Preparation Kit

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SUOMI FINLAND

Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)

The 'right' opinion: With the growing popularity of the extreme right and euroscepticism within the EU, how should the EU react to the loss of its citizens' trust, without compromising freedom of speech and democracy?

By Aline Senn (CH) and Martino Tisot (IT)

1. The topic at a glance

The National Rally, otherwise known as the National Front, in France, the Freedom Party in Austria and the Danish People's Party all have one thing in common: they advocate for more independence for their respective countries from the EU. There are many other examples all over Europe as the popularity of parties of the extreme right has grown over the last few decades. Often, their policy proposals do not only include characteristically conservative goals but also eurosceptic statements. Lately, distrust in the structure and the purpose of the EU has grown in Europe. Considering that the majority of these countries are members of the EU, this poses a serious problem for both involved. The EU may eventually lose its trustworthiness if too many of its Member States turn against it. Governments of Member States whose citizens increasingly support eurosceptic parties face a discrepancy between the will of the people and their commitment to the EU.

There are various reasons for the rise of euroscepticism. Some argue that recent events, such as the refugee crisis or the recession in 2008 made distrust in the European Union more common. Others say that this type of scepticism has always existed and that it is a fundamental issue of the institution itself.

Approaches to address this issue range from grassroot-movements to policy changes by political institutions. Since eurosceptic movements have evolved into something bigger than just minority groups, it is important for the EU and its Member States to reflect on possible solutions.

2. Key Terms

- **Extreme right:** A portion on the political spectrum, which is positioned further on the right than the traditional conservative ideologies or parties. The extreme right is characterised by policy positions, such as acute nationalism, criticism of immigration and opposition of the European Union.
- **Euroscepticism:** A general opposition and doubt about the process of European integration. This can range from **soft euroscepticism**, which is not a principled rejection of the EU as an institution or an objection to European integration but rather concerns on certain policy areas, to **hard euroscepticism**, which is a more categorical opposition of the EU and the principle of European integration.
- **European integration:** The process of economic, political, legal, cultural and societal integration of European nation states through the EU.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders

- **European Union:** The EU is highly affected by euroscepticism because the institution in and of itself or its policies are criticized. Their main goals are the citizens' well-being and the promotion of peace which cannot be fully achieved if Member States are sceptic towards cooperation with EU bodies.
- **European Commission:** Promotes the general interests of the EU and can propose laws which could promote European integration.
- **European Committee of the Regions (CoR):** EU advisory body that represents the regions of all the Member States. Through the committee, representatives are able to voice their

opinion on EU legislation that impacts a certain region. The CoR can issue opinions which are then discussed in [plenary meetings](#).

- **National governments:** National elected power that take care of issues on a national level. They are represented in the EU by ministers on the [Council of the EU](#), and by heads of state on the European Council. When a eurosceptic party or coalition has the majority in a national parliament, collaboration with the EU becomes more difficult.
- **Far-right parties:** Extreme right-wing parties stand for opposition to the EU and can, contribute to an increase of euroscepticism in a Member State. They demand certain policies, often regarding [immigration](#), monetary policy and sovereignty, to be changed. The most drastic measure might be withdrawal from EU membership.
- **Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD):** a hard Eurosceptic political group within the European Parliament that has been characterized as far-right. It rejects the idea of a more centralised EU and favours more independent nation states.
- **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR):** Stand for a version of soft euroscepticism and could be categorized as a centre-right group.

4. What has been done so far?

There are two main approaches to tackling the problem of euroscepticism. The first one is a top-down method, which would include a first step by the EU, most likely manifesting itself in legislation. There is one recent example of that approach in the European Parliament. Aldo Patriciello, an Italian member of the European Parliament, filed a [motion for a resolution](#) in June of 2016, which recognises the problem of growing euroscepticism in public opinion in the wake of the EU's handling of the migrant crisis. The motion calls on the European Commission to "develop measures to restore the confidence of EU citizens in the European institutions, values and integration, by involving them more in the life and decision-making processes of the Union." Another [motion for resolution](#) that was adopted in April of 2016 focused on education to battle euroscepticism. According to a [2014 Eurobarometer survey](#), 44% of EU citizens feel that they have limited understanding of how the EU works and 52 % of Europeans believe that their voice does not count in the EU. Poor knowledge about the EU paired with a lack of understanding in its concrete added-value may cause the spread of euroscepticism.

