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THE CONTRASTING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF EUROPE. THE 2009 MILK STRIKE IN THE FRENCH BASQUE COUNTRY

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Abstract
*The dairy sector is mostly concerned with market volatility and with the transformations of European regulations. In September, 2009, more than 60,000 European dairy farmers halted or reduced milk deliveries to protest falling prices and the European Commission's plans to scrap production quotas. The strike was initiated by the European Milk Board (EMB), a new European association of milk producers' associations and unions, promoting an alternative discourse on the European and national regulations of the dairy sector. In France, among the highest rates of strikers were to be found in the Basque Country. This paper argues that the 2009 milk strike testifies the emergence of a new kind of protest, being simultaneously transnational and local. In the Basque case, the milk strike sheds light on two dimensions. First, the strike informs on the local perception of the Common agricultural policy and of European integration. Second, the strike challenged the traditional equilibrium between the two local farmers' unions (FDSEA and ELB-*Confédération paysanne*) by the birth of a new specialised association, the APLI (*Association de producteurs de lait indépendants*), related to the EMB. The protest gave birth to a public controversy where European and territorial issues appeared to be intrinsically interdependent.*

Résumé
Le secteur bovin-lait est soumis à la fois à la volatilité des marchés et aux mutations des régulations européennes. En septembre 2009, plus de 60.000 producteurs laitiers européens interrompent ou réduisent leurs livraisons de lait pour protester contre la chute des prix au producteur et la suppression annoncée des quotas par la Commission européenne. La « grève du lait » est initiée par l'European Milk Board (EMB), comprenant associations et syndicats de producteurs, et promouvant un discours alternatif sur les régulations européenne et nationale. A l'échelle française, le Pays Basque fait montre d'un taux de participation à la grève très élevé. La grève de 2009 y témoigne de l'émergence d'un nouveau registre protestataire simultanément transnational et local. La mobilisation informe d'abord sur les perceptions locales de la PAC et de l'intégration européenne. La grève, ensuite, interroge un clivage syndical binaire (FDSEA/ELB-Confédération paysanne) en faisant émerger une association sectorielle spécialisée, l'APLI (Association de producteurs de lait indépendants), liée à l'EMB. La protestation génère dès lors une controverse publique où enjeux européens et territoriaux apparaissent comme inextricablement liés.

Keywords | Mots clés
Farmers' unions, cooperatives, Common Agricultural Policy, territorial mobilisations, French Basque Country
Syndicalisme agricole, coopératives, Politique agricole commune, mobilisations territoriales, Pays Basque français

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The case study[1] presented here illustrates a methodological stance which favours a dual understanding of Europeanization phenomena, one which is sector-based as well as territory-based. Mobilization taken by farmers provides an apt subject for this kind of study: because of the strength of their representative organizations, farmers are capable of influencing the European decision-making process and/or to exert vigorous collective pressure at national level against European policies which they see as unfavourable. Protests by small farmers are generally internalized, in the sense that dissent is above all directed against national political targets in order to denounce measures taken in Brussels (Balme and Chabanet, 2008: 241). They may also take on a directly European dimension. This type of industrial action has often had some effect on the legitimacy of European institutions which may be perceived as "*increasingly cut off from citizens and whose role, paradoxically, is never so fully identified than when it raises problems and spark opposition*" (Balme and Chabanet, 2008: 241).

The study of Europeanized industrial action at a sub-national level is rich in lessons to be learned, particularly at regional level (Carter and Pasquier, 2010). Following Pasquier and Weisbein (2004), we propose here to study "Europe under the local microscope", descending to a sub-regional and even sub-departmental level, though one marked by a strong territorial identity: the French Basque Country. Our intention is, by studying the territorial translations of sector-based industrial action, to answer the three questions raised by any "microscopic" analysis of Europeanization (Pasquier and Weisbein, 2004): who are the local actors, partners or competitors, who construct a meaning for Europe? On the basis of what forms of action and action repertoires is this meaning constructed? Does this common meaning produce a shared vision of the "remote" nature of the EU?

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1 My thanks to Mike Fay for the translation of this article, to Antoine Roger and Andy Smith, Romain Pasquier, Laurent Jalabert and Samuele Dossi for their comments; to those interviewed for this research, especially Christian Harlouchet, who left us in June 2011. Earlier versions of this paper were discussed at the European Union Studies Association Biennial Conference, Boston, March 3-5, 2011 and at the ECPR General Conference – Reykjavik (25-27 Aug. 2011), *Section "The institutionalization of European spaces: interactions, practices and political work"*. This research is part of a wider project on the territorial dynamics of social economy, supported by the CCRDT-Région Aquitaine.

This set of questions will be illustrated by a study of the industrial action taken by cow milk producers during the crisis which affected this sector in 2008-2009. Although it is true that when farmers take major industrial action against the EU, this is mostly triggered by general reforms of the Common agricultural policy (CAP) (Saurugger, 2004 ; Wolffe, 2009 p. 120), those sectors which have historically been very much supported by the CAP, such as the milk production sector, provide a notable exception to this rule (Wolffe, 2009). In turn, the sectorization of agricultural policy also leads to a sectorization of the forms which representation of interests takes, and thus to the emergence of specialized associations at a European level, alongside generalist, cross-sector trade unions. We will focus here on the milk deliveries strike carried out by producers in several European and French regions in 2009. In following the precedent of similar action in Germany in May 2008, French producers were participating in the construction of a European repertoire of protest action. In this sense, the milk strike represents a form of "Europeanization from below" of a sector-based protest (Della Porta and Caiani, 2007; Monforte, 2010). At the same time, however, reactions to the strike within the local, national and European landscape are evidence of an extended range of forms of Europeanization, ranging from radical protest to collective actions whose nature is closer to that of special interest groups.

We will see the territorial translation of this to the French Basque Country, a choice of region which is doubly relevant. On the one hand, the Basque Country was one of the French regions where the September 2009 strike had the strongest support. Secondly, the milk strike upset a local balance between trade unions based on a split which is both sector-based (two conceptions of agriculture) and identity-based (two conceptions of territorial identity). Rather than addressing the whole set of issues raised by the milk crisis, this article centres on the forms of industrial action which were activated on this occasion. We propose to illustrate, at territorial level, the hypothesis developed by Roullaud (2010) about the 2009 strike. Roullaud sees it as revealing a dual phenomenon: the sectorization of trade union representation with the strengthening of sector- and industry-based organizations, and the resonance of the European dimension in conceptualizations of the issues and collective action. Both these generic elements were

present on the Basque scene. Grafted on to this was a local context marked by a bipolarity of trade union representation, itself challenged by an atypical form of industrial action. We shall examine, following a sequential approach, the stages of this mobilization. Section 1 of this article briefly reviews the causes of the crisis. Section 2 analyses the strike itself in the Basque Country, the sociology of the actors involved and the forms which action took, before identifying (in section 3) some research paths concerning the consequences of this industrial action and the plural forms of Europeanization experienced by the actors[2].

