. 2025). Interestingly, although the NPF has always claimed that the presence of emotions is relevant in policy narrations, the empirical findings are scarce and the measurement of emotions not very accurate (Kamkhaji et al. 2025; literature review forthcoming). Consequently, ours is an original conceptual and empirical contribution to the NPF literature.

Our lens is the NPF, applied to institutional communication rather than campaign rhetoric

In terms of substance, we empirically identify and analyse the drive towards emotionalisation in policy narratives in a highly technical, yet highly polarised, policy debate: the Farm to Fork strategy (F2F) of the European Union. Empirically, we built a corpus of 794 sentences of the Hungarian government and analysed it with appropriate techniques to reveal the association between narration and emotions. Why Hungary? Although other countries have presented arguments about the limitations of the design of F2F, Hungary has been the most stubborn opponent of the proposals made by the European Commission. Note that by examining a highly technical, highly polarised meso-level of the EU policy process (that is, F2F) we do not bracket away the technical arguments and the political power of leaders (Orbán is a case in point!) when we observe emotions.

For theorists of the NPF, our contribution is: how exactly do emotions feature in the structural elements of the narratives? To understand this, we need to say a few words about the NPF and its assumptions and presuppositions.

In the next section, we will introduce the NPF and our expectations. Section 3 presents the broad contours of the case (F2F). Section 4 reports on the construction of our data. Section 5 presents our findings, and Section 6 discusses them and presents some conjectures for future research.

2. Concepts and Expectations

Narratives follow structural rules; populist discourse is expected to stay emotional even in technical arenas

The NPF maintains that public policy is shaped not just by facts and interests, but also by the stories actors tell, and stories are inherently emotional. Also, the NPF presupposes that policy narratives have structural features. This means that all narratives of public policy share some elements, although they can be diverse in all other aspects. We now describe the elements that give a text or a speech a typical narrative form.

The setting is the discursive construction of where the story takes place, like when Hungary refers to “Brussels” or ‘Our agriculture’. It shows the problem we are talking about in the story. It often contains details about the facts and properties of a narrative. There are different characters in a story. The hero, we shall find out in our Hungarian narratives, is almost invariably the narrator, although we may imagine that this character could sometimes be the farmer or the Hungarian consumers. The villain perpetrates an immoral or wrong action, and the victim suffers because of what the villain has done or is doing or will be doing. We can also expect to find two characters that are not common in the NPF literature, that is, the ally and the beneficiary. The ally is the character who will assist the hero and the victims in turning things around. This character is relevant in our story because the Hungarian government refers to the Visegrád countries as a bloc working more or less with the same political and policy goals in Europe. Whether this is true or false, it does not matter, because we are talking about policy narratives, that is, the discursive representation of reality put forward by a narrator. The beneficiary is the category comprising those who will benefit from doing good. The plot is the series of events, cause-and-effect pathways that support the story. In the NPF literature, we often find fragments of a plot, not a complete explanation of how the prime forces generated outcomes through the actions of the characters. Narrators in politics have short shrift for complicated causal narratives, especially if they are populist, emotional narrators. The moral is the call for action, that

An intriguing feature of the F2F policy process is its dual nature: it is both technical and highly politicised

is, what should be done and why this is the good thing to do for, say, Hungary or the Visegrád Group. The final category we consider here: the doomsday scenario. This is a discursive presentation of a future where things go very wrong—unless we, the audience, listen carefully to the solution put forward by the narrator-hero. It is the dystopian future that should transport the audience into an undesirable scenario to see how bad things may happen.

A key element of the NPF is the assumption that individuals in public policy are purposeful, meaning that they want something from policy decisions. Yet they have bounded rationality, which means that they cannot calculate the payoffs of alternative courses of action. And this type of policy actors can be persuaded by narratives. The NPF indeed talks of a *homo narrans*—someone who is persuaded not just by the quality of the evidence or the calculation of the balance of power, but by what the story is and how a story is told. And this opens an important pathway for emotional narratives. Specifically, we claim that emotions are aroused by narrators and empirically appear in relation to the NPF structural features. For example, the hero may be discursively portrayed in ways that elicit pride; the villain is associated with contempt; the narrative of the victim brings in compassion. These associations are what we are going to test empirically. The fact that policy narratives possess universal structural features allows the researcher to abstract from the idiosyncrasies of narrative content and focus on the systematic linkages that are observed between specific narrative elements and emotions. However, the literature on emotions within the NPF is scant. The measurement of emotions within the NPF is not very advanced: we find simple measures of affect, for example, or one-two emotions, not a full range. The first example we found is the dissertation by Michael Jones (2010); his operationalisation of emotions appeared in Jones and Song (2014), Jones (2014a; 2014b), and Jones et al. (2017). Some more recent NPF publications with emotions-related variables include McBeth et al. (2022), Flores et al. (2023), Peterson et al. (2022) and, on risk communication, Shanahan et al. (2019).

To get closer to emotions, we focus on the following research questions, which are largely unexplored within the NPF:

- Do populist governments deploy emotional narratives in relatively sophisticated settings, that is, outside electoral campaigns and the communication of the government directly targeting its electorate?
- What is the list of emotions we should consider for the empirical analysis of policy narratives?
- If emotions are present, do negative or positive emotions prevail? The Hungarian government has been on the opposing side of the fence. Does this lead to a negative posture in emotionalisation, like eliciting fear, anger, and frustration?
- How are emotions linked to narrative elements (especially characters)? Is it true that specific emotions are systematically attached to/evoked by different characters?

Turning to expectations, we expect populist narratives to be blunt, highly emotional, and simple, in line with the scholarship on the discourses of



“Policy actors are purposeful yet bounded and can be persuaded by stories—homo narrans”

Jonathan Khamkaji
MORES researcher at
European University Institute

populist leaders during electoral campaigns and in parliament (e.g., French MEP Jordan Bardella, British MP Nigel Farage, and Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini). An important point is that these expectations have been developed on the basis of discourses of populist leaders that address mass political opinion. But we do not know much about the populist narrative-emotional register in technical fora like F2F. One may instead expect populists to engage with technical registers and leave the emotions out when they address the ‘technocrats’ in Brussels. An intriguing feature of the F2F policy process is that is both technical and very politicised, as shown by farmers’ protests, with the presence of tractors blocking traffic in Brussels in the most-heated moments.

