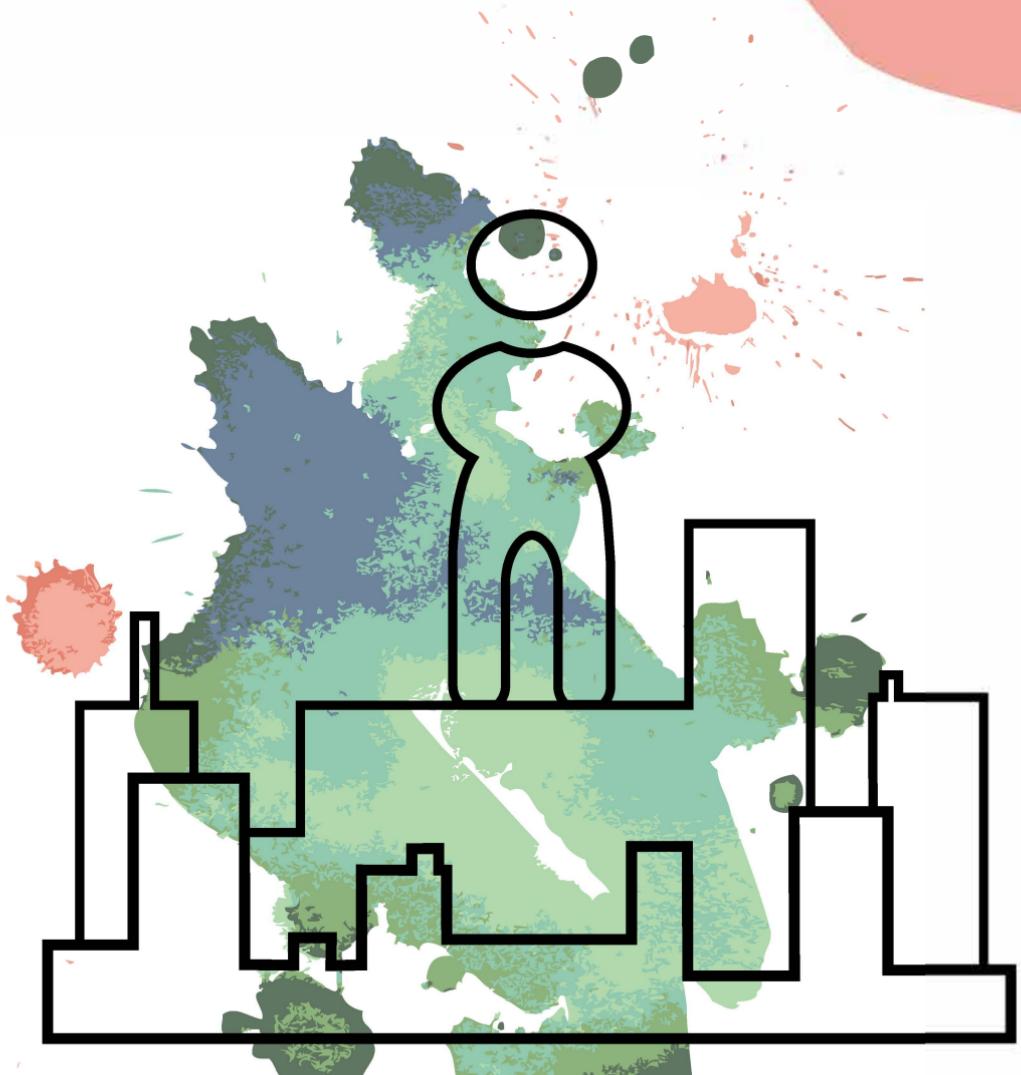


EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT
SUOMI FINLAND



VAAASA2018

PREPARATION KIT

European Youth Parliament (EYP)

The European Youth Parliament is a non-partisan and independent educational project which is organised across Europe by young people, for young people. European Youth Parliament Finland, established in 2001, is the National Committee of EYP in Finland.

EYP encourages independent thinking and initiative in young people and facilitates the learning of crucial social and professional skills. Since its inauguration in 1987, tens of thousands of young people have taken part in Regional, National and International Sessions, formed friendships and made international contacts across and beyond borders. EYP has thus made a vital contribution towards uniting Europe.

Today, EYP is one of the largest pan-European platforms for political debate, intercultural encounters, non-formal educational work and the exchange of ideas between young Europeans. The EYP network is represented in 41 European countries and has thousands of active young volunteers.

EYP is a programme of the Schwarzkopf Foundation.

European Union (EU)

The European Union is an economic and political union of 28 Member States. The EU was established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 upon the foundations of the European Communities.

The EU has developed a single market through a standardised system of laws which apply in all Member States. It ensures the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, including the partial abolition of passport controls within the Schengen area. It provides legislation in justice and home affairs, and maintains common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development. 19 Member States have adopted a common currency, the euro.

Institutions of the European Union

The European Council is responsible for defining the general political direction and priorities of the EU. It comprises of the heads of state or government of EU Member States, the President of the European Council (currently Donald Tusk from Poland) and the President of the Commission.

The Council of the European Union (commonly referred to as the Council of Ministers) is the legislative institution of the EU that represents the governments of Member States. The other legislative body is the European Parliament. Who exactly are members of the Council of the EU depends on the topic: for instance, when discussing agricultural policy, the Council is formed by the 28 national ministers whose portfolio includes this policy agenda.

The European Parliament is the directly elected, parliamentary institution of the EU. The Parliament directly represents the citizens of the EU. Together with the Council, it forms the bicameral legislative branch of the EU. Parliament is composed of 751 MEPs. The current President is Antonio Tajani from Italy.

The European Commission is the executive body of the EU. It is responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, upholding the treaties of the Union, and the general day-to-day running of the Union. The Commission operates as a cabinet government with 28 commissioners, one from each Member State. The current President is Jean-Claude Juncker from Luxembourg.

Other important institutions of the EU include the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Central Bank. The EU also has several agencies and other institutions.

Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN)

A driverless future: With driverless vehicle technology constantly advancing and several applications already in place, how should the EU regulate this innovative technology, without compromising road safety?

By Zhina Garmsiri (FI) & Apostolos Souflis-Rigas (GR)

Topic in a nutshell

Every year, 1.3 million people are killed in road accidents and 50 million people are injured, mainly by human error¹ according to the John Chen the chief executive officer of BlackBerry. Driverless vehicles have the possibility to change our lives by, for example, ensuring safer roads² and by expanding our options on transportation. They could also be a great opportunity for elderly people or disabled people, who cannot drive themselves. Autonomous cars could further help collaborative consumption,³ as private ownership will be unprofitable by taking the cost of the vehicle and insurance in consideration. Also, mobility will be part of the service sector. The driverless cars could accelerate vehicle electrification and electro-mobility⁴. Ultimately, driverless vehicles could also free up the space used for parking and create new jobs for urban planning.

The EU is one of the largest exporters of vehicle technologies and European businesses stand to benefit from the dynamic growth⁵ of the sector. The EU's automotive industry, with its expertise in developing vehicle technologies, is well-positioned to seize this opportunity. However, despite several EU Member States such as Germany and the UK moving to introduce rules to allow self-driving cars on the roads, there is currently no EU-wide framework which sets rules for vehicles to travel across borders autonomously. This is crucial for deploying the technology into sectors such as haulage⁶ that depend on long road journeys through several countries.