1.TOWARDS INDUSTRIAL ACTION: PRICE FLUCTUATIONS AND CHANGES TO REGULATION

A European Crisis

At a national French level, the milk crisis is part of one of the worst crises which the agricultural sector has experienced over the past thirty years, with a 20% fall in the average income of farmers in 2008[3]. The crisis in the cattle and milk products sector was caused by a sharp drop in the price of milk to a level never previously reached, even in 2006, itself a very bad year. This fall, in part attributable to the fall in demand, followed a rise which was just as exceptional on a European scale in 2007. These fluctuations are evidence, firstly of the great sensitivity of mechanisms for fixing prices on world markets (for milk powder and butter), alongside those of European markets (ordinary cheeses and mass consumption products) and internal markets (high-value quality products). In 2007, prices shot up following a continuous increase in demand from Asian countries and a fall in the production of some exporting nations. European producers, especially German and French ones, reacted by increasing their production, which was allowed by

2 This work originated in the *Mouvements paysans, Politique Agricole Commune et Mondialisation dans les régions de l'Arc Atlantique (Peasant Movements, Common Agricultural Policy and Globalisation in the Atlantic Arc)* study day at the Université de Nantes, 4 December 2009. In Spring 2010 a survey was carried out in the Basque Country of media and professional sources and by means of a series of interviews of members of the FDSEA and ELB unions, the APLI Association and a milk collection and processing cooperative. This data was updated in spring 2011.
3 *Sud Ouest*, 3 September 2009.

weakening quota arrangements. This increase simultaneously caused a sharp fall in prices in now deregulated markets. European surpluses were then dumped onto countries in the South, supported by export subsidies (Cassez and Trouvé, 2010)[4].

These economic fluctuations, which had a direct effect on producers' incomes, took place in a context of changes in public regulation of the sector. At the level of the European Union (EU), the programmed end of the quota system was ratified by Ministers of Agriculture on 20 November 2008. The aim was to liberalize production levels, lower prices to consumers and strengthen the sector's competitiveness. Overall, the system of regulation based on controlling production rights by means of quotas since 1984, Community preference (taxation of milk imported into Europe), and intervention to regulate surplus stocks had until then enabled price variations to be limited and their effects on the producer cushioned. In 2003, the EU planned for a progressive dismantling of quotas until 1 April 2015, a weakening of Community preference under pressure from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United States, and a reduction in intervention funds. In parallel, the CAP reform of 2003 replaced public funding of market support by direct aid to cattle farmers (milk support, which became single payment entitlements). The link between income payments to producers, the quantities produced and market support was broken. In 2006, the effects of an essentially market-based deregulation began to be felt, with strong fluctuations in price and a considerable drop in prices. In 2007-2008, the cost of raw materials, food and energy increased, which increased production costs for milk.

This deregulationary turning point was strengthened at the French national level by an order from the General Directorate for Competition and Suppression of Fraud[5] (DGCCRF) in April 2008 to inter-branch organizations that they should end the price recommendation mechanisms which had till then been negotiated within the inter-branch organization at national level (CNIEL, the National Inter-branch Centre

4 In France, it was decided in 2008 to produce less milk, in particular by stopping the loan against the individual quota in order to avoid exacerbating the surplus of milk on the market.

5 Direction générale de la concurrence et de la répression des fraudes

for the Milk Economy)[6] and regional level (CRIEL) between producers (represented by the FNPL, the milk producers' branch of the FNSEA[7], the National Federation of Farmers' Trade Unions), industrial-scale dairy companies (FNIL[8], the National Federation of Milk Industries) and cooperatives (FNCL[9], the National Federation of Milk Cooperatives). Issuing national recommendations for the price of milk could now lead to an accusation of distorting competition, albeit in a context of very high prices for milk. Despite this order, negotiations were opened between industrial-scale operators and producer representatives at inter-branch level, against a backdrop of industrial action outside milk production plants. On 3 June 2009, the FNPL reached agreement with industrial operators on the basis of an average price for milk of 280 euros per 1,000 litres in 2009. In doing so, the FNPL acknowledged the end of the quota system and of this form of regulation, advocating adaptation to the new situation by means of contractual relations between producers and large-scale dairy firms. The agreement was criticized by minority trades union organizations (*Confédération paysanne*, the Peasants' Confederation, and *Coordination rurale*, Rural Coordination,) and by the new National Association of Independent Milk Producers (APLI)[10]. Criticism was made of the FNPL's monopoly right within the inter-branch organization to represent producers and against the terms of an agreement felt to be too favourable towards industrial dairy firms.

A Changing Sector in the Basque Country

These developments were closely followed in the Basque Country, where the dairy sector remains dynamic despite structural changes. The Pyrénées-Atlantiques department, with around 1100 producers, produces about one third of the milk collected in Aquitaine. In the Basque Country, estimates of the number of producers active in 2010 vary between 350 and 450. The Basque Country, with 60 million litres, represents a little more than a third of production within the department as a whole, with around a third of producers. On average, each farm produces between 160,000 and 200,000 litres (according to estimates),

6 Centre national interprofessionnel de l'économie laitière
7 Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles
8 Fédération nationale des industries laitières
9 Fédération nationale des coopératives laitières
10 Association des Producteurs de Lait Indépendants.

such production levels and quotas being slightly lower than across the department as a whole. When quotas were fixed in 1983, there were 5,400 cow milk producers within the department. This figure had gone down to 1,100 in 2009, a fall of 79% in 27 years. In the Basque Country, cow milk is in decline in mountainous areas, to the extent that it has disappeared in some cantons, such as Tardets and Baigorry, which now specialize in ewe's milk and beef cattle. In the Soule province, with one exception, the ten or so cow milk producers are concentrated in Lower Soule (Basse-Soule). Today, cow milk producers are distributed across all hill and plain areas. Some areas near to the Landes (Bardos-Bidache) are important centres of milk production.

In contrast to other types of production, cow milk, as a raw material, is highly dependent on industrial methods and markets. Although Basque producers are developing direct sales, this remains a minority or complementary option. The great majority of production is collected by dairies which are either cooperatives or privately-owned. In 2009-2010, Danone remains the principal private operator, alongside the much smaller Chaumes. Among the cooperatives, some, such as Berria or 3A, carry out both collection and processing of milk. Others concentrate on collection, such as CLPB[11], the Basque Country Milk Cooperative, with 38 producers, and *Haize Hegoa*, which however carries out little collection in the Basque Country. Collection cooperatives sell the milk on to private operators who process it. The uncertain nature of commercial relations with private operators can lead certain cooperatives to place their milk, by default, on the SPOT market, an instantaneous market between dairies, which is volatile and subject to strong speculative pressures. In fact, the high dependency of producers on dairies makes them vulnerable to commercial strategies and to upstream negotiations between industrial-scale operators and group purchasing organizations. The 2008 crisis hit this already fragile area of milk production, and pushed producers into adopting various strategies in order to deal with it.

11 Coopérative laitière du Pays Basque

2. INDUSTRIAL ACTION: THE STRIKE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE APLI

A new system of actors?

Reactions to the crisis were not expressed univocally. The context of the crisis initially favoured the emergence of new trade-union or para trade-union organizations, structured at both national *and* European levels (Roullaud, 2010). In France, the emergence of the APLI was part of these developments. In the Basque Country, APLI's appearance upset a trade union landscape marked by a binary cleavage. Farmers' trade union activities had stabilized since the 1980s around a split between FDSEA[12], the Departmental Federation of Farmers' Trade Unions and ELB (*Euskal herriko laborarien batasuna*, the Union of Basque Country Peasants (or small farmers), the Basque branch of the national and left-oriented CP[13], the Peasant's Confederation. Opposition between these two trade unions is as much over agricultural models as over questions of territorial identity, with the ELB calling for management institutions specific to Basque agriculture. The split is expressed in particular through a territorial and judicial controversy over the *Euskal herriko laborantxa ganbara* (Basque Country Chamber of Agriculture) association set up in 2005 by the ever-changing small farmers' agriculture movement (Itçaina, 2011). The milk strike saw the sudden entry on the scene of a third actor, though not a trade union but a specialized association, the APLI (Association of Independent Milk Producers) which from the outset was structured on a European Basis.

The emergence of the APLI

The APLI was created in France in December 2008. At the European level, the APLI includes the *European Milk Board* (EMB), an essentially Franco-German structure, which since 2006 has chosen not to affiliate to COPA-COGECA, the main institutionalized special interest group representing agricultural trade unions and cooperatives at the European level. The EMB aims, by means of parallel mobilization, to work for a European supervisory body representing all actors within the milk industry.