We also expect correlations between NPF categories and emotions. The villain should be associated with anger and fear, the victim with compassion-empathy, the hero with pride. The plot can have different emotional associations. The doomsday should be discursively represented to elicit fear. But overall, we expect characters to be loaded with emotions – more than the setting, the moral, the plot, and the doomsday scenario.

We also expect the narrative to be dynamic, to move with the events and absorb external events that show up during the time period under observation (2020-2024). We do not expect populists to change their minds, but rather to factor in, metabolise events and capture them in their narrative—spinning the events in their favour, so to speak.

We expect populist narratives to be blunt, simple, and emotional, even in technical fora like the Farm to Fork

3. Case Selection and Case Description

Farm to Fork's ambitious goals collided with crises, protests, and political backlash, paving the way for Hungary's narrative offensive

Launched in May 2020, the Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) was introduced as a central pillar of the European Green Deal, aiming to reshape the EU's food system to make it more sustainable, resilient, and health-oriented. Its genesis lies in a growing scientific and political consensus that agriculture and food consumption significantly drive climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and non-communicable diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities in global food supply chains, strengthening calls for systemic reform.

The strategy's vision was ambitious (see Table 1 on the following page) promising to deliver a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system. It outlined a broad set of targets for 2030, including a 50% reduction in pesticide use, a 20% reduction in fertilisers, a 50% cut in antimicrobial use in agriculture, and the expansion of organic farming to cover 25% of EU farmland. It also promised actions to improve animal welfare, food labelling, and consumer empowerment, while promising support for farmers through innovation, digitalisation, and reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

From its inception, the strategy faced noticeable criticism. First of all, the achievement of F2F targets and objectives cuts across a number of existing policies, showcasing the structural complexity of integrating F2F transversally across existing sectoral legislation, policy bundles and mixes, and sub-systems (Bazzan et al. 2022). Second, since the beginning, the F2F targets were considered overly ambitious, substantially pitting food security and sustainability goals against each other (Hennessy et al. 2024; Wesseler, 2022). Third, F2F's anticipated impacts were immediately perceived as deeply asymmetric – across Member States, regions, and farms' size (Beckman et al. 2022). Fourth, such perception was undoubtedly reinforced by the fact that the F2F strategy was not the object of in-depth stakeholder consultation. In fact, unlike legislative proposals, the F2F was launched as a Commission Communication, meaning it was not subject to a comprehensive impact assessment with the related call for evidence.¹ This procedural decision drew sharp criticism from farmers' associ-

¹ The strategy, the Commission reasoned in 2020, set out a broad action plan for non-legislative initiatives, amendments to existing legislation and new legislation. Impact assessment and consultation processes—the Commission argued—would be taking place at the time of presenting formal proposals for

Title 1 – Farm to Fork in a nutshell

Reduce the environmental impact of food production:	Cut pesticide use by 50% by 2030	Reduce fertiliser use by 20%	Decrease antimicrobial use in farming by 50%
Promote Sustainable agriculture:	Increase organic farming to 25% of the total agricultural land by 2030	Encourage biodiversity and regenerative practices	-
Make food systems more resilient:	Ensure food safety while mitigating climate change	Encourage shorter supply chains and local food systems	-
Improve health and nutrition:	Promote healthy, sustainable diets and reduce food waste	Require clearer food labelling and better consumer information	-
Support farmers and fishers in the transition:	Provide financial and technical assistance to help producers meet new sustainability standards	-	-

Source: Authors (2025).

ations, some Member States, and industry lobbies, who warned that the strategy's targets were not sufficiently backed by economic and feasibility studies. A handful of reports (see Hennessy et al. 2024 for a review), including one by the European Commission's own Joint Research Centre (Barreiro-Hurle et al. 2021), later suggested the strategy could lead to production drops, rising food prices, and trade distortions if implemented without global coordination.

These immediate challenges to the strategy were reinforced by political and geo-political factors. From 2021 onward, the F2F began to lose political momentum. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, inflation, and energy crises shifted EU priorities toward food security and price stability. Conservative and far-right parties increasingly framed F2F as unrealistic and driven by pro-environmental ideology rather than societal needs and empirically identifiable benefits. This opposition culminated in widespread tractor protests across Europe in 2023–2024, especially in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Farmers denounced regulatory burdens, environmental targets, and declining incomes, calling for a rethink of green transition policies. In response, the European Commission and several Member States began to deprioritise or dilute F2F goals. As a result, almost all the key legislative components of the strategy stalled, were delayed, or were shelved. In more detail:

_Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR): Proposed in 2022, this regulation faced strong opposition and was ultimately withdrawn in 2024 after the European Parliament rejected it.

new legislation or changes to existing directives and regulations.

_Sustainable Food Systems Framework (FSFS): Announced for 2023, this flagship initiative has yet to be presented, with no clear timeline for its introduction, although an inception impact assessment and consultation were carried out. It should be re-framed in the context of the Vision for Agriculture and Food COM (2025) 75 Final, 19 February 2025.²

_Food Labelling Reforms: Plans for revised front-of-pack nutrition labelling and sustainability labels, initially slated for 2022 and 2024 respectively, have not been submitted.

_Animal Welfare Legislation: While a proposal concerning the welfare of animals during transport was introduced in 2023,³ other aspects, such as animal keeping, slaughter, and product labelling, remain pending.