Studies show that a majority of European citizens are having a positive attitude towards autonomous cars⁷. However, to gain the highest societal acceptance the EU should ensure safety and security which is one of the priorities. New risks such as overreliance on, and misuse of, technology have to be addressed. Misuse of technology and overreliance will create new risks, such as hacking in transportation, which have to be solved. New questions such as the level of infrastructure support and infrastructure's interaction with the vehicle also have to be tackled. Ethical issues related to transferring the responsibility of driving to vehicles must also be addressed. This includes, amongst other things, our expectations for how a vehicle should react when an accident cannot be avoided and the criteria used to determine a vehicle's decision.

Key Conflicts

Driverless vehicles include many dangers and challenges that the majority of the population may oversee. Being a technology under development, they are not yet safe to travel in without a driver. There are already a few examples (Tesla Car and Uber) of people getting killed due to the

¹ Road traffic injuries: <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/road-traffic-injuries>

² According to the European Economic and Social committee, human error is estimated to play a role in 94% of accidents

³ Collaborative consumption: <https://www.fastcompany.com/3046119/defining-the-sharing-economy-what-is-collaborative-consumption-and-what-isnt>

⁴ UBS bank forecasts that automation, competition, and electrification will cut the cost of ride-hailing by 70%

⁵ According to Boston Consulting Group, automated vehicles should represent 20% of global vehicle sales in 2025

⁶ Haulage refers to means of transportation

⁷ With 58 percent willing to take a ride in a driverless vehicle

misjudgement of the sensors or the autopilot⁸. So, it is quite clear that further research and advancement of technologies is required⁹. Another threat being posed by such a digitalized system as the automated vehicle, is the danger of hacking the system itself. In 2015, security researchers Chris Valasek and Charlie Miller infamously demonstrated the way they could hack into a car's system and take over control of its key functions¹⁰. Considering the traffic, the incidents and the general chaos that can occur in the roads due to hacked cars, the systems need to upscale their security in many ways. Also, the potential of a car driving itself means that many drivers could be made redundant due to the new automation. Many jobs are at risks and it is crucial that the intergovernmental authorities (such as the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the United Nations) come up with a well organized plan to manage the labour market, while creating new jobs to compensate for those that are lost to automation¹¹. Furthermore, this new technology essentially hands ethical decisions over to computers. In a difficult situation, how do the autopilot system dictate the way vehicles should react¹².

The transition to driverless vehicles can provide substantial benefits for the economy of the country that will fathom and exploit this technology the best. The EU is currently managing 23% of global motor vehicle production and almost 72% of inland freight transported by road in Europe¹³ and so there is a lot at stake for the EU. The competition of the nations for great benefits (environmentally, financially, socially). In this competition, software (e.g. Apple, Google) and car (e.g. BMW, Volvo, Chrysler) companies are targeting at prevailing in this new era and making the greatest profits of the lot.

Measures in Place

- **Horizon 2020:** is the main research and innovation programme of the E.U. During 2018-2020, it targets at digitising, connectivity as well as satellite navigation technologies for optimised connected and automated driving functions (including the EGNOS and Galileo).

⁸ Dangers of driverless vehicles, Pedestrian killed due to Uber:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/19/uber-self-driving-car-kills-woman-arizona-tempe>

⁹ According to 'Commission Study on the assessment and certification of automated vehicles'.

¹⁰ Several videos of the hacking, available on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sejanp4pxQQ>

¹¹ The International Transport Forum Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study on "managing the transition to driverless road freight transport" estimated the demand for drivers in Europe could decrease down to 1 million by 2030 from 3.2 million drivers existing.

¹² On the road to automated mobility: An EU strategy for mobility of the future:

https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/3rd-mobility-pack/com20180283_en.pdf

¹³ Preparatory work for an EU work strategy 2020-2030:

<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bd17c6de-6549-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1>.

- **Common legislation and framework for every EU country:** there is a real internal market for vehicles guaranteeing the harmonisation of the E.U. and the facilitation of cooperations with other countries.
- **Tests of 5g networks to enhance connectivity:** in order to deploy enhanced network in automated mobility, in order to enhance network speed and security
- **Galileo¹⁴:** is the European global satellite-based navigation system can provide enhanced accuracy of the position of the car and live traffic information, that will facilitate the navigation of the vehicle through cities with safety.
- **Funding for research: The Commission** is willing to provide EUR 450 million under the **Connecting Europe Facility** to support digitisation in transport in support to automation. The Connecting Europe Facility is a key EU funding instrument to promote growth, jobs and competitiveness through targeted infrastructure investment at European level. The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is a key EU funding instrument to promote growth, jobs and competitiveness through targeted infrastructure investment at European level.
- **Evaluation of professional drivers:** Commission has produced directives for the evaluation of the professional drivers that will handle automated vehicle.
- **Cybersecurity package:** Commission adopted a proposal for a voluntary certification framework of information and communication technology (ICT) products and services certificate, that will enhance secure and trustful communication between vehicles and infrastructure for road safety and traffic management related messages.
- **The European Pillar of Social Rights:** is a legal framework that facilitates labour market state transitions. It is intended to help professional drivers and other experts transit safely - and without being made redundant - to the driverless vehicles era.
- **The European Artificial Intelligence (AI) Alliance:** will sentence ethical guidelines for artificial intelligence that is being heavily utilised on driverless vehicles. Provided these vehicles have to deal with the case of an accident occurring, these guidelines shall dictate the criteria of the vehicles' decision.
- **2nd High Level Structured Dialogue:** Member states have pointed out the crucial ethical issues. All member states gathered to raise their concerns relating to this new technology.

Main Actors

- The European Commission is the institution responsible for initiating the legislative procedure in the EU. It features a Directorate-General on Mobility and Transport, which includes many agencies for railway, maritime and aviation safety. The EU Commissioner for Transport,

¹⁴ Europe's Global Satellite Navigation System (GNSS)

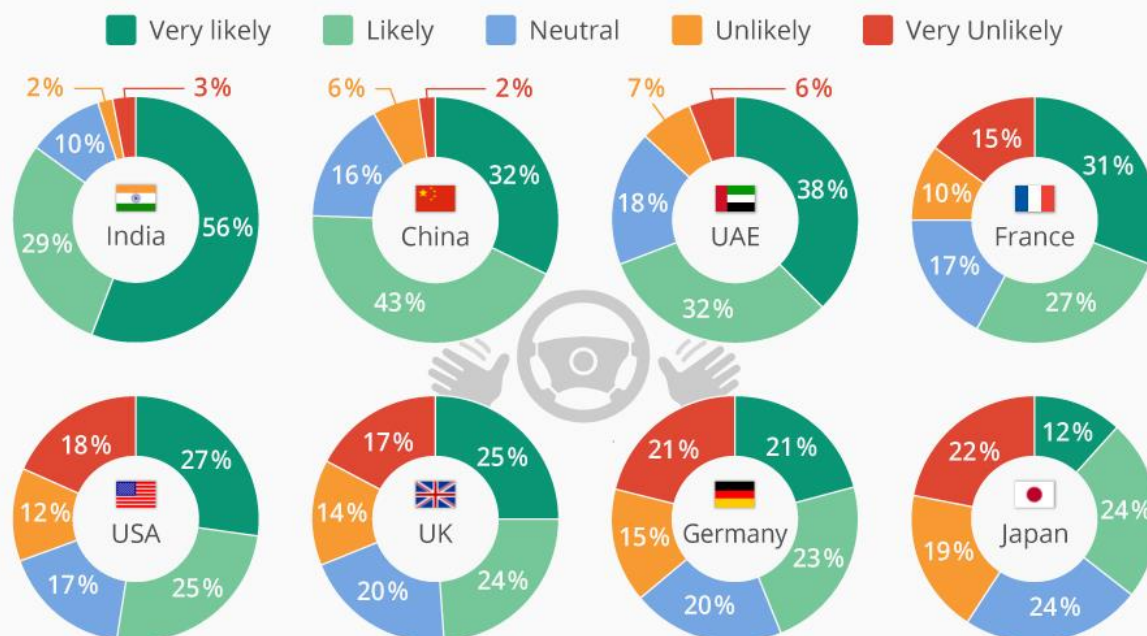
Violetta Bulc, visited the European Youth Parliament during the International Session in Rotterdam.