12 Fédération départementale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles
13 Confédération paysanne

In France, the APLI began in the Tarn, Ariège, Aveyron and other Southern departments from a nucleus of around fifteen producers who specialized in genetics, and who for several years had been attempting to promote alternative approaches to those adopted at national level, especially inspired by the Canadian model. This nucleus followed the German milk strike of May 2008 with interest, and began to consider an equivalent action in France. A first meeting was held in the Aveyron in October 2008, bringing together 350 persons from 9 departments. Producers in difficulty who were disappointed by majority trade union activities were able to express themselves at this meeting. The APLI emerged from these meetings in associative, non-trade union form, and began to consider the forms which action might take. Producers took part in blockades of dairies and in the industrial action at the end of 2008. Dissatisfied with the intra-branch organization agreement of 3 June 2009, they cast about for other means of action.

The APLI established itself in particular in fragile milk-producing areas, including the South-West of France. The movement reached the Basque Country in the person of a Basque producer located in the Tarn department, who as a result shared the APLI's views. Returning to the Basque Country, he set up business with an associate in the Soule province. In autumn 2008, two Basque producers considered making an initial attempt to hold a strike at the beginning of 2009, organizing a first meeting in November 2008 near Tarbes. At the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, several industrial actions (blockades of group purchasing organizations, occupations of superstores, etc.) led to an agreement with the industrials. Judging this progress to be insufficient, the APLI relaunched a cycle of meetings in spring 2009. This mobilization associated producers from the Basque Country, Béarn, the Hautes-Pyrénées, Ariège, etc. At the Basque level, starting with its nucleus in Soule and Lower Navarre, the movement found support in Bardos, Came and the Cize valley, reaching Saint-Pée sur Nivelle and the Basque coast. Basque producers, together with their immediate neighbours in Béarn and the Landes, comprise the Landes-Pyrénées-Atlantiques section of the APLI. This led to the setting up of structure favourable to widespread industrial action, which was not long in coming.

APLI militants in the Basque Country aimed to stabilize their movement around certain key ideas. On the one hand, the APLI claims to be *independent*, presenting itself as an associative, non-trade union structure, which aims to distance itself from the split between the FDSEA and the ELB:

> *"Given the fall in incomes, there is no longer a split. I think that today, in the Basque Country like everywhere else, all trade unions have lost power because things have come to this. Now nobody says "he is an FDSEA man", or "he is an ELB man". They have lost some of their power. People are no longer afraid of trade unions, but nobody worships them either. The shine has come off them. Today we have realized that it was necessary for there to be trades unions on different sides, and I think that people have understood that they had to take action. I think that out there it's the APLI which has won out."*[14]

The rejection of ideologies, the denunciation of bureaucratic trade unionism and the priority given to pragmatism and the sectoral interests of producers are emphasized by the APLI. The Association then developed some alternative thinking about institutions: instead of trying at any price to include forums for negotiation (such as the inter-branch organization) judged to be ineffective, the APLI aimed instead at promoting parallel instruments of regulation. Finally, the Basque promoters of the APLI are unquestionable masters of media relations and use of the Internet. This meant that a new type of social movement had come to the fore, impelled not by trade unions, but by farmers in difficulty without long experience of this type of industrial action, who come from a fragile milk-producing centre, and are the bearers of a potential challenge to existing forms of support from trade unions.

FDSEA: Strikes as an ineffective form of action

As the majority trade union at departmental and national levels, the FDSEA took up a critical position towards the strike. Rather than encouraging producers to harm themselves in search of an uncertain result, the Federation preferred to promote the negotiations route

14 APLI interview, 29 March 2010.

with a view to setting up contractual relations with the industrial operators, via groupings of producers and inter-branch organization negotiations. As regards the forms of industrial action, while sharing the view that market liberalization was the root cause and advocating the continuation of regulatory instruments, the FDSEA preferred other forms of action, such as regional and national action days or the organization of a regional conference on milk production issues. At the end of the strike, the FNSEA organized a grand national day of action to demand an emergency plan and to denounce the fall in agricultural incomes.

The position of the FDSEA was the subject of debate within its own ranks. During a meeting of around a hundred milk producers in front of the *Maison de l'Agriculture* (House of Agriculture) in Pau, several FDSEA members symbolically tore up their union membership cards, and some of them joined the APLI. For its part, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques Young Farmers trade union (JA64) took the exact opposite view to that taken by its national union by declaring itself in "solidarity with the actions being taken"[15], without however formally calling a strike.

ELB or selective support

After mature reflection, ELB decided to join the APLI in calling a strike. On a national level, the Peasants' Confederation declared itself on 10 September 2009 to be in "solidarity with the milk strike which is being carried out"[16] and aims to support the strikers in their action. This being so, the Confederation left each departmental federation free to position itself. In the Basque Country, the ELB the APLI agreed three claims: a price which remunerates the labour value and production cost, limitation of the amounts of milk produced to the level which the market can pay for; a refusal of any system of contractual relations, which would leave producers at the mercy of dairies. The national inter-branch organization, in particular, was at the heart of criticisms, insofar

15 *Sud Ouest Pays Basque*, 17 September 2009.
16 Confédération paysanne, « Grève du lait : la Confédération paysanne soutient les grévistes et mènera des actions complémentaires », ("Milk Strike: Confédération paysanne supports the strikers and will carry out supporing actions") *Press Release*, 10 September 2009.

as the minority trade unions were not represented within the CNIEL[17].

Before the strike, in July 2009 during an action at the sub-prefecture of Bayonne, ELB was already reaffirming its analysis of European policy. Guaranteed stable prices required supply levels to be adjusted to European demand. The union opined that the 10% of European production exported at low prices on the global market were responsible for current problems. Hence its position in favour of a policy of controlling production, as the best policy for producers (in both the North and South of the planet), consumers and taxpayers. ELB and the Peasants' Confederation called for a change in policy which should in the first instance take the form of a decrease in European milk production in order to re-establish the conditions for a remunerative price. Although historically ELB and the Peasants' Confederation were critical of the quota systems (because distribution mechanisms and the calculation method based on reference to historic production levels had favoured individualistic behaviours and worsened overproduction) the union was now asking, in the absence of alternatives, for the maintenance of this system of regulation and the organization of thoroughgoing governmental controls.

At the beginning of September, the ELB made clear its position on the milk crisis. The union acknowledged the launch of the strike by the APLI and the EMB. The ELB did not decide to *join* the strike but to *support* the producers out on strike: "the decision is for each producer, freely and according to his conscience"[18]. The union would support all forms of struggle which included the three following objectives: a guaranteed remunerative price; control of volumes at the level of the needs of the EU internal market, plus creditworthy export markets, in other words reducing the current volume by 5% to 7%; solidarity between producers (the reduction in volume must be proportionally greater for the highest volumes of production so that small producers could retain some chance of growth). These demands were reiterated during an action

17 « Prix du lait : les syndicats minoritaires et l'APLI demandent au ministre d'organiser une table ronde », (Milk Price: minority unions and the APLI call on the minister to organize a Round Table". *La France agricole*, 1 December 2009 ; *Laborari*, 587, 9 July 2009; 862, 10 September 2009; 867, 22 October 2009.
18 *Laborari*, 861, 3 September 2009.

at the Departmental Directorate for Agriculture (DDA)[19] at Bayonne after the strike on 19 October 2009. The announcement of a European subsidy of 280 million euros to assist the milk and milk products sector was held to be insufficient and primarily aimed at ending the social movement[20]. At the beginning of October, ELB deplored the fact that the demands of the group of 20 countries for a new system of European regulation had met with the "intransigence" of Mrs. Fischer Boel[21].