As of mid-2025, most of the F2F strategy's legislative pillars have either been abandoned, downgraded, or subsumed into broader, less prescriptive policy frameworks. While the strategy remains nominally in place, its transformative agenda has effectively been politically sidelined. The Von Der Leyen Commission de facto put F2F in abeyance by launching quite late in the day the so-called strategic dialogue with 29 major stakeholders.⁴ To add legitimacy to the Commission's advocacy mix, technocratic arguments are accompanied by the deployment of instruments that promote bottom-up participation, such as different forms of stakeholder engagement and in-depth dialogue. This was not the case with F2F, where the so-called strategic dialogue... arrived at the end.

To sum up, F2F was contested from its very beginning; its content and process were the object of fierce criticism, most of all due to its ambiguous impacts—which were not quantified or assessed. Contextual factors like the Russian invasion of the Ukraine added to those challenges leading to the 2023-2024 tractor movement. The farmers' protest represented the culmination of years of widespread discontent with the strategy, which was cannily and strategically exploited by policy actors such as the Visegrád 4 group and, most of all, by the Hungarian government. F2F's demise has for sure many fathers. Yet, it is undeniable that a savvy communicator like Viktor Orbán was extremely effective in surfing the protest wave in 2023-2024 and, also helped by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council in the second semester of 2024, pictured himself as F2F's undertaker ([BBC, 2024](#)).

The Hungarian advocacy against F2F epitomises, hence, an extremely representative voice of the anti-F2F front—a voice that openly engaged in populist emotional advocacy against the strategy. More pertinently perhaps, F2F provided the perfect stage for emotionalised policy narratives.



“ F2F was contested from its very beginning; its content and process were the object of fierce criticism, most of all due to its ambiguous impacts ”

Jonathan Kamkhaji
MORES researcher at
European University Institute

² See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0075> The Vision was criticized by environmental groups as the death of farm to fork, see <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/eu-vision-for-agriculture-and-food-plant-based-protein-climate/>

³ See https://food.ec.europa.eu/animals/animal-welfare/eu-animal-welfare-legislation/animal-welfare-during-transport_en#revision-of-regulation-ec-no-12005

⁴ See https://commission.europa.eu/topics/agriculture-and-rural-development/strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en

4. Data Generation and Validation

A 53-document corpus coded for narrative roles and emotions, validated through iterative human checks and AI benchmarking

To answer our questions and test our expectations, we constructed a corpus for the Hungarian government. The corpus we analyse spans from May 2020 (when F2F was officially launched) up to the end of 2024 (when F2F was de facto phased out/put in abeyance, and Hungary terminated its Presidency of the European Council). All texts in our corpus are official, institutional documents. In terms of narration, this means that the narrator is always an institution and we are dealing with institutional policy narratives.

The corpus was constructed as follows. We focused only on official sources in the English language. The choice of working only with material in English is because the EU-level advocacy of the Hungarian government is always in English, i.e. addressed to a European audience, be it the European Commission, the other Member States, or the Council's formations, especially the Agriculture and Fisheries Council configuration (Agrifish).

In more detail, we perused the following sources: the webpage of the Hungarian government (*abouthungary*), the webpage of the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union, and the webpage of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council. All entries tagging the Ministry of Agriculture, Farm to Fork and the Agrifish Council were pre-selected and read for relevance. At the end of this selection process, we were left with 53 individual policy narratives, from the first entry of the 22nd of May 2020¹ to the press release concerning the last Agrifish Council presided over by Hungary, in December 2024. They were extracted from the official website of the Hungarian Government (19 entries), the webpage of the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union (23 entries) and the webpage of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council (11 entries). Once broken down, the 53 entries constituting the Hungarian corpus include 794 sentences. On average, each entry is 14.98 sentences-long, the longest entry being the portion of the 2024 Programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council devoted to agriculture (48 sentences). Each of the 53 entries possesses the minimum elements to make it a narrative according to the NPF: a policy problem, or setting, and a character.

The question now is: what shall be done with this corpus to systematically

¹ Right after the F2F Communication was released by the European Commission, the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, István Nagy, gave an interview to the Hungarian news agency MTI whose content was later published under the section 'news' on the government's website)



Viktor Orbán speaks to a farmer during a protest in Brussels in 2024.
Credit: Zoltán Fischer / Prime Minister's Press Office / MTI/ MTVA

garner its narrative structure and emotional content? From the methodological point of view, our analysis takes place at the sentence level; hence, all the narratives were dissected into individual sentences. Each sentence was then coded according to two different approaches: narrative form and emotional content. On the one hand, we manually coded each sentence according to its belonging to one of the elements of the narrative form, i.e. setting, character (either hero, villain, victim, ally, or beneficiary), plot, moral, and doomsday. So at this stage we were only concerned with the NPF categories.

We performed, first, a manual (i.e. human-based) coding of the emotion evoked by each sentence (meaning, we tagged each sentence with one of the NPF categories) and, second, an automated emotional coding based on the XML-RoBERTa foundation.² The automated coding was for us a benchmark to check the accuracy of our coding. This model was adapted, perfected, and calibrated on the goals of the MORES project by its consortium participants and called [MORES Pulse](#).³

The MORES Pulse model is designed to capture joy, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and the residual category of “no emotion”. Since our analytical framework is the NPF and, more generally, theories of the policy process (Weible 2024), we anchored our choice of emotions to the work of Pierce (2021 and 2024) on public policy processes, with some adaptations suggested by our knowledge of the nature of the controversies between Hungary and the European Commission. We knew, for example, that disgust was not something to be elicited in an official statement of the Hungarian representative in the Council, while frustration with “Brussels not listening” was likely to appear, although not included in the project model. We also wanted a relatively large catalogue of emotions, to avoid missing something we might not have thought about. This stands in contrast to the work on emotions carried out until now within the NPF, where, as we said, we typically find one emotion or a few, or just the broad category of ‘affect’.

² For a technical discussion: https://huggingface.co/docs/transformers/en/model_doc/roberta

³ For details: <https://huggingface.co/poltextlab/xlm-roberta-large-pooled-emotions6-v2>

5. Empirical Analysis

Hungary's advocacy is blunt, repetitive, and emotionally charged, framing itself as hero and Brussels as villain

Our catalogue starts with the positive emotions:

_Hope

_Joy

_Pride

_Enthusiasm

This is a large category in Pierce (2021) and also for us. It includes or is elicited by sentences also referring primarily to Commitment, Defiance, Resolve, and Determination.