Another approach to shorten the distances between EU institutions and its citizens could be a movement initiated by citizens. There are various examples of events that have been organised to bring people together and to stimulate conversation about Europe and the EU. [Pop Up Europe](#) is a project launched by the province of Antwerp, awarded with the EuroPCom prize, which was designed by the Committee of the Regions to gather Europeans to rethink and reshape communication within Europe.

A mix of both approaches could be seen in the [Eurocities Mayor's Summit](#). The gathering of mayors of major European cities and EU leaders was organised to discuss euroscepticism. One of the convention's hosts and CoR President Markku Markkula concluded that it is crucial to interact with citizens to effectively change anything.

5. Key Conflicts

There are various conflicts associated with the rise of euroscepticism. They can be categorised into three major areas of criticism from eurosceptics. A first point made by critics is the utility of the EU. It mostly applies to the economic benefits a country receives as a member of the EU. How citizens answer the question if the membership benefits their country economically is crucial to their opinion

about the EU. In other words, people base their opinion of the EU, among other factors, on utilitarian calculations.

For example, when the 2008 financial crisis hit Europe, with all its consequences for Member States' economies, many of the measures that the Union took did not satisfy many citizens, especially in countries, such as Italy or Greece, where the effects of the financial collapse were worse.

If citizens do not think the EU is serving their interest, they would not support it. Since the economic differences amongst the Member States are immense, the EU needs to serve each Member State as needed. That could eventually eradicate euroscepticism on an economic basis.

The second, and most prevalent, explanation for scepticism towards European institutions is the issue of democratic deficits in the EU. A democratic deficit could be a lack of accountability of elected officials and lack of representation of its citizens. In 19 Member States, more than 50% of the population feel that their voice does not count in the EU. On the other hand, many scholars argue that such a democratic deficit does not exist. Nevertheless, the sole fact that people believe it exists poses a challenge to the European Union.

A third aspect related to euroscepticism is how European integration impacts a nation's sovereignty and independence. The argument of eurosceptics is that sovereignty is an all-or-nothing question; if the power of the EU increases, the nation state's power automatically decreases. EU advocates' counter-argument is that through cooperation, a country's influence could increase.

In addition to fundamental criticism towards the EU, current trends and events greatly contribute to euroscepticism. Increasing migration within Europe and the refugee crisis tend to cause discomfort among European citizens. Studies have shown that the public disapproves of the way the EU handled these crises, which certainly added to the lack of confidence in the EU. Further problems the EU is dealing with include a lack of transparency.

One factor that all these conflicts and criticisms have in common is the diversity among different Member States. Each country has a different cultural and historical background and therefore their citizens support different positions. All EU citizens experience a different reality in their country of origin, which naturally creates a variety of views on the EU and European integration.

6. Questions to consider

- Bearing in mind that Member States hold different views towards integration, citizen participation and differ in EU awareness, what steps should be taken to achieve the European Commission's goal to create a more unified and democratic Union?
- What needs to be considered when changing policies in order to reduce euroscepticism, keeping in mind that views on European integration differ greatly?
- Are recent developments in addition to the current struggles of the EU the cause for the rise of euroscepticism or do the root causes lie in the fundamental structure of the EU?
- Biased media outlets can possibly have a significant impact on how the public perceives the EU. Taking that into account, what role does the information that citizens gather through the media play?