ELB's support for the strike was a decisive gain for the APLI. Neck and neck with the FDSEA in the (Basque part of the) Pyrénées-Atlantiques Chamber of Agriculture elections, ELB had a well-consolidated base on this territory and well-tried industrial action know-how from which the 2009 strike benefited. On the Spanish Basque side of the border, the EHNE (*Euskal Herriko Nekezarien Elkartea*) union, a member of the Spanish COAG[22] union, supported the strike on the French side.

A New Repertoire of Actions?

The milk strike proper took place in September 2009. It followed several conventional forms of protest mobilizations, such as the handouts of milk made by ELB members in a superstore on the French Basque coast on 18 May 2009. In June, the situation hardened at national level, despite the agreement on 3 June. Blockades were imposed on distribution centres for superstores; clashes with police took place in Brittany. In July in the Basque Country, ELB producers blockaded several milk collection trucks, then, escorted by around ten tractors, drove to the Bayonne sub-prefecture to demand more involvement from public authorities[23]. ELB also called upon Basque producers to take part in industrial action organized at European level, such as the three "milk caravans" organized by the Peasant's Confederation which drove to Strasbourg for Bastille Day, the 14 July. The demonstration brought together small farmer members of ECVC, *Coordination européenne Via campesina* and the EMB. At the beginning of September 2009, ELB producers took part in a demonstration organized in Bordeaux

19 Direction départementale de l'agriculture
20 *Laborari*, 867, 22 October 2009.
21 *Laborari*, 865, 8 October 2009.
22 Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos
23 *Laborari*, 9 July 2009.

by the Peasants' Confederation, with a distribution of milk, fruit and vegetables, to demand "the ditching of the European Commission's policy of destroying agriculture."[24]

The milk strike represented a qualitative leap in forms of industrial action. The choice of action repertoire was motivated by the ineffectiveness of the methods used until then, especially that of blockades, which can only have a limited legal duration. The mobilization was inspired by the German precedent but it was also part of a long history of repeated crises experience by the milk and milk products sector caused by overproduction, from the 1950s until the imposition of quotas in 1984 (*Mission d'animation des agrobiosciences*, 2009). Probably the most striking parallel is with the French milk strike of 1972, which in its time strongly marked the relationship between trade unionism and cooperatives, especially in departments in the West of France (Peyron, 1992).

For the APLI, the only way to hit industrial operators was to penalize them financially through a milk collection strike. The message was simple: given the gap between industrial operators' margins and the price paid to producers, one might as well give milk away or even throw it away. The use of the language of strikes, even of slogans which are more in the tradition of wage earners than of proprietors or independent workers provides a good reflection of the dependency on large-scale dairies experienced by milk producers (Bonhommeau, 2010). The APLI called for a revaluation of the price of milk to 400 euros per 1000 litres. At national level, the APLI and the Organization of Milk Producers (OPL)[25], affiliated to the *Coordination rurale* union, were the main spearheads of the strike. At the beginning of August, a meeting of milk producers from the French Basque Country at Sare let it be known that they would call a milk strike, thus taking up, via the APLI, the EMB's call to strike. In so doing they made use of a *European strike* tactic, which also brought them closer to strategies which had until then belonged to other industrial sectors (Groux and Pernot, 2008).

The strike proper lasted about two weeks, depending on the producers. At first the uncollected milk was distributed on farms or in squares

24 *Laborari*, 861, 3 September 2009.
25 Organisation des producteurs de lait

in around 20 municipalities. At Bayonne, producers from the Bidache canton made gifts of milk to *Secours catholique* (Caritas France) for a district which had been affected by flooding. Since health regulations made it difficult to make donations to hospitals or schools, distributions to these remained limited. After a week, the industrial action became more widespread. Some producers threw the milk into the slurry pit or over fields (including 15 tanker loads by 70 producers in the canton of Bidache[26]). 5,000 litres of milk were dumped in front of the Bayonne sub-prefecture on 23 September. Filtering road blocks were organized on 21 September 2009 by around fifty tractors outside the Chaumes cheese plant at Jurançon, and outside the 3A at Lons and *Berria* at Macaye. Outside Chaumes, the strikers observed a minute's silence in memory of the seven farmers who have committed suicide in France since the beginning of the crisis. On 23 September, three trucks full of milk produced by non-strikers were intercepted at Ayherre, Saint-Pée and Briscous and were hijacked to the Bayonne sub-prefecture, where a fourth tanker, containing milk produced by strikers, was standing by to distribute milk to the population[27]. Mobilization in the Basque Country reached some of the highest levels in the country, even though actors within the sector were far from agreeing on the numbers taking part. According to the APLI, the strike was observed by 80% of producers in the Basque Country. ELB talked of 70-80% in the Basque Country at departmental level. According to the FDSEA, this figure should be 35%, since one-or two-day solidarity strikes should not be accounted for. Nevertheless, this participation rate was still above the national average.

The APLI emphasized the personal, voluntary and responsible nature of the action. All sides emphasize the intensity of the discussions or even pressures exerted between producers, neighbours or within families about the timing or appropriateness of the strike. In one GAEC[28] cooperative, where two brothers were in disagreement over the principle of the strike, milk was thrown away after every second milking. Other situations were more tense. The decision whether to embark on the strike or not had to take account of an infinite number

26 *Sud Ouest Pays Basque*, 11, 15, 17, 19 and 21 September 2009.
27 *Sud Ouest Pays Basque*, 24 septembre 2009.
28 Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun.

of factors, especially in the context of a small family holding. In another GAEC[29], for example, although the strike's promoter was an associate from outside the family circle, the views of the local farmer and the parents were decisive. The symbolic violence of the gesture went well beyond mere economic loss. All parties, whether in favour of the strike or against it, agreed how difficult it was to take this action. ELB was at first reluctant to back a milk strike, before finally deciding to support the strikers:

> *"Too much respect. It's unthinkable, it's unthinkable for us to throw away our production. This is a foodstuff. It's not like any other production. It's a foodstuff. And it's also our production. It is something for which we have great respect. And throwing that away, really, it's unthinkable."*[30]

For this producer in the north of the Soule province, the manager of a cooperative and a non-striker, the form of action above all points to a situation of helplessness and confusion:

> *"Throwing away your product when you are responsible for one's product. We're not someone's employees. If you throw away your product, you know what you are doing. It's a helpless, confused form of action. They wanted to say 'We are on the brink of the abyss, there has been no solution up till now, and this is the only solution we can see.' I think that with this action, with all this moving the milk around, the authorities have got the message. There have been lots of people, ministers and so on, who came down to have a look at what is happening with milk production, who had no idea of the helplessness and confusion in the milk industry. There are people who have committed themselves to finding solutions, so that in future there will be a milk price that allows you to at least make a living. It's definitely true that there has been a favourable impact in the media."*[31]

29 Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun. Joint venture farming.
30 ELB Interview, 10 March 2010, Ainhice-Mongelos, translated from Basque.
31 Interview, milk co-operative manager, 20 May 2010.

For the APLI, the strength of the industrial action came from the very fact that the strike was a form of violence which the producer inflicted most of all on himself. Holding fast to this principle, the APLI refused to turn towards tougher forms of action targeting industrial operators or wholesalers. In the Basque Country, as on the European level (Roullaud, 2010), the strike organisers aimed to shake off the violent image associated with demonstrations by farmers. What was being enacted here, relatively speaking, was a high media-impact strategy of self-violence which ultimately has more in common with types of action such as hunger strikes than with violent actions (Siméant, 2009).