A positive emotion with high relational quality is Empathy-Compassion. We therefore included it in our list, reasoning that narratives may have sought to elicit sympathy for the farmers, for example.

Turning to negative emotions, and here again broadly following Pierce, we have:

_Anger

_Fear

_Frustration

Anger includes or is strongly connected to Hatred, Moral disgust, and Contempt. Fear can appear on its own, or in connection with Anxiety. Fear is the response to a perceived (in our case, narrated) threat, whilst a narrator can elicit and induce anxiety by talking about threatening events that have not happened yet. Table 2 (see on the following page) presents the emotions considered in our study.

To ensure the validity of the coding, we followed a hybrid and multi-layered approach. In the initial stage, each sentence was coded by an individual researcher. In the second stage, carried out a week later, the coding was repeated from scratch by the same researcher, and discrepancies were adjusted to guarantee consistency. This iterative scoring, carried out by a single knowledgeable coder, beyond facilitating reproducibility, trades some

When human-coded emotions differed, we used MORES Pulse to benchmark our analysis

reliability (achieved by adding other coders) for a deeper understanding of a policy text and its context. The material was then passed to a further knowledgeable coder who performed a second round of scores meant to validate coder one's scores.

The few discrepancies in the NPF categories were resolved by the two researchers by looking into the specialised literature and discussing the individual scores. As far as the emotional tags assigned to the narrative units, when the human scores were different, the result of the automated analysis, if present, was used to assign the final value. In this sense, we used MORES Pulse to benchmark our exercise. Those cases where the human-coded emotions differed, and the MORES model did not render any result, were discussed and agreed upon individually.

Rhetorical entrapment: the Commission is pressed for impact assessments, accused of failing its better-regulation standards

5.1 Qualitative Remarks

Before discussing the quantitative evidence, we observe the quality of the overall advocacy of the Hungarian government on F2F. This advocacy is highly narrative. The narrator typically identifies with the hero (character self-attribution). In terms of qualitative remarks, the narrative advocacy is calibrated on the type of narrative stage

Table 2 - Emotions in this study

EMOTIONS	TYPE	INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING...
1 Hope	Positive	
2 Joy	Positive	
3 Pride	Positive	Commitment, Defiance, Resolve, Determination
4 Enthusiasm	Positive	
5 Empathy	Positive	
6 Anger	Negative	Hatred, Moral disgust, Contempt
7 Fear	Negative	Anxiety
8 Frustration	Negative	

Source: Authors (2025).

in which the F2F battle took place (that is, an EU level *policy battle* mainly waged against the Commission and several Member States and bolstered by public protests). The narratives also track pretty closely the diachronic steps of the Hungarian public advocacy against the Green Deal in general and F2F in particular. To clarify, the narrative and the moral are stable; the points are always the same. But, we found that the elements were calibrated around the main events and meetings of a given particular period, with Hungary moving toward a more collective register when speaking on behalf of the Visegrád allies.

The content of the Hungarian F2F discourse is rather straightforward, as well as consistent. The narrative is blunt, direct, hammering on the same points. Already in the first chronological entry, we find Hungarian Minister of Agriculture Istvan Nagy declaring that F2F is a death sentence to European agriculture. The Commission is the Goliath strangling small countries and farmers with impossible tasks and targets; the farmers, therefore, are the victims, and the Hungarian government is the (tiny) David trying to protect the victims from the Brussels villain. Its advocacy, therefore, is eminently an opposing/contrarian narrative.

To say ‘NO—We do not want to change’ you do not need as much detail as when you are trying to persuade Europeans to change the way they produce and consume food. This is reflected in the fact that the narratives are noticeably vague on policy detail, data, or evidence-based arguments. This makes sense because, as we said, the narrator is geared towards criticising and attacking a position rather than building consensus for a new policy. As a result, when data and evidence are deployed, they are used to counter a report published by a perceived opponent. However, their framing is simply furious, the rhetoric accompanying them livid and even openly intimidatory:

“In a report published last week on agricultural subsidies in Hungary by the European Greens Group in the European Parliament, entitled ‘Where does the EU money go?’ the ill-informed author, a certain Leonárd Máriás, who is better known in Hungary as a regular contributor to staunchly anti-Orbán news sites like *Mérce* and – Soros-funded – *Átlátszó.hu*, makes a series of factually incorrect and biased statements. The report, which takes aim at the agricultural subsidies regimes of Central and Eastern European countries, can best be described as a tsunami of lies with complete disregard for the facts.”¹

There is one interesting twist in the observations we are making about evidence. There are sentences where the Hungarian narrator displays the rhetorical entrapment technique. The Commission did not present an im-

External shocks (e.g., Ukraine war, grain inflows) are folded into the storyline—‘Hungarian farmers first’

¹ <https://abouthungary.hu/blog/where-does-the-eu-money-go-to-small-and-middle-sized-farming-businesses>

pact assessment for F2F. In May 2020 (that is, Nagy's "Green Deal is a death sentence for European agriculture" doomsday moment) this lack of impact assessment is remarked as a negative fact in a sentence. Nagy goes on to argue in the next sentence that:

"During the drawing up of strategies that are so comprehensive and have such a major effect, a responsible decision can only be made based on studies that analyse their expected effects in a suitable manner."²

Thus, the Commission is trapped in its own evidence-based principles. If it does not respect these principles, it must not proceed with policy proposals, especially those that are so far-reaching as the Green Deal.

Yet, facts seem to matter little amid this flamboyant rhetoric. Almost all the narratives default on a moral (that is, the policy solution, or call for action) that consists of a postponement of/block to F2F policies across the board. The main motivation is that its targets are unachievable and would lead to the death of European agriculture and a steep increase in prices. Consider also that in the period 2020/2021, after the F2F communication was issued and various legislative proposals were being prepared, the Covid-19 pandemic was still a major issue that could be used by the Hungarian narrators to make the case for at least a postponement of the most ambitious and far-reaching F2F initiatives.