- **The Member States** are in charge of putting vehicles to a test. To create a EU-wide framework on rules for autonomous vehicles, there must be a cooperation network between all the EU Member States. A number of EU countries, including the UK and Germany, are introducing rules governing the use of autonomous vehicles, especially allowing for testing on public roads
- **Companies** such as BMW, Volkswagen, GM etc. are constantly developing and producing driverless vehicles. These companies are in charge of vehicles safety and functionality.

The picture is showing the citizen's reliance on the driverless cars in following countries:

How Do Consumers Feel About Self-Driving Cars?

% of respondents who are likely/unlikely to try a self-driving car*



Links for further research:

- A article about when will autonomous cars entirely enter our roads:
<http://www.alphr.com/cars/1001329/driverless-cars-of-the-future-how-far-away-are-we-from-autonomous-cars>
- A video about how driverless cars will change cities:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEebyt6G5kM>
- An article about the threats and dangers of autonomous vehicle:<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-42710215>
- Links to videos of hackers taking control of vehicles:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdZ8nx6nRfA>

Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety I (ENVI I)

Green food: With the amount of energy necessary to cultivate, process, pack and bring food to our tables accounting for 26% of the EU's final energy consumption, what steps should be taken in order to encourage food sustainability?

By Stella Miettinen (FI) & Martin Örn (FI)

Topic in a nutshell

Seeing that 26% of the total amount of energy consumed within the EU comes from agriculture, it's safe to assume that shifts in sources of energy within the agriculture industry have colossal impacts on the environment. Considering the agri-food sector's significant portion of the EU's annual energy usage, the source of their energy plays a consequential role in all aspects. If the agriculture and food (agri-food) sector would begin shifting towards renewable energy sources with extremely low or possibly even no carbon footprint, it would make a serious difference in Europe's general level of pollution. In addition to the agri-food sector's usage of energy, individual farmers play a key role in improving food sustainability in Europe. This is because farmers have the ability to make choices in terms of their methods of farming, specifically whether or not these methods are ecologically sound. This can vary from powering your farm with solely renewable energy sources, to just simply using less pesticides to aid with soil erosion and degradation. With global population projected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050, the current food crisis is only going to get more challenging if not addressed immediately. A lack of inclination to address food sustainability and security will only hurt us more down the line.

Key Conflicts

The focus on raising environmental standards can potentially be portrayed as hindering economic growth. This acts against the adopted stance of the EU to achieve a "circular bioeconomy"¹⁵ which encourages countries on a national level to produce, package and consume food sustainably. Despite the EU's official goal being to achieve a circular economy, Member States do not have equal economic capabilities to reach these goals. Member States with weaker economies will probably be hesitant to invest capital in sustainable food when they already have issues regarding their financial state. With energy consumption set to increase alongside population growth, the 79% dependency on fossil fuels within the EU remains a core issue in the future of green food through it's creation of emissions and increasing global warming.¹⁶ This is due to alternative fuel sources still being underdeveloped and incapable of sustaining the amount of energy required for adequate production. Renewable energy sources used for the food system¹⁷ accounted for just 7% of the energy mix in previous years.¹⁸

Nonetheless, research for the design and implementation of green energy continues to increase, with renewable fuel consumption tripling since 1990¹⁹. Combined with their renewability and minimal impact on the environment, further funding is projected to make alternative fuels increasingly competitive on the energy market.

¹⁵ A circular bioeconomy is an economic system that utilizes renewable resources efficiently as well as turning waste streams into value added products

¹⁶ Energy use in the EU food sector: <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁷ Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs: <http://www.fao.org>

¹⁸ Energy use in the EU food sector: <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁹ Carbon brief: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/>

However, the past 50 years have seen a revolution in agricultural practices and production - with a consequent increase in the negative impact on the environment. Although many European nations continue to support sustainable food production initiatives, few have seen wide scale and effective implementation²⁰. The role played by current livestock, fishery, and fertilising practices on global emissions is often portrayed as a necessary trade-off between food quality and environmental stability. The wide scale environmental damage made by such products and practices within these industries is usually justified as necessary in order to meet extensive health and safety regulations²¹ which require high amounts of energy to complete²². A shift to less energy demanding practices can be met with resistance, as corporations hope to avoid overhauls in their established production systems.

Likewise, issues raised by logistics and packing, which depend on food system “infrastructure,”²³ account for nearly half of all energy consumption in the food industry.²⁴ Excessive dependence on plastic packaging and long-haul transportation for food products, has meant that the shift towards more sustainable practices has been slow. Increasing proposals for governmental enforcement of common development policies and strategies have aimed to, alongside research, provide the basis to produce more using less energy. Currently, efforts to create such coordinated movements have remained on the local level.²⁵

Measures in place

- The **Europe 2020 strategy** is the EU’s agenda for promoting growth and jobs in the current economy, whilst tackling the main problems and goals towards achieving an integrated and efficient society. Under its target for combating global warming, an initiative to direct resource efficiency within the EU, offers legislative foundation as a reference framework on a national level, which has seen several strategies implemented europe-wide.
- **IPES-Food**: Multinational research effort which ultimately aims to co-construct a set of policy proposals targeted to implement more sustainable legislation within Member States, addressed for the EU comprehensive Common Food Policy by 2019.
- **Horizon 2020**: Largest fund for initiative and research work in the EU, supporting sustainable start-ups in the field of sustainable development and alternative fuels.
- **FAO - 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development**: Part of UN resolution 70/1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering social and economic development.

²⁰ Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs: <http://www.fao.org>

²¹ Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs: <http://www.fao.org>

²² Energy use in the EU food sector: <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

²³ Food system & infrastructure “covers everything needed in the supply chain of activity between the consumer and the producer, be that a farm, fishery or community garden.” <http://www.ngfn.org>

²⁴ Energy use in the EU food sector: <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

²⁵ Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs: <http://www.fao.org>

They have co-ordinated extensive research into creating concrete steps in which the EU is able to, alongside Member States, reduce emissions, and implement sustainable initiatives through research and legislation.

- **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**: The agricultural policy of the EU which combines an implementation of agricultural subsidies with programmes on rural development in order to encourage introduction of greener practices within agricultural industries.
- **Energy efficiency directive**: Legislative body which sets rules and obligations to direct the EU under the 2020 energy efficiency target.

Main Actors

- **The European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development**: Promotes developments in the agri-food sector and oversees Member States level of food sustainability. Specifically in accordance to agreements already signed, such as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- **Member States and National governments**: They have the most power to affect issues regarding methods of agriculture and the sustainability of food in their countries.
- **Scientists and Academics**: Research enhances capabilities to improve food sustainability. This is especially relevant since a decisive issue regarding the implementation of reforms regarding food sustainability is the cost of it. Research can lead to innovations that allow for efficient farming whilst being sustainable.
- **Food industry**: It plays a key role in the effectiveness of implemented reforms. Although corporations and individual farmers must follow completed reforms, lobbyists slow down the process of fixing these issues.