A social movement with a strong media and socio-political impact

Beyond the sector, the success of any social movement consists of gaining support from public opinion. On this level, the strike's "scandalising" strategy (Roullaud, 2010) was a success. Inevitably, media focus leads to simplification of the issues. It nevertheless contributed towards raising public awareness and towards conferring European status on the cause. In parallel to the strike itself, more traditional action repertoires were put into action. Several meetings were organized. Some were quite small, but with a symbolic content, such as the demonstration outside the holiday home of Bruno le Maire, the Minister of Agriculture, at Saint-Pée sur Nivelle, attended by local councillors. About a hundred producers held a meeting outside the Maison de l'Agriculture in Pau; on 5 October, a large procession of 150 famers at the wheel of their tractors passed through Bayonne, on 19 October, about 30 milk producer members of the ELB and APLI laid siege to DDA in Bayonne, on the 22nd, the National President of the APLI addressed 500 farmers at Pau. Filter blockades of dairies were still taking place at the end of the strike.

Action by local councillors in support of producers was very evident. The Town Council of Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle and neighbouring municipalities took action. Around ten mayors of small municipalities accompanied the ELB-APLI demonstration at the beginning of October 2009 in Bayonne. The Community of municipalities in Baigorri-Garazi unanimously adopted a motion supporting cow milk producers intended for the EU and calling for the valley's inhabitants to get their supplies directly from the striking farmers. The General Council of

the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department expressed its solidarity with the sector. The Regional Council took action by organising regional coordination. The strike also gave rise to less conventional reactions in support of the strikers, such as those by the Basque nationalist party Batasuna or that of the Bishop of Bayonne.

3. INDUSTRIAL ACTION WITH A PLURALITY OF EFFECTS

The purely financial consequences of the strike were relatively minor for industrial operators and cooperatives. According to the FDSEA, there was a milk shortfall of around 35% over this period. For this large cooperative, which involves around 115 Basque producers, the economic impact was minimal with 7% of milk lost during the month of the strike, a figure affected by the fact that the strike took place during a period when milk was in surplus[32]. In contrast, the financial loss was much more consequential for the producers who went on strike, especially for those who prolonged their strike over more than ten days. Aside from individual situations, the milk strike led to three sets of consequences affecting modes of regulating the sector, the balance between local trade unions, and social consequences for the community.

Consequences for the political regulation of the sector

The strike publicized the fundamental debate on the public (local, national and European) regulation of the sector. Recognizing that the quota system would definitely disappear, the FDSEA advocated recourse to contractual relations in order to regulate the price of milk:

> *"This means that we have to organize on a collective basis in order to offer supplies en masse, to stand up to industrial operators, it means that we must talk on an equal basis. The legal framework must allow us to do this. So we can say 'Here, what volume do you need at what price? And we compare prices and start on that basis. Broadly speaking the contract will make things more visible for the farmer so he knows what his starting point is. In the knowledge*

32 *Ibid.*

that these days the industrial operator says: there is too much milk around so I pay you badly, because it's difficult for me to sell. In this case we start in the opposite direction. We say 'we're not producing this milk, or if we do produce it, it has to be for a decent average price. We can also be willing, if in the event the milk is fetching a good price, there can be a quid pro quo, there can be part of the milk which does not fetch a "good" (in inverted commas) price, if the average price is OK. It's for us to choose."[33]

This form of contractual relations would avoid farmers having to position themselves within markets which are too volatile, such as the SPOT market, and be able to position themselves in internal European markets, especially the Spanish one where French products have to compete against German milk. In the Basque Country, some producers anticipated a national legislative framework, especially by organizing themselves into a group of producers with a partnership contract with Danone. The agreement enables producers to negotiate with the firm a price which is better than the price negotiated at the inter-branch organization level. It also allows for better adaptation to reciprocal quality demands.

This type of contractual relations requires on the one hand a stabilized framework for negotiations at the level of the inter-branch organization between producers, cooperatives and industrial operators by virtue of the agreement of 3 June 2009, a stabilization which cannot necessarily be taken for granted. On 18 March 2010, discussions were broken off during the CNIEL meeting of inter-branch organizations. The FNIL (milk industries) in particular, asked for the introduction of a competitiveness indicator in order to rebalance the differential between France and Germany. A trial of strength followed between producers and industrial operators which was ended by an agreement concluded on 30 March 2010 under Ministry pressure. The price of milk over the next quarterly periods would have to be fixed in accordance with new indexes which were to take account of the price gap between French milk and German milk, production costs and world prices for industrial products (butter and milk powder)[34].

33 Interview FDSEA Basque Country, 26 March 2010.

34 « Industriels et producteurs satisfaits de l'accord sur le lait » ("Industrial operators

If it is to be stabilized, a set of contractual relations next requires a legal framework, both on a national and a European level. In March 2010, the FNPL took their case to the European Commissioners for Competition and for Agriculture and Rural Development[35]. The FNPL was in particular reacting following a report by European experts promoting the grouping together of farmers into cooperatives in order to constitute a strong negotiating partner for industrial operators. According to the FNPL, strict respect for European competition rules would lead to a limit of 150 on the number of producers associating. Moreover, determining an equitable price can only take place by means of writing in pricing clauses based on indexes recognized by both industrial operators and producers. The FNPL therefore formulated three proposals. On the one hand, in order to rebalance power relations between a dispersed group of producers and a small number of processors and wholesalers, the FNPL proposed the formation of groupings of farmers at regional or inter-regional production area level, without these organizations being systematically held to be horizontal entities by competition authorities. Secondly, the FNPL called for Europe and Member States to set up legal mechanisms with the aim of strengthening protection of sector producers against industrial operators. These European guidelines on good contractual practice could then be invoked by producers in the framework of their commercial relationships. Finally, the FNPL called for formal authorization by the EU of a mandate to enable producers to organize collectively. The FNPL was thus criticizing the encouragement of farmers to organize into milk-collecting cooperatives. This would not give them sufficient means of exerting pressure on industrial operators, compared with a union of producers *within* the dairy business. The FNPL called for a legal framework which would enable price negotiations to be carried out by the producers' trade union, but with no transfer of ownership, which would remain in the hands of the industrial operator. In the framework thus described, regional organization on the basis of milk producing areas seemed to represent the best way of maintaining production in all territories after the final

and producers satisfied with the milk agreement"), *Le Monde*, 30 March 2010.

35 Frédéric Hénin, Terre-net Média, « Prix du lait. La FNNPL dénonce l'inadéquation du droit à la concurrence avec les objectifs de la PAC » (Milk Price. The FNPL denounces the mismatch between competition law and CAP objectives", 24 March 2010 (http://www.web-agri.fr/actualite-agricole/politique-syndicalisme/article-fnpl-ciolos-prix-du-lait-commission-europeenne-1145-61862.html).

disappearance of quotas. Similarly, the FNPL as well as the French Ministry of Agriculture welcomed the report published in June 2010 by the European High Level Group (GHN)[36] et up after the strike in October. This report in particular recommended the strengthening of contractual relations between producers and industrial operators. These measures would require significant adjustments to legislation, especially as regards competition rules. The FNPL saw it as recognizing the existence of an imbalance between milk producers and industrial operators[37].

Clearly, the new regulatory arrangements made at national and European level confirmed the movement towards contractual relations. At national level, the Law on modernising agriculture, definitively adopted on 13 July 2010 following its passing by the French Senate, provides for contracts between farmers and processors from 1st April 2011. The European Commission's legislative proposal on "contractual relations in the milk and milk products sector" published on 9 December 2010 confirms this direction. Following the GHN report, the Commission's proposal aims to strengthen the position of producers within the supply chain and to prepare the sector for a more market-oriented and sustainable: *"it provides for written contracts between milk producers and processors, the possibility to negotiate contract terms collectively via producer organisations in a way as to balance the bargaining power of milk producers relative to major processors, specific EU rules for inter-branch organisations and measures for enhancing transparency in the market"*[38].

36 Groupe de Haut Niveau

37 Euractiv, « Lait : le groupe de haut niveau rend ses conclusions » ("Milk: the High Level Group submits its conclusions"), 17 June 2010, http://www.euractiv.fr/lait-groupe-niveau-rend-conclusions-article.