Then, in terms of narrative dynamics across time, a major exogenous, contextual circumstance was rapidly picked up by the anti-F2F advocacy, that is, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its impacts on food markets, both the markets of the EU and global. The inflow of cheap Ukrainian grains into the EU was narrated as an existential threat by Hungary and served perfectly the purpose of strengthening the argument against F2F. Key to this is the unilateral imposition of a ban on Ukrainian grain as a means both to preserve the profitability of Hungarian products and to show how the higher environmental standards imposed by F2F targets were self-defeating in a time of crisis. "Hungary first," then, as in this sentence: "István Nagy, the agriculture minister, said Hungary is maintaining the import ban on Ukrainian agricultural produce as the interests of Hungarian farmers 'always come first'.³

Three other contextual elements influenced the Hungarian narrative in 2023 and 2024. They are the tractor protests (2023-2024), quickly patronised by Hungary, Orbán, and the V4 countries; the fact that Hungary presided over the EU Council in the second half of 2024; and the 2024 EU Parliamentary elections with the subsequent renewal of Von der Leyen. In light of these factors, the Hungarian rhetoric, while embracing the motivations and opposing advocacy of the tractors, becomes also less inflammatory and more institutional, reflecting both the coordination role played by the rotating Council presidency and the fact that after the elections, under the

² <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-agriculture/news/if-brussels-implements-the-green-deal-based-on-the-recommendations-of-the-european-commission-it-could-mean-a-death-sentence-for-european-agriculture>

³ <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/nagy-hungarian-farmers-always-come-first>

new Von der Leyen Commission, F2F had already morphed into a less ambitious policy. Importantly, this allowed the Hungarian government to claim a policy victory during its Council presidency. The arc of the F2F policy process, with its endogenous and exogenous factors, peaking in a widespread stakeholder contestation that allegedly killed the strategy, is then ostensibly reflected in the narrative arc of the Hungarian narrative corpus.

5.2 Quantitative Analysis

After the qualitative presentation of the corpus, we move now to the structure of the Hungarian narrative, that is, its *form*—this is our NPF focus. In the second step, we will connect narrative categories and emotions. Focusing on the narrative form first allows us to draw more systematic conclusions on the narrative strategy of the narrator, most of all if we assume that the emotional load embedded in the structural elements serves to convey the narrative content with more persuasion and traction on the audience. In terms of narrative elements, the Hungarian corpus is composed as follows (table 3; see on the following page.)

Widespread stakeholder contestation to F2F is ostensibly reflected in the narrative arc of our Hungarian narrative corpus

Table 3 – Narrative elements of the Hungarian corpus

NARRATIVE ELEMENT	PERCENTAGE
Setting	10.58%
Character	35.64%
<i>Hero</i>	21.03%
<i>Villain</i>	5.29%
<i>Victim</i>	7.93%
<i>Ally</i>	1.38%
Plot	36.4%
Moral	15.99%
Doomsday	1.38%
Total	100%

Source: Authors (2025).

The narrator-hero is always the Hungarian government (character self-attribution, as we said), typically expressed through the voice of Minister Nagy or State Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development Zsolt Feldman. The plot category stands at 36.4 per cent, but this does not mean that the narrator is systematic. Quite the opposite: we find fragments of plots, cause-and-effect elements that are isolated and not supported by evidence. The narration is poor on data, policy technicalities and supporting evidence. Even if Hungary is addressing the highly sophisticated stage of the EU, it does not feel the need to articulate a causal story in depth. This could be because of the choice to press on emotions instead of evidence—a point to which we will soon turn.

The Hungarian narrator may be rather superficial in deploying the plot of policy motivations and development, but almost each of the 53 entries has a call for action, as if there was the pressure or need to state ‘this is what it should be done’. The doomsday scenario, when present, has the same function: to move the audience towards the feasible, desirable scenario, and avoid the doomsday.

Importantly (in light of what we said about narrators that “just say NO”),

the moral systematically defaults on the defence of the status quo, that is, strengthening the CAP and pausing/halting F2F to substitute it with the strategic dialogues—i.e. forms of multilateral, intergovernmental, and stakeholders-oriented bargaining. To achieve that, the argument goes on, we need agency; that is, actors. And here we find the hero, the victim, and the villain. The self-characterisation of the Hungarian government as the hero is absolutely systematic: out of 167 sentences coded as hero character, only three of them do not cast Hungary, or the Hungarian government, as the hero of the story. The same goes for the assignment of the victim role to the farmers (regardless of the noticeable heterogeneity of this actor—think of the differences between small and big farms, agro-industry versus rural farming) and the depiction of the European Commission as the main culprit/villain.

Other villains are featured: Hungarian opposition parties, EU green parties and groups and, most interestingly, large agrifood firms that benefit from cheap Ukrainian export (“Nagy said in the interview that the European Union was protecting so-called Ukrainian farmers who were in fact US, Saudi and Dutch companies and investors”, 18/09/2023, <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/nagy-leaders-of-the-european-union-are-not-protecting-the-eus-interests>).

The European Commission can usefully be narratively portrayed as “Brussels”: we readers know from the beginning of the story that the “Brussels” folks are not going to provide a bright future, and we should feel anxious about this entity. Take these two sentences: “Brussels can’t see that and supports Ukrainian producers rather than European farmers” “Brussels is endangering the future of European agriculture with its proposals”. Now,

the first sentence is also a good example of how roBERTa cannot detect any emotion because there is no word pointing to an emotion. Instead, in the second sentence, the use of the term “endangering” allows MORE Pulse to come to the same conclusion about emotions as the human coders. It is then time to move to emotions.

Let us start with the presence of emotions across the corpus by considering human coding (table 4; see on the following page). Importantly, this draws on the researchers’ contextual knowledge of the policy process and its actors, revealing emotional content also where it is not apparent.