Links for further reading

- More food with less. While pollution is harming the environment and making agricultural practises more challenging, changes to in the agri-food sector can help divert us from the current path we are on.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4jcJlpf3Ws&t=0s&list=LLU1E3Z7XBq2TmPMAtpgHkZg&index=6>
- The EU's approach to addressing the current issues regarding sustainable food. In addition to highlighting the issues and current measures, it stresses what is yet to be done to ensure food security and sustainability. <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/food.htm>
- With the global population set to increase by 2 billion people by 2050, addressing issues regarding the entire process of food production is urgent. Improving production, processing, distribution and consumption by making them more sustainable while still being efficient is key. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcl3BQeteCc>

Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI II)

Nuclear Renaissance: With nuclear power contributing a very low amount of emissions into the atmosphere, how should the EU regulate nuclear energy production whilst ensuring the minimisation of the safety risks it poses?

By Alexandra Salo (FI) & Kalle Valkeakari (FI)

Topic in a nutshell

Nuclear power is created with the process of fission in nuclear power plants and it is responsible for nearly 30% of the EU's electricity²⁶. During fission, neutrons bombard a uranium atom which then causes a chain reaction of the fission process. This fission releases large energy that heats water to extremely high temperatures, which in turn, spins turbines connected to generators that produce electricity. However, nuclear waste remains radioactive for extremely long periods of time. The effective storage of the waste produced is still a problem but it is continuously being researched and improved upon. Nuclear power has the capacity to provide electricity to millions of people while limiting greenhouse gas emissions but it is facing opposition since the 1986 Chernobyl and 2011 Fukushima disasters. This has led to some Member States, such as Germany and Belgium, to phase out or limit their production of nuclear energy²⁷. The nuclear power used today solely relies on nuclear fission but the concept of nuclear fusion of hydrogen atoms is also being researched as the process would just produce helium instead of any radioactive waste.

Key Conflicts

The nature of nuclear fission power dictates that there will always be risks of radiation, no matter how safe²⁸. With the popularization of nuclear power, known as the Nuclear Renaissance, it is important to remember that nuclear energy produces nuclear waste which emits harmful radiation for thousands of years. In addition, accidents at nuclear plants can harm hundreds of thousands of people across the continent. Even though, many accidents can be prevented with better safety precautions, many accidents can still happen even with the strictest safety precautions. Additionally, nuclear plants are susceptible to accidents in other cases as well, such as, in natural disasters. An example of this is the 2011 Fukushima power plant accident. However it is very important to realize that nuclear energy produces much more energy with very little emissions, while traditional energy sources like fossil fuels emit lots of harmful gases into the atmosphere. So nuclear energy, while posing potentially serious security risks, produces energy much more efficiently and with little to no emissions, while other traditional energy sources are easier to produce, pose little to no immediate safety threats and account for a very large part of global emissions.

Another issue that rises is the conflict between opinions on nuclear power. Nuclear energy emits little to no emissions and provides much more energy than traditional energy sources, like fossil fuels, or

²⁶European Commission - Nuclear energy:

<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/nuclear-energy>

²⁷ European parliament fact sheet on nuclear energy: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/62/nuclear-energy>

²⁸ As nuclear energy will always produce radioactive nuclear waste.

renewable sources of energy. However, many are anti-nuclear for security reasons²⁹, and funding for the development of safe practices in nuclear energy usually is insufficient³⁰. These two conflicting views often make the topic of nuclear energy a political question in ways that other energy sources have never been.³¹

Measures in place

- The **Nuclear Safety Directive** of 2009 (amended in 2014) requires EU countries to prioritize nuclear safety at all stages of the lifecycle of a nuclear power plant, including before the construction as well as implementing enhanced safety features on old reactors.
- **The Euratom Treaty** (The European Atomic Energy Committee) was established in 1957 to form a common market for the peaceful use of atomic energy. Now encourages the growth and development of nuclear energy production and its minimisation of safety.
- **Stress tests** conducted by the EU on European reactors tests the ability of nuclear installations to withstand natural disasters.
- The **Management of Spent Fuel and Radioactive Waste Directive** of 2011, which requires all member states to have national framework and policies for spent waste and radioactive waste management.

Main Actors

- The **European Nuclear Energy Forum** (ENEF) is a platform held annually for discussions about the opportunities and risks surrounding nuclear energy. Governments, European institutions, and representatives of the nuclear industry, regulators, consumers, and civil society, take part in the forum.
- The **European Commission** (EC) is the executive arm of the EU and is therefore responsible for the creation of new EU legislation, and implementing decisions made by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.
- The **International Atomic Energy Agency** (IAEA) is an international agency cooperating closely with countries around the globe. A Memorandum of Understanding³² has been signed by the

²⁹ With many countries and leaders deciding to phase out nuclear energy, and with how many countries haven't built nuclear plants at all.

³⁰ Nuclear engineering International- New reactors- more or less?:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111212195417/http://www.neimagazine.com/story.asp?sectioncode=147&storyCode=2058653>

³¹ With for example, Belgium's recent decision to abandon nuclear energy, and Brexit playing a part in the exit of Britain from Euratom.

³² A Memorandum of Understanding signifies a formal agreement and partnership between two parties. However, it is not legally binding.

EC with the IAEA and the EU has since participated in various joint research projects with the agency.

- The **European Atomic Energy Community** (Euratom) is a organization within the EU which regulates the European civil nuclear industry.

Links for further reading

- Kurzgesagt: *Nuclear Energy explained*: A series of 3 videos quickly explaining nuclear energy and giving a couple general arguments for and against.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcOFV4y5z8c>
- European Commission: *Nuclear Energy*: A general overview of nuclear energy, key actors, and some of the problems tackled within the area of nuclear energy in the European Union.
<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/nuclear-energy>
- France 24 (English) : *Nuclear energy: When France faces a new era*. - A 13 minute video on some of the local problems and concerns by the public:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YgmCu7dfS4>
- World Nuclear Association: *Nuclear power in the European Union* - A detailed article on EU energy policy and nuclear energy figures:
<http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/others/european-union.aspx>
- Vox: *Nuclear power is dying*. Can radical innovation save it? - A look into innovation and general opinions on nuclear power, and the history behind it:
<https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2017/3/27/15043522/nuclear-power-future-innovation>

Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)

Constantly negotiating: In light of recent political developments in Turkey and negotiations with the EU on Turkey's accession not moving forward, what steps should the EU take regarding the future of EU-Turkey relations?

By: Amanda Häkkinen (FI) & Mia Lanča (HR)

Topic in a nutshell

In its Progress Report of 2015, the European Union criticised Turkey for its human rights violations and weak democracy³³. This could pose a problem for Turkey in its effort to join the European Union, as, according to the Copenhagen criteria, a candidate country needs to be a stable democracy with a functioning economy that is committed to preserving human rights in order to become a Member State.

Turkey and several other countries have failed to meet this criteria and, in Turkey's case, it is unlikely that the standards of the EU will be met anytime soon as the Turkish government has become even more autocratic overtime.³⁴ Even though the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was democratically elected in 2008, one could doubt that Turkey is highly democratic: it ranked as the 157. country in the 2018 Press Freedom Index, with Erdogan controlling most of Turkey's free press.³⁵ In March 2016, the Turkish government even seized the country's leading opposition newspaper and replaced its editor-in-chief, after which the newspaper has turned strictly "pro-government".³⁶ Moreover, Turkey has been widely criticised for its violations against minorities: Erdogan's military has, for instance, attacked ethnic Kurds in South-East Turkey, claiming that the aim is to fight the Kurdish separatist group but ending up killing thousands of civilians.³⁷ This might pose a problem for Turkey's possible accession to the EU, as in order to become a Member State a candidate country must be committed to protecting its minorities from discrimination.