38 European Commission, "Milk and milk products" (Legislative Proposal, 9 December 2010), http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/milk/index_en.htm

Box 1. The European Commission's Legislative Proposal (9 December 2010)

Extracts from "Milk package to stabilise the EU dairy sector." (European Commission, 2010)

Actions to be taken by the EU:
- Milk production comes under Europe's Common Agricultural Policy. The EU is responsible for ensuring that CAP-related measures are applied by all member countries
- However, since contract law is not the same everywhere[39], countries will still be able to decide whether or not to make contracts between farmers and processors compulsory.

What exactly will change?
• formal contracts will encourage those involved in all parts of the dairy industry to:
- be more aware of the state of the market
- respond better to signs of changes in the market
- keep wholesale and retail prices more in line with prices paid to farmers
- adapt supply to demand
- end unfair commercial practices
• dairy farmers will have more collective bargaining power because they will be allowed to negotiate prices and contracts as part of a producer organisation
• "inter-branch" organisations will bring together actors from the whole supply chain:
- improving knowledge of production and the market
- making for better-coordinated research
- promoting best practices in production and processing

Who will benefit and how?
- Dairy farmers – who will have a stronger bargaining position thanks to better milk delivery contracts and the option to negotiate prices collectively.
- The whole dairy chain – farmers, processors, distributors and retailers will all benefit from greater transparency.

When are the measures likely to come into effect?
2012 (after adoption by the European Parliament and Council)

There have been contrasting reactions to the Commission's proposal.

39 In particular, some cooperatives whose statutes have rules with similar effects would be exempted from having to conclude such contracts.

FNPL and FNSEA

The FNPL and FNSEA welcomed "the Commission's recognition of their call to rebalance commercial relations between producers and processors and the help given by the French Minister of Agriculture (Bruno Le Maire) on this question"[40]. The measures envisaged by the Commission enable a strengthening of the collective organization of producers, an increase in their negotiating power, arrangements to ensure transparency of markets in the milk and milk products sector, and recognition of the role of inter-branch organizations. As regards collective action, the FNPL and FNSEA pointed out that if the project put forward by the Commission includes the measures they had been asking for, this is the result of the "long-term work carried out in Brussels over several years to support the milk and milk products sector, whether in representations to the European Commission or within COPA-COGECA" (*ibid.*). The product of a tradition of co-management, the FNSEA-FNPL developed a three-pronged strategy to gain access to the European level: national ministry, direct access to the Commission, and action via a European special interest group (COPA-COGECA). Instead of only reacting during the phase which follows consideration by EU instances, or the implementation phases of European policies, the action taken by the FNPL-FNSEA is a manifestation, at trade union level, of an *ex ante* or "bottom-up" approach, which occurs *"in the ex ante phase of the policy cycle, when domestic policies are 'up loaded' to the European level for negotiation"* (Carter and Pasquier, 2006: 12).

ELB and the Peasants' Confederation

ELB and the Peasants' Confederation remained critical of the formula for contractual relations. The spectre of an evolution similar to that which occurred in the pig and poultry sectors was not encouraging. For the union, the risk of contractual relations was that it gave industrial operators the whip hand over producers. It is therefore imperative that government be a stakeholder in these contracts, besides industrial operators and producers. At European level, *Coordination Européenne*

40 FNSEA-FNPL, « Mini paquet lait : une avancée fondamentale pour le secteur laitier, mais aussi pour les autres filières agricoles » ("Mini Milk Package: a fundamental advance for the milk and milk products sector, but also for other agriculture sectors", (*Press Release*, Paris, 10 December 2010.

Via Campesina (CEVC), of which the Peasants' Confederation is a member, criticised the approach proposed by the GHN in June 2010. An individual contract between a producer and a dairy would only be useful if there is public control of production and collective negotiation of prices on the basis of production costs, including labour.[41] At local level, in May 2010 the ELB made representations to Basque members of the French parliament about the Law on Modernising Agriculture which was being prepared at that time, calling for inter-branch organizations to be more representative and criticising the project to make contractual relations compulsory. This last measure was considered to be not enough to counterbalance the power of group purchasing organizations[42].

Criticisms of contractual relations which were in 2010 included in French law and the Commission proposal, bear upon four points[43]: a) this system does not protect producers, because it does not really define the system of fixing milk prices; b) there is no guarantee that producers' milk will continue to be collected by wholesalers beyond a limit of five years; c) management by production area is seen as a way to concentrate production where costs will be lowest; d) a contractual relations system causes the creation of producer organizations (PO) in order to have enough weight to stand up to industrial operators, especially when managing large volumes: but the legal framework for these POs remains undefined: within what legal framework will POs be able to limit their production? Will they able to penalize overproduction? When all is said and done, the new organization of the sector is perceived as potentially resulting in a concentration of production inside a few milk producing areas within Europe, and objective which is in contradiction to CAP reform, which recommends diversifying agriculture and maintaining a large number of farmers in the territory. The ELB and CP are opposed to contractual relations for as long as methods of determining prices fail to take account of indexes such as production costs, margins on high value-added products (yoghurts, fresh produce) produced by

41 European Coordination Via Campesina, « Politique laitière de l'UE : le Groupe à Haut Niveau condamne les éleveurs européens » ("EU Milk Policy : the High Level Group condemns European dairy farmers"), *Press release*, Brussels, 16 June 2010.
42« Loi de modernisation de l'agriculture. ELB interpelle les députés » ("Agriculture Modernisation Law. ELB calls on parliamentarians"), *Laborari*, 899, 24 June 2010.
43 *Laborari,* 16 December 2010.

dairies and wholesalers, and the remuneration of work carried out by small farmers.

One of the themes of the current reform is the strengthening of intra-branch organizations. The representative nature of inter-branch organizations has thus become a central issue. The collective action of the Peasants' Confederation has because of this shifted towards inter-branch milk organizations nationally. The Peasants' Confederation was calling for all unions to be represented on the College of Inter-branch Producers' Organization[44] and that decisions be taken there by majority vote. On 8 September 2010, the Peasants' Confederation began an occupation lasting five weeks of the *Maison du lait*, the Paris headquarters of the CNIEL. ELB militants took a direct part in this action, which was echoed in the Basque Country by the symbolic occupation of the DDA[45] in Bayonne by ELB militants, in order to demand that the ministry become involved by supporting the recognition of a plurality of trade unions within the inter-branch organizations. In Paris, Peasants' Confederation activists, several of whom were close to bankruptcy, began a hunger strike.

APLI and the European Milk Board (EMB)

For its part the EMB was critical of the GHN report and the European Commission proposal of December 2010, at the same time emphasizing the positive achievements in the areas of legal consolidation of producer organizations and labelling of milk products[46]. While sharing the view that milk producers are in a poor negotiating position, the EMB nevertheless judges that the measures proposed by the Commission do not resolve the problem. Criticisms bear in particular on the following points:

- Level of pooling: "In principle, the EMB welcomes the European Commission's proposal to strengthen the milk producers' market position through greater scope for pooling. But this must amount to an effective increase in the scope for pooling. The level proposed by the European Commission of

44 Collège producteurs des interprofessions

45 Departmental Direction of Agriculture (state administration).

46 European Milk Board, "High Level Group of Experts on Milk Fails to Deliver", Brussels, 16 June 2010.

> 3,5 per cent of the EU milk volume fails to recognize the state of affairs in the market and would result in little improvement in real terms (…) the proposal to limit pooling per major producer country to 33% also ignores the situation in the dairy sector, where for instance in Denmark or the Netherlands one single dairy in each already has a larger market share"
> - Intensifying exchanges in the added value change: "The milk producers in Europe support this idea. In future, the milk policy must consider the interests of society as a whole and also be compatible with the aims of the CAP. That is why the EMB backs the establishment of a Monitoring Agency, which besides constantly and promptly charting price, cost, volume and market developments also pursues the aim of sustainable milk production in every region of Europe. The agency would stipulate a target price bracket based on production cost calculations, and in turn it would have to be taken as the yardstick for volumes to be produced (…)"
> - Contracts that can be introduced as binding for member-states: "Experience shows that contracts between unequal negotiating partners put the weaker contracting party at a continued disadvantage rather than an equal footing. As concentration is prevalent on the dairy sector, the terms and conditions of contracts are also dictated by the dairies as the strongest market partner. (…) EU states will hardly decide to make contracts between dairies and milk producers obligatory. The milk market does not end at national borders (…) (…)"[47]