7. Further links

A map showing election results of eurosceptic parties across Europe:
https://www.statista.com/chart/2293/far-right-leads-eurosceptic-earthquake/

Pew Research Center: various statistics on how European countries view Brexit and European integration
http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroskepticism-beyond-brexit/

The Economist: The roots of euroscepticism
https://www.economist.com/britain/2016/03/12/the-roots-of-euroscepticism

European Council on Foreign Relations: The spread of euroscepticism across Europe
https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR79_EUROSCEPTICISM_BRIEF_AW.pdf

Information guide euroscepticism: A guide to information sources on euroscepticism, with hyperlinks to further sources of information within European Sources Online
https://orca.cf.ac.uk/77359/1/Euroscepticism.pdf

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

The continuing epidemic: this year over 40 000 people have been diagnosed with measles around Europe. With Europe standing in the way of eradicating measles from the world, how should the EU tackle the issue of anti-vaccination whilst respecting freedom of choice?

By Ella-Kaisa Luoma (FI) & Alessia Donna (IT)

1. The topic at a glance

In his 2017 State of the Union address, European Commission President Juncker said: '*In a Union of equals, there can be no second class citizens. It is unacceptable that in 2017 there are still children dying of diseases that should long have been eradicated in Europe. (…) No ifs, no buts. (…) Avoidable deaths must not occur in Europe.'*
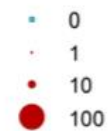
Vaccinations have been proven to be one of the most effective ways of preventing diseases worldwide. It can be considered one of the biggest developments in modern medicine in addition to sanitation, antibiotics and anaesthesia. Currently, more than 100 million children are vaccinated every year against diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, tuberculosis, polio, measles and hepatitis B. Vaccination prevents an estimated 2.5 million deaths worldwide each year and reduces disease-specific treatment costs, such as antibiotics.

Despite the successes of vaccinations many EU and non-EU countries are now facing outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases due to decreased vaccination rates. Unequal access to vaccines and the waning of public confidence in vaccination are a cause for concern and a major challenge for public health experts. Differences exist in healthcare systems and their availability to the citizens of various Member States, which can also lead to unequal access to vaccines and lack of adequate information reaching the general public.
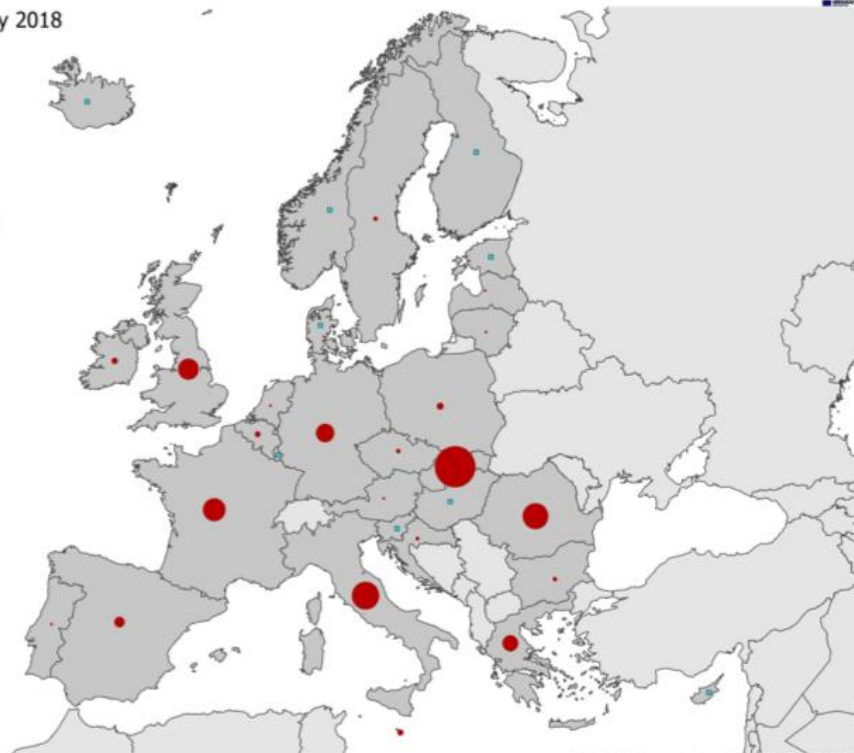
Parents choosing not to vaccinated their children has been increasingly growing trend for the past two decades. The main arguments of **anti-vaccination ideology** are: vaccines are unsafe; vaccines are not adequately tested; vaccines contain toxic additives; vaccines weaken or overwhelm the immune system; vaccines cause or worsen asthma and allergies; vaccines cause autism; vaccines are the cause of cancer, several illnesses and syndromes; an alternative healthy lifestyle, personal hygiene and diet stop diseases.