As mentioned, the same individual sentences were coded automatically by the large language model roBERTa, trained to detect these emotions: Anger, Disgust, Fear, Joy, Sadness, and none of them.⁴ Table 5 presents the results (see on page 22).

In sum, according to the automated emotional coding of the corpus, the

**Emotionalisation index = 0.55:
over half the sentences carry
emotions; for characters, the
index rises to 0.83**

⁴ MORES Pulse was specifically trained to identify five emotions: anger, fear, disgust, sadness, and joy. Any emotions outside this scope are classified as “none of them” - which includes not only neutral expressions but also any emotional states not covered by these five categories. The English version of MORES Pulse was developed through translation from German, Hungarian, and Polish rather than using native English data. It has been manually validated only in German, Hungarian, and Polish

Table 4 – Emotions across the corpus: human coding

EMOTION	PERCENTAGE
No emotion	45.21%
Fear (including anxiety)	11.84%
Enthusiasm	8.18%
Hope	7.80%
Pride	7.43%
Anger	6.93%
Empathy	6.30%
Frustration	4.40%
Joy	1.38%
Other: non-identifiable emotional sentences (emotions not included in our list)	0.5%
Total	100%

Source: Authors (2025).

narratives are not particularly loaded with emotions, but an expert reading and coding of the same corpus reveals a much heavier reliance on emotional discourse. To elaborate on what we said about “Brussels” earlier: an automated coding driven by a trained LLM reads each sentence at its face value, lacking the contextual understanding and policy knowledge that may lead a human coder to detect emotional content in a word-by-word neutral sentence. To make another example: a sentence like “We cannot impose unrealistic quotas or burdensome rules on farmers and companies, but should offer practical support for them” is coded as “None of them” by the model, but a human coder would immediately link the adjectives *unrealistic* and *burdensome* to frustration or even anger. Moreover, one sentence can indeed have an emotional content on our list of emotions but fall outside the scope of the five emotions embedded in the model. As we said, the model was in any case useful to confirm that we did not miss any emotional sentence (there are no sentences qualified as emotional by the project model and non-emotional by us) and to adjudicate cases where the two coders had come to a different

Table 5 – MORES Pulse values

EMOTION	PERCENTAGE
Anger	6%
Fear	3.35%
Joy	1.86%
Sadness	0.5%
None of them	88.3%
Total	100%

Source: Authors (2025).

conclusion about the type of emotion.

To then go back to the human-assisted emotional analysis, our expert human coding reveals a noticeable emotional load. Negative and positive emotions are almost the same (23,2 versus 24.9 per cent). This is somewhat surprising since we expected negative emotions to dominate. Having said that, the prevalent emotion is, however, negative, and fear + anger together get close to 20 per cent. Anger is also at the top of the MORES Pulse coding calculation of emotions.

To look into the relationship between narratives and emotions, we provide a simple indicator of narrative emotionalisation where 0 indicates that no sentence is emotionalised and 1 that all are. To do this, we divide the number of sentences showing emotion by the total number of sentences. This indicator has a value of 0.55. This rough indicator tells us that more than half of the sentences featured in the corpus are indeed emotional. We are in quite uncharted territory here, because we are not aware of other studies using indicators like ours, but if the number of emotionalised sentences passes the 50% mark (i.e. > 0.5) we would say that the narrative, considered in its overall dimension, is highly emotional. Considering that we are talking about institutional communication between a government and its partners, and not about the advocacy of a pressure group that is ‘outside the tent’ of decision-makers, this level of emotionalisation has surprised us.

Let us now look at how emotions map onto narrative elements. Starting with the setting, we find that the policy problem and the policy background where the narrative takes place are rarely emotionalised (71.4 per cent of

setting sentences show no emotions). Yet, when it is, the driving emotion is fear (19.05 per cent), reflecting the wish of the narrator/hero to set the stage for a doomsday story (see on the next page). When the setting is emotionalised and no doomsday is implied, it is typically counterbalanced (entries 20 and 21) by the hero who leverages hope in promoting specific policy solutions (elements of the moral).

We now move to the plot, another narrative element where emotions are not so prominent. The plot includes procedures, processes, actions that will follow a meeting, the identification (in the narrative) of the Conclusions of a Council meeting, and so on (in short, sentences like: Ministers discussed this; the Parliament discussed that.) Two-thirds of the sentences that contain plot elements do not display any emotion.

The opposite holds true for characters. It is in these categories (most of all the hero, the victims, and the villain) that we expect to find a consistent resort to emotions. In general, out of the 283 sentences coded as revolving around the characters (which together make up 35.6 per cent of the total), only 48 (17 per cent) were scored as showing no emotions. In other words, the indicator of narrative emotionalisation discussed above would be as high as 0.83 for the characters.

When it comes to our expectations regarding the emotionalisation of the individual characters, we start with the hero. We find that the hero's role, actions, and purposes are, as expected, mainly framed through positive emotions such as enthusiasm (28.7 per cent), pride (21.6 per cent), and hope (7.8 per cent). As expected from looking at the aggregate characters' sample, only 22 per cent of sentences attributed to the hero category do not feature any emotion (as opposed to the 45.2 per cent of the whole corpus). Among the negative emotions, only fear plays a role, featuring in just less than 10 per cent of the hero-related sentences. This presence of fear is justified because, in some instances, the hero must act to avoid doomsday.

To give some examples beyond the numbers, a sentence like the following clearly connects the hero with pride, even if the context is institutional (mentioning the European Court of Auditors):

“As a vital element in the operation and transparency of the system, Hungary has one of the most stringent and sophisticated monitoring systems in relation to the disbursement of agricultural subsidies, which is not only subject to strict accreditation but is also regularly reviewed by the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors.”