However, even if the EU was not ready to accept Turkey as a member state there are other already existing cooperative practices between the countries whose development can shape the future of the EU-Turkey relations. First of all, the EU and Turkey are linked by a Customs Union Agreement that came into force in 1995.³⁸ The EU is Turkey's biggest import and export partner, and the Customs Union Agreement enables free movement of goods between the two parts of the union. However, the possibility of an enhanced Customs Union remains uncertain, as it would require the full integration of the EU and Turkey's industries that are yet to be on even grounds.³⁹ Moreover, Turkey and the EU have

³³ European Commission (2015): Turkey 2015 Report:

https://www.members.eyp.org/sites/default/files/cw_guide_2015.pdf

³⁴ CNN (6/2018): What Erdogan's Re-election Means for Turkey and the World:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/25/europe/turkey-erdogan-analysis-intl/index.html>

³⁵ Reporters Without Borders (2018): World Press Freedom Index: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

³⁶ The Guardian (3/2016): Seized Turkish Opposition Newspaper Toes Government Line:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/06/seized-turkish-opposition-newspaper-zaman-erdogan-government>

³⁷ voanews.com (11/2015): Turkey Launches Strikes on PKK in Iraq, SE Turkey: <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-launches-airstrikes-on-pkk-in-iraq-southeast-turkey/3068024.htm>

³⁸ European Commission (1993): Customs Union with Turkey: <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/tradehelp/customs-unions>

³⁹ Carnegie Europe (2017): EU-Turkey Relations Confined to Core Priorities:

<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/74791>

also agreed on improving the existing cooperation to tackle the threat of terrorism as effectively as possible ⁴⁰

Despite the aforementioned disputes between the EU and Turkey as well as possible alternative forms of cooperation, Turkey might actually have a chance at joining the EU due to the refugee crisis that hit Europe in 2015. In March 2016, the EU and Turkey signed an agreement to stop the flow of refugees, where the Turkish government agreed on receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees in the exchange for at least 6 billion euros of EU support, visa-free European travel and a faster path to EU membership. This agreement has been criticised for being “flawed” as Turkey has failed to provide refugees with access to education and healthcare. ⁴¹ Thus, the question is, will the EU overlook Turkey’s human right violations and weak democracy in its effort to tackle the refugee crisis, and, if not, will Turkey be willing to settle for alternative ways of cooperation?

Key conflicts

Relations between the European Union and Turkey were established in 1959, and the institutional framework was formalized by the 1963 Ankara Agreement. Turkey is one of EU's main partners in the Middle East and both are members of the European Union–Turkey Customs Union. They have a common land border through the EU member states - Bulgaria and Greece. Turkey has been an applicant to accede to the EU since 1987, but in 2016 accession negotiations have stalled. The EU has accused and criticized Turkey for human rights violations and deficits in rule of law⁴². Despite Turkey being a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, it has been unable to demonstrate the ability to safeguard them and has been associated with violations of human rights for a long time.

One of the most important factors regarding Turkey’s negotiation about entering the EU is the EU-Turkey refugee agreement. Turkey repeatedly threatened to terminate the agreement because the EU has not paid the promised amount and the visa freedom for Turkish citizens provided for under the agreement has not been implemented.

The EU is reluctant to permit the visa-free travel, unless Turkey recognizes the Republic of Cyprus as an independent country.

Turkey’s foreign relations have a strong impact on the situation as well, due to the fact that Republic of Cyprus has the right to veto Turkey’s accession during any part of the process. Regardless, Turkey is refusing to acknowledge the country’s independence.

There have also been some disputes between Turkey’s president and the governments of Austria and Germany.

Relations with Greece are tense due to the history of Greek and Turkish disputes, at the root of which is the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

⁴⁰ European Union External Action (2017): Joint EU-Turkey Press Release: EU-Turkey Counter-Terrorism Consultations: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/36411/joint-eu-turkey-press-release-eu-turkey-counter-terrorism-consultations_en

⁴¹ Q&A: Why the EU-Turkey Migration Deal Is No Blueprint: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/14/qa-why-eu-turkey-migration-deal-no-blueprint>

⁴² <https://www.dw.com/en/council-of-europe-accuses-turkey-of-violating-human-rights/a-37567024>

Regarding the political criteria, in April 2017, Turkey held a referendum which approved by a close majority constitutional amendments introducing a presidential system - The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly voiced concern over the freedom and fairness of Turkish snap elections, the committee also expressed concern that the vote would nudge the country closer to authoritarian rule and allow possible abuse of power.

The EU has also voiced its concerns regarding Turkey's actions in Syria, especially in the northwestern region of Afrin, which is now controlled by the Turkish military and its allies.

Measures in place

- **The Ankara Agreement:** A treaty signed in 1963, which provides for the framework for the cooperation between Turkey and the EU. The Agreement initiated a three-step process the goal of which was to create a customs union to help ensure Turkey's full membership in EEC.
- **EU-Turkey deal on migrant crisis:** In exchange for Turkey's willingness to secure its borders and host irregular⁴³ migrants, the EU agreed to resettle, on a 1:1 basis, Syrian migrants living in Turkey who had qualified for asylum and resettlement within the EU. The EU further incentivized Turkey to agree to the deal with a promise of lessening visa restrictions for Turkish citizens and by offering the Turkish government a payment of roughly six billion euros. Of these funds, roughly three billion euros was earmarked to support Syrian refugee communities living in Turkey. By the end of 2017, the EU-Turkey deal had been successful in limiting irregular migration into Europe through Turkey.
- **Turkish constitutional referendum, 2017:** held throughout Turkey on 16 April 2017. With 51% majority supporting the proposed changes, the office of the Prime Minister was abolished and the existing parliamentary system was replaced with an executive presidency and a presidential system.
- **European Union–Turkey Customs Union:** provides that goods may travel between the two entities without any customs restrictions. The Customs Union does not cover essential economic areas such as agriculture (to which bilateral trade concessions apply), services or public procurement.

Main actors

- **The Republic of Turkey** is a transcontinental country in Eurasia and Middle East. About 80% of the citizens identify themselves as ethnic Turks, whereas the Kurds are the biggest ethnic minority in the country (about 20% of the population). Traditionally a predominantly Muslim

⁴³ **Irregular migration** - Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. There is, however, a tendency to restrict the use of the term "illegal migration" to cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.

country, Turkey became significantly more secular under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's rule (1923-1938) but has experienced an increase in the influence of Islam since Erdogan was elected in 2008. Turkey is also a charter member of NATO, the IMF and the World Bank and a founding member of OECD and G-20, and has been negotiating with the EU about its accession to the union since 2005.

- **The European Union** is a political and economic union that currently consists of 28 member states that are located in Europe. In order for a country to become a Member State it must have a functioning democracy and be committed to supporting human rights, and once a country becomes a Member State it can take part in the union's decision-making through various platforms, such as the European Parliament. Some are worried about the fact that Turkey's 76 million inhabitants would bestow the second-largest number of MEPs in the Parliament, making it a powerful force in decision-making.
- The attitudes towards Turkey's possible accession to the European Union vary from country to country within the EU. **The United Kingdom**, has long been in favour of Turkey joining the EU, whereas the **German** Chancellor Angela Merkel has typically opposed Turkey's potential entry. **The Netherlands**-Turkey relations have also remained strained since the 2017 Dutch-Turkish diplomatic incident, when the Netherlands prohibited Turkish ministers from entering the Netherlands for rallies concerning the Turkish constitutional referendum.