Measles, which has mostly disappeared from the whole world, is now returning and affecting more and more people, despite the fact that a working vaccine for it has been accessible since 1960's. According to the **ECDC** monthly measles monitoring report data for July 2018, 758 cases of measles were reported by 21 countries, only nine countries reported zero cases. The highest amount of measles cases were reported by Italy, France, the UK, Germany and Greece.
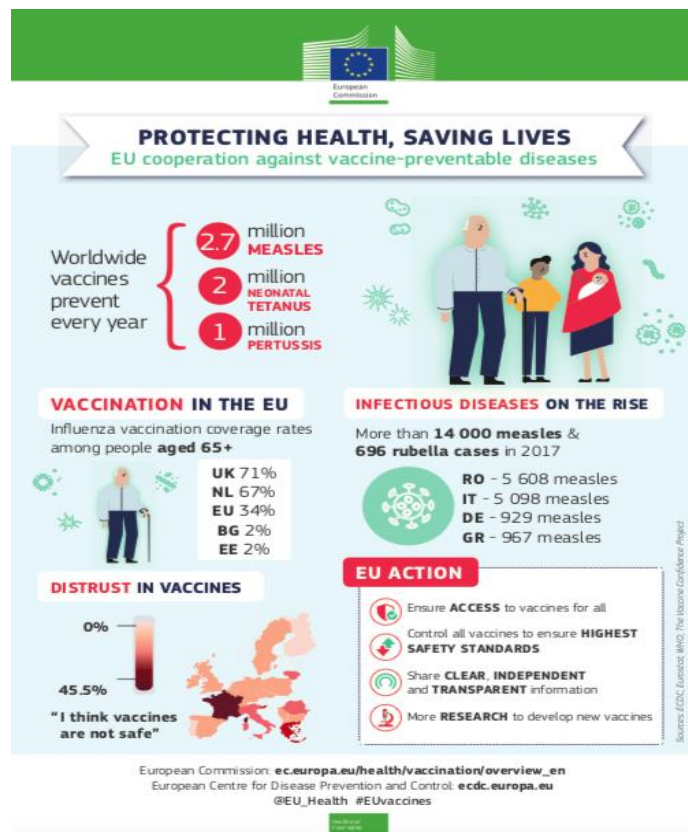
Number of measles cases, July 2018

- 0
- 1
- 10
- 100

EU/EEA Member States
Other countries

Luxembourg

Malta

ECDC. Map produced on: 04 Sep 2018
ECDC map maker: https://emma.ecdc.europa.eu

PROTECTING HEALTH, SAVING LIVES
EU cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases

Worldwide vaccines prevent every year
- 2.7 million MEASLES
- 2 million NEONATAL TETANUS
- 1 million PERTUSSIS

VACCINATION IN THE EU
Influenza vaccination coverage rates among people aged 65+
UK 71%
NL 67%
EU 34%
BG 2%
EE 2%

DISTRUST IN VACCINES
0%
45.5%
"I think vaccines are not safe"

INFECTIOUS DISEASES ON THE RISE
More than 14 000 measles & 696 rubella cases in 2017
RO - 5 608 measles
IT - 5 098 measles
DE - 929 measles
GR - 967 measles

EU ACTION
- Ensure ACCESS to vaccines for all
- Control all vaccines to ensure HIGHEST SAFETY STANDARDS
- Share CLEAR, INDEPENDENT and TRANSPARENT information
- More RESEARCH to develop new vaccines

Sources: ECDC, Eurostat, WHO, The Vaccine Confidence Project

European Commission: ec.europa.eu/health/vaccination/overview_en
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: ecdc.europa.eu
@EU_Health #EUvaccines

2. Key Terms

Vaccine: A vaccine is a biological preparation containing a harmless form of the microbes (weakened, killed or parts of the microbe) that cause a particular disease. It stimulates the body's immune system to recognise the substance as foreign, destroy it and "remember" it, so that the immune system can easily recognise and destroy these microbes if encountered later.