Moving to the villain, the connection between its role in the narratives and anger (74 per cent) and frustration (14.3 per cent) is crystal-clear (e.g. “Brussels is endangering the future of European agriculture with its proposals”). Interestingly, the share of non-emotional sentences in the villain category drops here to an incredibly low 9.5 per cent. This aspect is even more marked when we look into the victim category, where only 3 per cent of sentences are emotion-free. No victim without emotion, then. The victim, hence (not surprisingly) is the most emotionalised category with 35 per cent of sentences

**Hero pairs with Enthusiasm
28.7%, Pride 21.6%, Hope 7.8%;
Villain with Anger 74% and
Frustration 14.3%**

loaded with fear and 20.6 per cent with anger and frustration, respectively. Empathy features in only 14.3 per cent of the sentences attributed to the victim. The exemplary sentence for the victim reads as:

“European farmers have had to face many challenges in the recent past, such as extreme weather events caused by climate change, high input costs, the negative effects of war, or market disruptions caused by increasing imports from third countries. At the same time, they have to meet increasingly stringent production standards and cope with increased administrative burdens”.

The sentences linked to the moral of the story typically offer strong suggestions, either directly or indirectly (pointing to a certain ideal, first best state of reality—policy objective(s)—to be achieved). As such, they are less emotionally loaded than narrative elements like characters. 45.7 per cent of sentences associated with the NPF category of moral are indeed emotion-free, reflecting the average of the whole sample. The dominant emotions are, not surprisingly, in the positive spectrum, with hope dominating (23.6 per cent), followed by empathy (7.9 per cent) and enthusiasm (7.1 per cent). From the point of view of the narrative structure, the moral elements are linked to the hero. The hero may act driven by and driving anger or fear, but this character ends up expressing hope in or enthusiasm for a positive finale through moral-connected statements. Negative emotions are rather rare (fear featuring in 7.9 per cent of the moral sentences), indicating that the narrator/hero is not interested in evoking doomsday scenarios.

This was one of our expectations—that is, the resort to doomsday scenarios as a trope of emotionalised populist narratives. This is proved in quality, a bit less so in quantity, apparently. In fact, doomsday sentences are rare in the corpus (1.4 per cent). Yet, despite being rare, they are critical to the interpretation of the Hungarian overall narrative in that they underpin the whole structure of the Hungarian advocacy. Remember that the May 2020 doomsday speech by Nagy is the master document of the Hungarian opposition to F2F. This is the speech about the Green Deal as a death sentence for European agriculture.⁵ A powerful villain endangers the victims, and only the intervention of the hero can avoid the disaster. Rare as they are, the doomsday sentences are qualitatively crucial and, most importantly, they are loaded with negative emotions, fear (82 per cent) and anger (18 per cent).

Victim is intensely emotional: Fear 35%, Anger 20.6%, Frustration 20.6%; Moral leans Hope 23.6%

⁵ <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-agriculture/news/if-brussels-implements-the-green-deal-based-on-the-recommendations-of-the-european-commission-it-could-mean-a-death-sentence-for-european-agriculture>

6. Conclusions

Hungary's institutional discourse is emotional and strategic; NPF–emotion mapping has been confirmed, raising normative questions

We have analysed the institutional policy narratives of a populist government in relatively sophisticated EU settings like the ones of F2F. These technical settings are also rich in contestation, and pressure groups have been very vocal. So the question we had in mind when planning this study was whether the Hungarian government would play the card of technical institutional narratives, still rich in characters, plots, moral, but not particularly emotional, or go for emotionalisation. Can populist institutional discourse be emotional? The other research questions were about the emotions that are more or less important (the list of emotions), the balance between positive and negative emotions, and the connection between NPF categories and emotions.

The Hungarian government articulates its position with policy narratives that are emotional. As expected, they are blunt, basic *and* emotional narratives. It doesn't really matter which specific narrator in the Hungarian government is speaking, their message or stance tends to be the same. The narrative always comes from the same hymn sheet. Positive and negative emotions are more or less present in the same quantity. We expected the prevalence of negative emotions in the opposition to F2F, but empirically this is not the case. The new NPF categories we piloted (Ally and Beneficiary) are irrelevant (ally is rare, beneficiary absent) but they show up in the narrative of the European Commission (according to our raw data) so it is worth keeping both in mind in future research on this topic.

As far as technical registers of storytelling go, they are absent. To argue for “no change” is not demanding in terms of evidence. It is those who want to change who have to explain in detail why the change is needed. But this lack of evidence-related elements comes with an interesting exception: rhetorical entrapment. The Hungarian government is most likely not interested in cost-benefit analysis, risk assessment, foresight and other evidence-based tools used in policy appraisal. But when the European Commission does not carry out an impact assessment, and indeed this procedure was not used by F2F, Hungary points to that absence, accusing the Commission of being political and not evidence-based.

Our main curiosity, in terms of theories of the policy process, was the association between narrative elements and emotions. This relationship has been conceptualised, but not much empirically studied in the NPF literature. Our

case shows that the NPF categories map onto emotions. The plot and the setting are not high in emotionalisation. However, as expected, the range of emotions we considered shows up massively in the characters. Our index of emotionalisation is indeed particularly high when we turn to characters. The hero is mainly associated with pride. The villain triggers anger and frustration. The victim is almost invariably associated with emotions. The moral is dominated by hope, empathy, and enthusiasm.

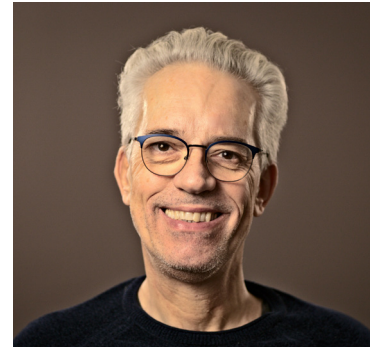
There are some dynamics over time, especially when major exogenous factors like the invasion of Ukraine impact the EU. The inflow of Ukrainian grains is factored into the narrative of opposition to the Green Deal. The same applies to the tractors protesting in Brussels. When Hungary takes on institutional roles, the tone slightly changes, but the points made in relation to F2F are always the same. With the turn to strategic dialogues, Hungary has a reason to claim a kind of victory, so the narrative becomes less flamboyant. The narratives make the same points over and over again, but they follow the arc of the events.