In France, the APLI accompanied criticism of contractual relation with reiterated criticism of the inter-branch organization . Echoing the EMB's European initiative, the APLI proposed promoting a parallel Office du lait (Milk Board). In December 2009, the APLI set itself a minimum objective of 35% of milk collected in France, or nearly 700 billion litres, in order to provide an alternative to the inter-branch

47 "(…) And the statement of exempting co-operatives from the obligation to sign contracts cannot be justified. The German Cartel Office has clearly shown that it is precisely in co-operatives that upside down pricing takes place, i.e. the producer is paid what is left over depending on turnover in the sales market (…)" (European Milk Board, "The Commission's Proposals Cannot Prevent Another Milk Crisis", *Press Release*, Brussels, 09.12.2010).

organization.[48] The association also advocates the Canadian model of managing production levels, which would enable adjustment of production to market demand. In May 2010, at Angers, the APLI officially registered the constitution of a national *Office du lait*, where minority unions, consumers and councillors and other publicly-elected officials would be represented. According to the APLI, in May 2010 the project had already collected nearly 12,000 promises to become a member (out of 83,000 producers of milk within France), representing around 4 billion litres of milk or 20% of national production[49]. There was still however the challenge of convincing industrial operators and overcoming the opposition of the majority union. The APLI aimed to turn to its own account the incentive in the Law for Modernising Agriculture for producers to group together by developing its own Office, compounded by producers, industrials, wholesalers, consumers and public authorities. In early 2011, France Milk Board emerged within the Office as a new producers' organization (PO). Promoted first by the national APLI and by OPL, France Milk Board was joined by *Confédération paysanne* (CP) in May 2011. This new PO aimed to elaborate a standard contract based on the control of volumes, on real production costs and on the economic realities of the farms. In June 2011, one hundred producers from CP, APLI and OPL demonstrated jointly in Caen in order to ask for a collective negotiation of milk price with industrials, in order to avoid individual negotiations between isolated farmers and dairies.

In the end, in terms of European collective action, unions and associations provide instances here of two Europeanization strategies, one "top-down" and the other "bottom-up" (Monforte, 2010). *Top-down Europeanization* is constructed through interaction. It results both from the desire of non-institutional actors to influence the

48 The APLI and OPL were to support the CNIEL occupation by the Peasants' Confederation. For its part the APLI launched in Autumn 2010 a legal action to recover the "Compulsory Voluntary Contributions" paid by farmers to the milk products inter-branch.

49« L'APLI dépose les statuts de l'Office national du lait » ("The APLI registers the Constitution of the Office national du lait"), *La France agricole*, 7 May 2010. In November 2010, the APLI thought it could count on promises for 15 million litres in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques (out of the 250 million collected each year) (« L'APLI déplore le 'manque de lisibilité'/The APLI deplores the 'lack of transparency' », *La République des Pyrénées*, 5 November 2010).

decision-making and support process of European institutions (in the form of various incentives to construct a collective Europeanized form of action) This mode of Europeanization essentially involves internalization and supranationalization. Groups which prioritize *top-down Europeanization* will go for pro-active collective action which takes effect upstream of the decision-making process or accompanying implementation of measures. In this case, the FNPL took advantage of the strength of its position in relation to the national government and COPA-COGECA to make its weight felt on the European level.

The actions of the Peasants' Confederation and the EMB, in contrast, are instances of *bottom-up Europeanization*, which is not built up by interaction: it is the result of the desire of non-institutional actors to construct a Europeanized collective action and European institutions do not play an active incentivising role. In this case, the European partner of the ALPI was the EMB (with its German leadership), while that of the ELB and CP was *Coordination européenne Via Campesina*. Although it received no encouragement from European institutions, this mode of collective action was not however limited to protest activities. These organizations lodged proposals with the Commission and with the Parliament, and were consulted by the group of experts in 2010. However, their impact on decision-making instances remained relatively limited.

Territorial Consequences for Unions

The strike carried within it the early signs of a breakdown in the power relationship between unions, accompanied by a challenge to the monopoly enjoyed by traditional structures of generalist representation brought about by the successful organization of sector-related defence structures (Roullaud, 2010). The movement seemed to federate producers of all persuasions, bypassing the traditional oppositions between different unions. The Basque situation inclines us to remain prudent about any effect on the make-up of trade union representation. It is true that those disappointed by the FDSEA swelled the ranks of the APLI. Nevertheless, links between the APLI and OPL-*Coordination rurale*, the main bodies behind the strike call at national level (Purseigle, 2010), have not been demonstrated here. *Coordination rurale* continues

to have little presence on a Basque territory which is systematically covered by ELB and the FDSEA in almost equal measure. The situation may perhaps have to be nuanced in the Béarn part of the department, where *Coordination rurale* received the greatest part of the 12% voting turnout in the 2007 Chamber of Agriculture elections[50].

Turning to other matters, it is by no means certain that the temporary alliance between the ELB and the APLI over the milk strike will lead to a lasting coalition. The ELB's agreement with the APLI over short-term demands does not mean that there is a perfect identity of views between two organizations with different and distinct origins. A negative coalition against a majority union is not necessarily a basis for an identity of values. Although they agree on the principle of the strike and the immediate demands to be made, the ELB and the APLI have not necessarily deepened the harmonization of their points of view on price setting mechanisms or on key aspects of distributing quotas, which for ELB are a long-lasting campaign subject at the level of the *département*. On other themes, identity of points of view is far from being achieved by the ELB and APLI, especially on the inheritance of farm holdings. In the last analysis, a generalist trade union and a specialized sector-based association will not necessarily share the same objectives. We shall have to see in the future whether the coalition stabilizes if the APLI decides to extend its mobilization to ewes' milk, a sector where the ELB is strongly present at intra-branch organization level, and where sheep breeding policy and health issues will not necessarily be subjected to analyses which are in concord.

Besides the trade unions, cooperatives have also learned lessons from the crisis. Following the strike, one large collection and processing cooperative has planned to draw up charts showing collection figures from producers against its industrial needs in terms of cheese processing, in order to avoid the creation of surpluses. In the Basque Country, managers of cooperatives were making efforts to restore confidence with producers:

50 Results in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques (farmers' college): FDSEA-JA: 55,21%, ELB: 21,98%; Coordination rurale: 12,1%; Confédération Paysanne Béarn: 12%. The majority system gave these unions 17, 2, 1 and 1 seat respectively.