Vaccine denier: Vaccine deniers (also referred to as vaccine refusers or vaccine sceptics) are individuals who do not accept the process of vaccination while denying scientific evidence that proves vaccines as safe and effective.

Herd immunity: Herd immunity occurs when the majority (usually around 95%) of a population are immunised. This provides protection to the members of society who are not immune due to for example being too young to be vaccinated. This method was used for the eradication of smallpox in 1977. Herd immunity applies only to **contagious** diseases. Tetanus, for example, is infectious but not contagious, so herd immunity does not apply.

Measles: Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and once a person is affected. No specific treatment currently exists. Measles can be prevented by vaccinating children. The disease affects about 20 million people a year. Initial symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough and inflamed eyes.
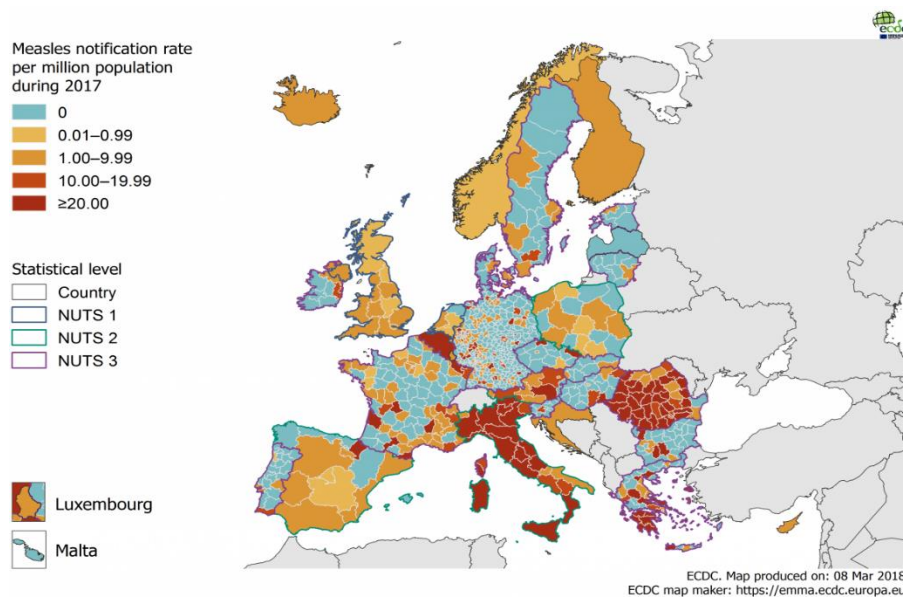
MMR vaccine: The MMR vaccine is a vaccine against mumps, measles and rubella. Children get two doses of it, first at the age of 9 to 15 months and the second dose at 15 months to 6 years of age.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency established in 2005. Its aim is to strengthen Europe's defences against infectious diseases.

The European Medicines Agency is a decentralised agency of the European Union responsible for the scientific evaluation, supervision and safety monitoring of medicines in the EU.

European Commission is an institution responsible for proposing legislation and implementing decisions in the EU. Cooperates with the ECDC.

National Governments and health institutions provide vaccinations to their citizens, carry responsibility in monitoring public health and reinforcing legislation on their healthcare systems. Vaccination policy is a competence of national authorities but the European Commission assists EU countries in coordinating their policies and programmes.

4. What has been done so far?

In some Member States, such as France, Germany and Italy, laws have been passed that make it mandatory for all parents to give the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination to their children. The Commission proposed in April 2018 a **Council Recommendation to strengthen EU cooperation on vaccine-preventable diseases**. The initiative aims to tackle vaccine hesitancy, improve coordination on vaccine procurement, support research and innovation and strengthen EU cooperation on vaccine-preventable diseases.

EU countries are encouraged to develop and implement national vaccination plans with initiatives to improve coverage and to introduce routine vaccination status checks.