Links for further research

- The EU- Turkey Refugee Agreement: <https://www.dw.com/en/the-eu-turkey-refugee-agreement-a-review/a-43028295>
- The Future of Turkey-EU Relations in a Time of Global Uncertainty: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/omer-celik/the-future-of-turkey-eu-relations-in-a-time-of-global-uncertainty-132872>
- Turkey's Relationship with the EU: It's Complicated: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/turkey-s-relationship-eu-it-s-complicated-summit-trade-migration-cyprus-syria-war>
- Turkey Must Recognize Cyprus to Gain Visa-free EU Travel: EU Report: <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/turkey-must-recognize-cyprus-to-gain-visa-free-eu-travel-eu-report/>
- Key Findings of the 2018 Report on Turkey: <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/eeas-news/key-findings-2018-report-turkey-7577>

- Chronic Human Rights Problems of Turkey During EU Accession Process
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/ozgur-h-cinar/chronic-human-rights-problems-of-turkey-during-eu-accession-process>
- Turkey Elections: How Powerful Will the Next President Be?
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44574919>

Committee on Human Rights (DROI)

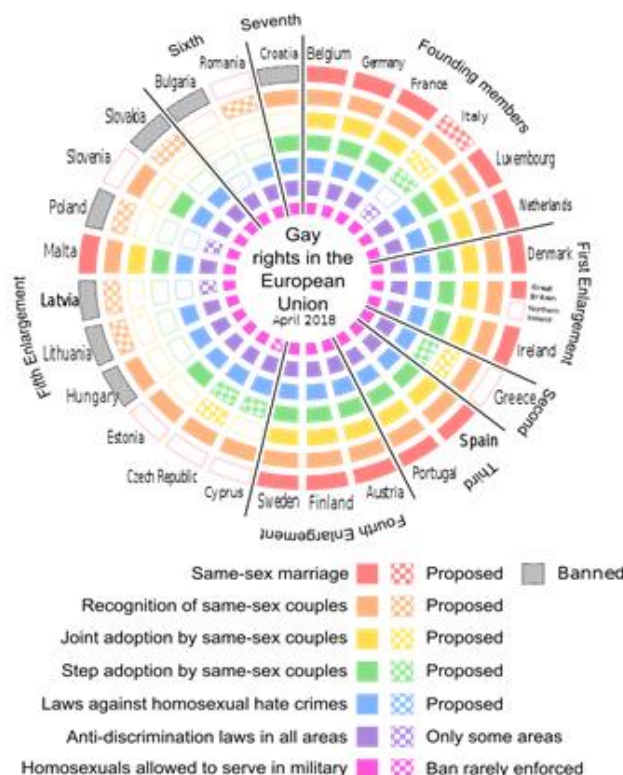
Equality for some: With LGBT+ people continuing to face discrimination across several Member States, how should the EU proceed when it comes to the integration and protection the rights of LGBT+ minorities on a legislative and societal basis?

By Elisavet Roussi (GR)

Topic in a nutshell

Incidents of violent behaviour targeted at LGBT+ individuals have now become frequent in news or social media outlets. What sounds like a widely known fact, in the end, can

potentially cause a chaos within Europe, bearing in mind that even in 2018, LGBT+ are being denied their basic rights as citizens.



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people, as well as people who work for the rights of the LGBT community, face deeply rooted prejudices, hostility and widespread discrimination all over Europe⁴⁴. The lack of knowledge and understanding about sexual orientation and gender identity could be a primary cause for discrimination for the EU Member States to consider, since it results in an extensive range of human rights violations, directly or indirectly affecting our lives.

Major concerns include physical and verbal violence (hate crimes and hate speech), undue restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, violations of the right to respect for private and family life, violations of rights to education, work, and

health, as well as regular stigmatization. Therefore, many LGBT people across Europe live in fear and “must” conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity to be able to live an easier life.⁴⁵

Key Conflicts

The majority of the population believes that LGBT+ people should be treated as equal human beings and be more open and active in our societies. However, a significant portion of the

⁴⁴ EU Survey of LGBT persons’ experiences of discrimination, violence and harassment.

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/eu-lgbt-survey-european-union-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-survey-results>

⁴⁵ Fear, isolation and discrimination common in Europe’s LGBT community:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/press-release/2013/fear-isolation-and-discrimination-common-europes-lgbt-community>

population opposes this statement claiming that homosexuality is wrong and it should be treated as a mental illness⁴⁶. For instance, several religious or independent conservative groups who oppose the LGBT community often argue that the legalisation of gay marriage would erode religious freedoms and traditions. Furthermore, they believe that same-sex couples raising children may be neglecting a child the adequate raising that comes from a biological mother and father. Others also believe such behavior is immoral and unnatural, inconsistent with God's and nature's law⁴⁷.

Furthermore, in times of increased lawlessness and pressure, homophobia rises to the surface and has often been acted upon with impunity with pre-existing stigma becoming amplified. Secondly, **International Humanitarian Law** pays little regard to the vulnerability and needs of the LGBT people. Both factors ultimately arise due to the past and present history regarding criminalisation of homosexuality and its classification as a mental illness. Even where same-sex intimacy is no longer a crime, homophobia can persist and surface in an extreme way in times of conflict or disaster.⁴⁸

Measures in place

- **Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights**⁴⁹ asserts that "any discrimination based on any ground such as sexual orientation shall be prohibited." The Charter was agreed in 2000 and became legally binding in 2009.
- The **Council of the European Union**, the body that represents the 27 national governments in the EU, had adopted a non-binding toolkit to promote LGBT people's human rights in **June 2010**. Three years later (**June 2013**), foreign affairs ministers have upgraded the document to these **new Guidelines** to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

⁴⁶ EU-wide survey of LGBT people's experiences of discrimination in everyday life:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-lgbt-survey-2012>

⁴⁷ Considerations regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html

⁴⁸ Criminalising Homosexuality and LGBT Rights in Times of Conflict, Violence and Natural Disasters

http://www.humandignitytrust.org/uploaded/Library/Other_Material/Criminalising_Homosexuality_and_LGBT_rights_in_times_conflict.pdf

⁴⁹ Charter of Fundamental Rights http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

- European Union law (**the Citizens' Rights Directive 2004/38/EC**⁵⁰) requires the Member States which have legalized same-sex partnerships to recognize every other partnership for freedom of movement.
- Openly gay people can **serve in the military** of every country except Cyprus, however, this is contrary to European law and is rarely enforced.
- According to **European Court of Justice** case law based on the **Employment Equality Framework Directive**⁵¹, employees in a civil partnership with a same-sex partner must be granted the same benefits as those granted to their colleagues upon their marriage in those Member States where marriage is not possible for same-sex couples.
- In June 2010, the **Council of the European Union** adopted a non-binding toolkit to promote LGBT people's human rights.
- The **Treaty of Amsterdam**, which came into force on 1 May 1999, marks a significant milestone for LGBT+ community in the European Union. The changes introduced by the Treaty include a new clause, Article 13.
- Two landmark **Anti-Discrimination Directives** were adopted based on **Article 13 ECT** (now **Article 19 TFEU**), which cover discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, together with sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability and age. This is the first time that any express reference to discrimination on grounds other than sex or nationality has appeared in the Treaties.

Main Actors

- **OutRight Action International** is an LGBTIQ human rights non-governmental organization that addresses human rights violations and abuses against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, intersex individuals, and transgender people. OutRight has existed for the past 16 years to secure the full enjoyment of the human rights of LGBT people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation or expression, gender identity or expression, and/or HIV status.
- The **European Convention on Human Rights** (formally the **Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**) is an international treaty to protect human rights and **political** freedoms in Europe.