Methodologically, emotions are not elicited by single words but by semantics. It is the way meanings are constructed in a sentence or a story that triggers emotional reactions in the audience. Referring to the European Commission as “Brussels” is already an emotional posture, differentiating ‘them’ from ‘us’. We remain sceptical of dictionary and large language models’ approaches to the detection of emotions in sentences like this. But large language models can be used to benchmark and to resolve divergences of opinion among human coders.¹

Future research should look at the narrative of the European Commission, since there were at least two visions in the F2F saga. We cannot make full sense of a contested policy by considering one narrator only. How do the two narrators differ in their policy narratives and emotions? Do they talk to each other—or do they behave like the two proverbial ships crossing at sea in the night? It would also be useful to look into this chicken and egg question: is it the character that brings emotions, or are emotions that make up a character? This question emerges from the strong correlation we found between characters and emotions. Finally, the big normative question is ‘so what’? Assuming we understand everything about populist narratives in sophisticated yet highly contested policy areas, what should those who care about liberal democracy and European integration do? Should we fight fire with fire, that is, populist emotional narratives with pro-European emotional narratives?

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the partners in the MORES consortium for comments on an earlier version. We thank in particular Gabriella Szabó and Orsolya Ring.



“Future work should compare the Commission’s narrative, probe character–emotion causality, and face the normative ‘fight fire with fire?’ question”

Claudio Radaelli

MORES Team Leader at
European University Institute

¹ Both manual and automated coding present limitations. The literature has developed methods to improve and ensure the validity of both approaches. Most of all in the field of emotions, the LLMs merely reproduce the emotional detections that humans perform. This is to say that the automation of coding cannot be a scientific aim in itself, but it is an instrument that serves the purpose of expanding the quantity of sentences or elements that can be coded.

References

Flores, Andrew, Daniel Boden, Donald Haider-Markel, Daniel Lewis, Patrick Miller, and Jami Taylor. "Taking perspective of the stories we tell about transgender rights: The narrative policy framework." *Policy Studies Journal* 51, no. 1 (2023): 123-143.

Gabehart, K. M., A. H. Fullerton, A. M. Crawford, and C. M. Weible. "How Are Emotions and Beliefs Expressed in Legislative Testimonies? An Advocacy Coalition Approach." *Review of Policy Research*. (2023)

Guo, D. Q., S. Habich-Sobiegalla, and G. Kostka. "Emotions, Crisis, and Institutions: Explaining Compliance with Covid-19 Regulations." *Regulation & Governance* 18: 177-202. (2024).

Jones, Michael D. *Heroes and villains: Cultural narratives, mass opinions, and climate change*. The University of Oklahoma, 2010. PhD Dissertation.

Jones, Michael D., and Geoboo Song. "Making sense of climate change: How story frames shape cognition." *Political Psychology* 35, no. 4 (2014a): 447-476.

Jones, Michael D. "Cultural characters and climate change: How heroes shape our perception of climate science." *Social Science Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (2014b): 1-39.

Jones, Michael D. "Communicating climate change: Are stories better than 'just the facts'?" *Policy Studies Journal* 42, no. 4 (2014): 644-673.

Jones, Michael D., Kjersti Fløttum, and Øyvind Gjerstad. "Stories about climate change: the influence of language on Norwegian public opinion." In *The role of language in the climate change debate*, pp. 49-68. Routledge, 2017.

Kamkhaji, J.C., Attila Bartha, Zolt Boda, Claudio M Radaelli. Prisma Review of Emotions in Public Policy. MORES Project working paper, in progress (not completed) (2025).

Kuenzler, J., B. Stauffer, C. Schalufer, G. Song, A. Smith-Walker, and M.D. Jones "A systematic review of the narrative policy framework: A future research agenda" *Policy & Politics*. (2025) 53(1): 129-151.

Marcus, George E. "Evaluating the Status of Theories of Emotion in Political Science and Psychology." *Frontiers in Political Science* (2023) 4. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.1080884

McBeth, Mark K., Donna L. Lybecker, and Jessica M. Sargent. "Narrative empathy: A narrative policy framework study of working-class climate change narratives and narrators." *World Affairs* 185, no. 3 (2022): 471-499.

Peterson, Holly L., Chad Zanocco, and Aaron Smith-Walter. "Lost in translation: narrative salience of fear>hope in prevention of COVID-19." *Narratives and the Policy Process: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework* (2022). Montana University Press.

Pierce, J. J. "Emotions and the Policy Process: Enthusiasm, Anger and Fear." *Policy and Politics* 49: 595-614 (2021).

Pierce, J. J., K. Miller-Stevens, I. Hicks, D. C. Zilly, S. Rangaraj, and E. Rao. "How Anger and Fear Influence Policy Narratives: Advocacy and Regulation of Oil and Gas Drilling in Colorado." *Review of Policy Research* 41: 12-34 (2024).

Radaelli, Claudio M. "Occupy the Semantic Space! Opening up the Language of Better Regulation." *Journal of European Public Policy* (2023) 30: 1860-83.

Ravazzi, S. "Beyond Plans, Governance Structures, and Organizational Strategies: How Emotional Mechanisms Can Make a Difference in Emergency Response Processes." *Policy Sciences* 56: 499-523. (2023).

Shanahan, Elizabeth A., Ann Marie Reinhold, Eric D. Raile, Geoffrey C. Poole, Richard C. Ready, Clemente Izurieta, Jamie McEvoy, Nicolas T. Bergmann, and Henry King. "Characters matter: How narratives shape affective responses to risk communication." *PLoS One* 14, no. 12 (2019): e0225968.

Wincott, D. "Institutional Interaction and European Integration. Towards an Everyday Critique of Liberal Intergovernmentalism." *Journal of Common Market Studies* (1995) 33: 597-609.