"The strike, when it came to people's feelings, we had six very difficult months for the cooperative. Really, very difficult. We had no relationship with the producers. We tried, we organized 15 meetings at cooperative level. Three in the department, right in the middle of the strike. Where people boycotted us. Where people came and said to us: you've got nothing to say to us, we know what you have to say, and they went off again. And we kept on at it, we started having meetings again, they told us it was not on. These are people we know, these are people who work together, they still have to be told what's happening at the cooperative, outside the cooperative, in the milk industry. And little by little dialogue started happening again, while the price of milk has still remained quite low."[51]

Social consequences

At the territorial level, the strike was the occasion for three things to be realized by the milk-producing community. *"The first danger"*, emphasizes this FDSEA official, *"is not about the union. It's demoralization. That the guys can't make a living from their profession any more"*[52]. A study by the CNIEL published in 2008 emphasizes that at French national level, 35% of dairy farmers (or 48,645) have disappeared in 10 years, and that 75% of dairy farmers do not feel that they are recognized by the wider public (CNIEL, 2008). Difficult economic situations, together with a dependency on regular wages brought in by the farmer or his wife or partner, are likely to influence the numbers deciding to set up in the profession, although the figure is relatively high in the Basque Country. The issue of insecurity is central to these worries. In April 2010, at the behest of the APLI in the wake of industrial action by 400 producers and their wives at Poitiers, several Basque producers jointly submitted applications for income support to the farmers' mutual fund (*Mutualité sociale agricole*)[53]. The symbolic force of the gesture was twofold: apart from pointing the finger at the fall in incomes, the APLI aimed to make the wider public aware the farmers aim to live from their earnings and not from handouts or social

51 Interview with Cooperative Manager, *op. cit.*
52 FDSEA interview, *op. cit.*
53 C. Revenu-Jomier, « Des producteurs de lait contraints au RSA » (Milk Producers Forced onto Income Support"), *Le Journal du Pays Basque*, 6 April 2010.

security payments.
For this local FDSEA official however, although the situation is critical it is not without historical precedent:

> *"I set up business in 1981. In 1984, quotas went down. I should have stopped doing milk. I didn't stop doing milk. In 1984 I had a quota of 20 or 30,000. And it was supposed to stay at that level. And fortunately there was the union, because I've been active since I became a farmer, fortunately the union took action. The period that we're going through now is not necessarily harsher than what I lived through between 1984 and 1990 with those milk quotas. Because at one point we wanted to get rid of milk quotas too. Because we had something we liked before that. And now people want them. In any case, the mistake we made at the time was that we didn't want to manage them. I don't know if we could have done it, we weren't given the choice. But if we had managed them, perhaps we would have kept them for longer. Perhaps we could have done something different with them. But one thing is sure, we had to go through some terrible things at that time. The Basque Country was being sacrificed. Then one day the quota went down. At that time it was historical production levels that were supposed to be the reference point. And that was supposed to be it. Fortunately we got organized to do something different, references and so on came in here, because otherwise milk production around here would have disappeared, that's clear. And at that time we weren't at all specialized. Milk production was very piecemeal. And then things changed a lot. For the better or the worse, I don't know. Some say that it was not for the better because there are many fewer producers … But a builder today, with many fewer workers, builds lots more houses. (…) And production hasn't gone down, quite the opposite, in the Basque Country".*[54]

The strike caused many producers, whether strikers or not, to become aware of a second point, that of the reality of the sector as a whole, of price-setting mechanisms and the intertwining of markets and decision-making levels, in particular the European level. Until then, the horizon of a large number of producers did not go beyond relations

54 FDSEA interview, *op. cit.*

with the industrial operator or the milk-collecting cooperative. For APLI officials, broadly speaking: "(interview 1): *up until now, you had the impression that they were doing you a favour when they took your milk. It's very nice of him to take our milk.*" (...) (interview 2): "*We had got to the point where you thought: 'who are you giving the milk to?" It wasn't 'who are you selling it to? It was 'who are you giving it to?'*". The strike, in this sense, occasioned a realization of the sector as a whole as the ELB official expresses it:

> *"This strike, I'll say it today after the strike, I'm convinced of this, this strike showed us that we were not only producers but sellers. This came up quite often in our conversation with each other. We are the sellers of what we produce. I have never heard so much of this kind of talk over the last few years. (...) We are used to negotiating the price of our animals. With the dealer. A calf, a lamb, a ewe. We negotiate the price. Thirty years ago somebody somewhere was setting the price of milk, the CNIEL and so on, we weren't too sure, they were our representatives...We were happy to leave that to others. This time, for many of us, it was 'it's our milk, it's the milk that we produce. Can't we sell it ourselves?"*[55]

A third set of issues concerns the link between type of agriculture, the organization of work and the effects induced by modes of regulation. For this manager of a cooperative, the quota system reinforced a certain type of individualism, especially in the Basque Country, a territory marked by a strong attachment to small family holdings:

> *"In France we went for the family type. Which has to change, because we did not go for the best option. If you say dairy farming you're saying 365 days a year. And if you want to organize the work, the business has to be big enough for there to be enough employees and enough farmers for them to be able to cover for each other. This is not what was done. When quotas were set up, we dug in on the farm, and even more so the Basque Country, because we're more attached to it than people elsewhere are, and each farmer tried to have extra quotas of course, to make a living. So in terms of work organization, of life as a small farmer or peasant and a life outside*

55 ELB interview, *op. cit.* Translated from Basque.

work as a small farmer or peasant, it was a catastrophe. And today we are paying a heavy price for that kind of thinking because when young people look at it, they have seen their parents working and they say 'this is not what I'm looking for. I'm ready to work, but if I know I'm going to work nine or ten hours, (…) have some time free, etc."[56]

The low level of development of joint venture farming may have made the situation more difficult for a large number of farmers. While emphasizing the recent development of associative forms of farming, including those outside family frameworks, the APLI also emphasizes the strong influence of "familial individualism":

"In the Basque Country there has been an enormous amount of mutual support, but making something official out of this is not on. It's mind your own business. At the same time, the family farm is the reference point for the family. If you start to lend it to your neighbour, you lose a bit of…It's true that today there are still places where they wonder 'What's going to become of the family farm? Are they keeping their family identity, relating to the place, the farm itself?' In agriculture, the Basque Country family farm is still the basis of the family. So going into association with your neighbour…There are places where they do everything together, except that afterwards each has his own accounts".[57]

CONCLUSION

The 2009 milk strike marked a dual Europeanization of political regulation and industrial action within the milk and milk products sector. Observation of industrial action in the Basque territory enables a response to the three questions posed by a microscopic analysis of Europeanization. In this case, construction of European "meaning" is carried out in conditions of competition by local professional actors who are divided by divergent visions of the sector and the territory. The choice of a radical, innovative action repertoire – the milk strike

56 Interview, milk-cooperative manager, *op. cit.*
57 APLI interview, *op. cit.*

– has enabled a sectoral issue to be mediatised and transformed into a territorial problem, by spotlighting the sector's European dimension. Finally, behind the shared discourse of a remote and technocratic vision of Europe, hide much subtler strategies on the part of unionized and association-based actors, who are working "top-down" or "bottom-up" in a profound way and with varying success to achieve access to European decision-making.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APLI : Association des producteurs de lait indépendants
ATLA : Association de la Transformation laitière française
CAP : Common Agricultural Policy
CEPE : Coordination européenne Via Campesina
CLPB : Coopérative laitière du Pays Basque
CNIEL : Centre National Interprofessionnel de l'Economie Laitière
CP : Confédération paysanne
COAG: Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y de Ganaderos
COPA-COGECA : Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations - General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives
DDA : Direction départementale de l'agriculture
DGCCRF : Direction générale de la concurrence et de la répression des fraudes
EHNE : Euskal Herriko Nekezarien Elkartea (syndicat agricole basque espagnol)
ELB : Euskal Herriko Laborarien batasuna : Union des paysans du Pays basque
EMB : European Milk Board
FDSEA : Fédération départementale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles
FNCL : Fédération Nationale des Coopératives Laitières
FNIL : Fédération Nationale des Industries Laitières
FNPL : Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Lait
FNSEA : Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles
GAEC : Groupement agricole d'exploitation en commun
GHN : Groupe d'experts de haut niveau
JA 64 : Jeunes Agriculteurs – Pyrénées-Atlantiques
OPL : Organisation des producteurs de lait (Coordination rurale)
SPOT (marché) : marché au comptant portant sur les devises, les taux ou les matières premières