⁵⁰ Citizens' Rights Directive 2004/38/EC <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32004L0038>

⁵¹ The Employment Equality Directive [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/536346/EPRS_STU\(2016\)536346_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/536346/EPRS_STU(2016)536346_EN.pdf)

- **International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association** is an international organization bringing together more than 1,300 LGBTI groups from around the world. It continues to be active in campaigning for LGBT rights and intersex human rights on the international human rights and civil rights scene.
- **European Institute for Gender Equality** is an EU agency working to make gender equality a reality in the EU and beyond by producing studies and collects statistics about gender equality in the EU, monitoring how the EU meets its international commitment for gender equality and supports the EU institutions, EU Member States and stakeholders from many different fields in their efforts to address gender inequalities in Europe and beyond.
- **Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020**, contributes to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.
- **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights** is a thematic funding instrument for EU external action aiming to support NGOs working against all kinds of discrimination outside the EU, including homophobic and transphobic violence, and to promote general freedoms of assembly, association and expression.
- In February 2014, the **Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs** (a standing committee of the European Parliament), adopted a recommendation for a future EU roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, covering hate speech and hate crime, freedom of assembly and expression, non-discrimination in employment, education, healthcare goods and services, citizenship and free movement, asylum, external action and the specific needs of transgender and intersex people.
- **European Parliament Intergroup on LGBTI Rights** is an intergroup of the European Parliament's legislators which focuses upon the right of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people both inside and outside the European Union.

Links for further reading

- Homophobia, Transphobia, and Discrimination on grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity <http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/FRA-2010-Homophobia-transphobia-and-discrimination-on-grounds-of-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity.pdf>
- Rainbow Map <https://rainbow-europe.org/>
- Sexual Orientation Laws Map <https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>

- EU report on LGBTI asylum seekers <https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/eu-report-lgbt-asylum-seekers>
- Which European countries have the best and worst LGBT rights?
<https://www.euronews.com/2018/05/14/which-european-countries-have-the-best-and-worst-lgbt-rights->
- Implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation
<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b9d8e8ef-3eac-4cf1-9095-8afedc169913>

Committee on International Trade (INTA)

Sustainable trade: With the EU having set sustainable development in its trade policy and with several Free Trade Agreement partners failing in the human and labour rights sector, what actions need to be taken in order to ensure the social sustainability in a significantly economic-driven trade policy?

By George Pardalis (GR) & Wilma Staffans (FI)



The current trade rules as administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO) encourage unsustainable resource use and an inequitable distribution of resources. They are still mainly based on the pursuit of profit regardless of social and environmental costs. For these reasons, the global community should agree on developing a new framework for the regulation of trade, based on the principles of democracy, equity, reduced consumption and co-operation.

⁵³ Free trade agreement types and examples: <https://www.thebalance.com/free-trade-agreement-types-and-examples-3305897>

Key Conflicts

Several nations in regions such as Central and South America have been violating the basic labour rights in the form of collective bargaining (Colombia, Guatemala), violence against trade unions (Colombia), freedom of association violations (El Salvador, Panama), child labour (Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panamá, Georgia), tripartite consultation (Georgia), and the lack of health and safety at work (Colombia, Peru, Moldova). In addition to this, child labour and unsafe working conditions have been continuously found and linked to regions of poverty.

The implementation of FTAs from the EU depends on a long-term engagement with trade partners, and especially with authorities responsible for policies in areas such as labour rights. The authorities do not always understand the link between those policies and sustainable international trade. Engagement with civil society organisations, including workers' and employers' representatives, is therefore an important part of this process.

Despite the EU implementing FTAs, countries do not always benefit from them, and problems arise due to lack of awareness of the FTAs, as well as difficulties in understanding the specific rules for products and services. This means that focus needs to be set on making the Fair Trade Agreements more effective and easier to implement.

In economically developed countries FTAs are often either taken for granted or viewed as something entirely positive. However, strong controversy around them still exists, especially in developing countries.

Measures in place

- **Agenda 2030**, proposed by the United Nations and backed by the EU, consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, and aims primarily towards ending extreme poverty.
- **Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)** have been implemented with developing countries in an effort to reduce poverty and strengthen the trade.
- **Aid for Trade (Aft)** is a programme built by WTO, with the aim of helping developing countries participate in sustainable international trade. The EU provides Aft assistance to countries in need, helping them to grow their economies and get out of poverty.
- **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs)** consist of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and aim to help shape the political and economic agendas of the three states to fit WTO standards of sustainable trade.

- The EU has worked closely with the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, to strengthen the implementation of the ILO fundamental conventions in countries that violate them, focusing on:
 - freedom of association,
 - collective bargaining and non-discrimination, and
 - child labour.

Main Actors

- The **European Union Customs Union (EUCU)**: The customs union is a principal component of the European Economic Community, established in 1958, and now succeeded by the European Union⁵⁴.
- The European Commission negotiates for and on behalf of the Union as a whole in international trade deals such as the WTO, instead of each member state negotiating individually.
- The **European Union** supports measures to bring international trading standards in line with EU's General Product Safety Directive⁵⁵. The EU would also like to see reduced tariffs for environmental goods and services. Strengthening or, where necessary, re-establishing, the systems guaranteeing minimum prices for certain products that are crucial to the survival of millions of people in the developing countries, as in the cases of coffee and cocoa, is also essential. Lastly, the EU defends, above all in the WTO, the position that certain essential goods such as water and land cannot be left to market forces alone.
- The **World Trade Organisation**: Once agreements move beyond the regional level, they usually need help. The WTO steps in at that point. It is an international body that helps negotiate

⁵⁴ What is the EU Customs Union?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6oXcVT1ldU>

⁵⁵ European Union Trade Standards: <https://www.export.gov/article?id=European-Union-Trade-Standards>

global trade agreements. Once in place, the WTO enforces the agreements and responds to complaints.

- The **business community and lobbies** consider that the economic pillar of sustainable development should not be neglected, arguing that growth is essential to financing measures aimed at creating better social and environmental conditions. Exchanges must be further liberalised and procompetitive rules, such as the Lisbon process, must be put in place. Without growth, societal needs cannot be fulfilled and financed.
- The **International Institute for Sustainable Development** recommends making the trade regime and the international environmental regimes fully compatible and mutually supportive. It suggests to conduct sustainability reviews of existing and new trade agreements and to find ways for developing countries to participate more equitably in the work of the WTO.

Links for further reading

- A report on South Africa's situation regarding EU trade:
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_106330.pdf
- In depth information on specific agreements with singular countries:
<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/>
- Definitions regarding sustainable development and the EUs trade policy:
<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/policy-making/sustainable-development/>
- Ideas of the Commission on how to improve sustainability in trade development:
http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2018/february/tradoc_156618.pdf
- Summary of an academic paper on the current challenges of combating labour rights violations within the EUs FTA partners: <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/shifts-trade-development/labour-standards-eu-free-trade-agreements-working-towards-end/>
- Imports, exports and exchange rates: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geoe-6NBy10>
- Free trade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIHRd3Bcl1w>

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)

Engineered crops: With worldwide demand for food increasing by 70% until 2050, what stance should the EU adopt when it comes to genetically modified organisms in agriculture while ensuring food safety?

By Natalia Van Dijk (NL) & Gia Gozalishvili (GE)

Topic in a nutshell

As the world population is ever growing, the demand for food is rising as well. Since the 1960s, population has more than doubled and our calorie intake has also increased.⁵⁶ Moreover, the population is expected to grow by 2.3 billion between 2009 and 2050. To feed over 9 billion people, food production needs to increase by 70%. Higher yields, higher crop intensity and land expansion will account for part of this growth⁵⁷, however, many expect this to be insufficient to accommodate the rapidly escalating demand for crops. A possible solution could be the use of **genetic modification (genetic engineering)**.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), are organisms, usually from plants, micro-organisms or animals that have been changed in their DNA structure. This can be done by removing certain parts of an organism's DNA and adding them to another organism⁵⁸.

Genetic modification could allow us to grow foods more efficiently (faster, better, or needing less space), make them healthier and more nutritious, and reduce crop failure in growth or harvest. Additionally, genetic modification could decrease the amount of pesticides used, eliminate diseases in crops, create new species and eventually make our food production cheaper.

However, genetic engineering has some downsides as well. Genetically modified food might have unknown health risks, for example, create new allergies, negatively impact our environment, be a risk for certain animal species and have unfavourable consequences for the economy.

Key Conflicts

Proponents of the use of GMOs in the European Union argue that genetic modification can allow for better, healthier crops within shorter amounts of time. The argument is essentially, that humans have already been modifying plants to their advantage for thousands of years through agriculture, and that genetic modification is simply a more direct and efficient approach to what humans have already been doing for thousands of years. There are other arguments as well, for example:

- 1) **GMOs are heavily tested:** an overwhelming amount of peer-reviewed studies⁵⁹ tracking the effects of GMOs on animals have concluded that GMOs are no more riskier than crop plants modified by conventional plant improvement techniques.

⁵⁶ **Growth of population and food demand:** <https://www-sciencedirect-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/science/article/pii/S0306919202000027>

⁵⁷ **Global agriculture towards 2050:**

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/Issues_papers/HLEF2050_Global_Agriculture.pdf

⁵⁸ **Explanation of how Genetic Modification works:** <https://www.wur.nl/en/Dossiers/file/Genetic-modification-1.htm>

⁵⁹ **Metabolomics study of transgenic *Bacillus thuringiensis* rice (T2A-1) meal in a 90-day dietary toxicity study in rats:** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21594293>

- 2) **Impact on farming:** GMOs allow plants to be modified to grow in environments that would be normally inhospitable, giving more room to grow plants and needing to take down less rainforests.
- 3) **Lower cost:** Easier farming means more food, which in turn, means less expensive food. This is not only beneficial for the average consumer, but it can have global implications. Less expensive food makes it easier to feed hungry populations around the world.
- 4) **Increased nutritional value:** GMOs can be modified to have greater nutritional value than the organism would have naturally, which would solve problems such as malnutrition. For example scientists, who want to reduce the deaths and irreversible blindness of children under the age of 5 caused by a Vitamin A deficiency, have genetically modified rice to contain higher amounts of Vitamin A. This “golden rice”⁶⁰ is not yet legal in most countries, but experts estimate it to be in a few years.

Most notably (within Europe) the **European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC)**, which in their report, backed by the EU’s chief scientific advisor Anne Glover, concluded that the EU should reconsider their widespread rejection of this technology.

However, the opinion of a significant portion of the European population regarding the use of GMOs is very skeptical⁶¹ and this is reflected in the many Member States that have banned them.

When some researchers published possible issues regarding GMOs were in the 1990s, the confidence in technological advancements and institutions decreased. Certain issues that already existed at the time irrelevant to GMOs, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), listeriosis and so on, led to strong distrust and caused the public to believe that firms and public authorities sometimes disregarded health risks to protect economic or political interests. Afterwards, debate on GMOs (*i.e.*, authorization, importation, labeling, impact, etc.) was still strongly influenced by food safety issues that had been widely known.

the EU has very strict rules and complex authorisation procedures concerning their cultivation and commercialisation - GMOs along with irradiated food are considered “new food” within the European Union and they are subject to a long, case-by-case food evaluation conducted by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

When it comes to cultivation, the authorisation is given at EU level, but Member States have the last word. Since April 2015, countries can decide to ban the cultivation on their territory at any time during the authorisation procedure. However, even after authorization, individual EU Member States can ban individual varieties under a 'safeguard clause' if there are "justifiable reasons" that the variety might cause harm to humans or the environment. Countries can justify the ban for a variety of

⁶⁰ “What is Golden Rice?” Article by Business Insider explaining the basics: <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-golden-rice-2014-6>

⁶¹ Eurobarometer report of a survey on Biotechnology:
http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_en.pdf

reasons and not, as was the case before, exclusively on the grounds of health or environment risks. So far 8 member states have banned cultivation: Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Poland, Hungary, Greece and Italy. When it comes to commercialisation however, the Member States have to abide by whether or not the commercialisation of the respective crop has been approved at the EU level.

Experts also say that another cause of European opposition to GMOs is that the advantage to agriculture and food production is often considered weak or non-existent, while the risks are considered substantial. However, with the demand for food supply in the world increasing as well as the risks decreasing more thanks to advancements within the field of biotechnology, this is all fit to change.

Measures in place

Within the European Union, a legal framework controls the production and development of GMO's in order to ensure the quality and safety of these products. Some of the most important legislations within this framework include:

- **Directive 2001/18/EC** on conscious release of GMO's into the environment: With this directive, the labelling of GMO's was made compulsory, a register of all GMO's was established, where information about the location and use of the product can be found as well as an explanation of the modification. Additionally, it allows Member States, under EU authorisation, to prohibit GMO's, if the country has evidence of the risk on human health or the environment the GMO holds.
- **Regulation (EC) 1829/2003** specifically focussing on genetically modified food and feed. This regulation establishes the authorisation process and the application procedure for the use of GMO's in food or animal feed. If someone want to use GMO's in food or feed, they need to submit an application to the authorities in their country. The authorities of said country then need to send it to the European Food and Safety Authority, which will accept or decline the request.
- **Directive (EU) 2015/412** which gives Member States the possibility to prohibit the cultivation of GMO's on their territory. This is an amendment of the Directive 2001/18/EC which is described above. This amendment gives Member States more flexibility in the cultivation of GMO's. This gives Member States the right to partly or completely ban certain GMO's from part of, or their entire territory, without having to assess the health or environmental risk of the GMO.
- **Regulation (EC) 1830/2003** on the labelling and traceability of GMO's. According to this regulation, all GMO's must be traceable during all parts of the production. Producers must

provide information on every GMO product, stating on the label of the product that the product contains GMO's, provide the product with the unique identifiers that are established for every GMO. A unique identifier is something similar to a barcode which is different for every type of GMO. Producers also must identify which ingredients contain GMO's. Furthermore, Member States are required to ensure that these rules are being followed, by carrying out sample checks, inspections and tests.

- **EU register of authorised GMO's** which contains all products containing GMO's. In this register, all products and ingredients containing GMO's that are approved and authorised by the EU can be found.⁶²

Main Actors:

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA): EFSA is a European agency funded by the European Union that operates independently of the European legislative and executive institutions (Commission, Council, Parliament) and EU Member States.

It was set up in 2002 following a series of food crises in the late 1990s to be a source of scientific advice and communication on risks associated with the food chain. The agency was legally established by the EU under the General Food Law - Regulation 178/2002. The EFSA is therefore responsible for the scientific-based crop evaluation necessary for authorisation of different GMO crops on the EU-level.

European Parliament (EP): as the legislative body of the European Union, the European Parliament is responsible for making legislation regarding the monitoring of GMOs at the EU-level.

European Council (EC): charged with defining the EU's overall political direction and priorities, is the institution of the EU that comprises the heads of state or government of the member states. As the European Council is seen as the representative of the interests of individual member states of the European Union, the European Council is vital in giving member states the platform in letting their voices be heard on the supranational level.

⁶² EU legislation regarding genetic modification: https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/legislation_en

Links for further reading:

Genetically modified organisms - European Environment Agency:

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/92-9157-202-0/page309.html>

GMO Legislation - European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/legislation_en

GMO authorisation - European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/authorisation_en

Eight things you should know about GMOs:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20151013STO97392/eight-things-you-should-know-about-gmos>

A Decade of EU funded GMO research: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d1be9ff9-f3fa-4f3c-86a5-beb0882e0e65>

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