The **ECDC** collects and publishes data on vaccination coverage and the measles infections in the EU.

5. Key Conflicts

With the rising popularity of the **anti-vaccine movement** many people see the MMR vaccine as a highly controversial topic. A small-scale study in 1998 claimed that there was a linkage found between the MMR vaccine and **autism** in children. Later on the study gained wide media attention, causing hysteria with parents of small children and leading to a drop in vaccination rates. Nowadays there is scientific consensus that there is no link between the vaccine and autism but the controversy still exists among the general public, causing more and more parents to choose not to vaccinate their infants. Misconceptions concerning vaccines are easily spread through the **internet** or **communities**. Some people for instance claim vaccines to be toxic or unnatural and serving only the purposes of pharmaceutical companies.

When it comes to effective vaccines, such as the MMR vaccine, they might become victims of their own success. The fact that vaccines are administered to healthy people to prevent diseases which have become rare, largely due to vaccination, contributes to the concerns raised about vaccine safety. Because the devastating effects of the diseases are no longer so prominent, public attention is focused on the side effects of vaccination. This influences how a person weighs up the risks and benefits of vaccination. Healthcare professionals might also pay less attention to educating parents of young children about the disease, which together with the information spread by the anti-vaccine movement leads to people reconsidering the necessity of the vaccine. This can lead to vaccination rates to drop and also decrease the herd immunity of the population and increase the number of infections.

There is also controversy with whether mandatory vaccination programmes violate **civil liberties** or reduce **public trust** in vaccination. Anti-vaccination reduces herd immunity, which has helped the human species to avoid deadly diseases. A fall in herd immunity leaves those who are not immunised at risk of infection.

People's trust in vaccinations is essential for them to work. The concerns and doubts around vaccines and immunisation can lead to hesitancy and reluctance, leading to disease outbreaks, as the current measles case demonstrates. Stakeholders from a national and international level have called for closer analysis on the matter to prevent it from evolving into a crisis.

6. Questions to consider

- Should vaccination programmes be mandatory for everyone or is forcing parents to vaccinate their children against **freedom of choice**?
- How can the EU and its Member States fight **misconceptions and the false information** spread about vaccines?
- How can the EU tackle the issue of **unequal access** to vaccines in the public healthcare of different Member States?
- Does mandatory vaccination violate **civil liberties** or reduce public trust in vaccination?

7. Further links

"Protecting health, saving life", general video on vaccination
http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I154315&sitelang=en&lg=EN

Overview on vaccination in Europe - European Commission
https://ec.europa.eu/health/vaccination/overview_en

Monthly measles and rubella monitoring report - ECDC and TESSy
https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/monthly-measles-and-rubella-monitoring-report-september-2018

Highlighting young adults and healthcare workers as groups that are susceptible to measles - ECDC
https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/ecdc-rapid-risk-assessment-highlights-young-adults-and-healthcare-workers-groups-are

Measles outbreaks continue to occur in a number of EU countries. - ECDC
https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/measles-outbreaks-still-ongoing-2018-and-fatalities-reported-four-countries

Rapid risk assessment; risk of measles transmission in the EU -ECDC
https://ecdc.europa.eu/sites/portal/files/documents/Measles-rapid-risk-assessment-European-Union-countries_0.pdf

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

Oceans of plastic: With the increasing issue of plastic waste around the world and many Member States transporting their waste to Asia, how should the EU take responsibility of its waste and tackle the global growing problem of plastic waste?

By Rebekka Sohns (CH

1.The topic at a glance

Up to 13 million tons of plastic waste end up in the world's oceans every year and single-use plastic products and abandoned fishing gear constitute together 70% of all marine litter items. Plastic pollution harms not only the ocean but also devastates local economies, harms the income of fishermen and destroys tourism potential. With the amount of harmful plastic litter in oceans and seas growing ever greater, shifting to a circular economy is of utmost importance. Facing issues of global warming, food security and a fast-growing population, it is essential to close the gap between consumption and production.

One of the first things that come into mind when thinking about recycling is plastic. Due to its unique characteristics of being versatile and highly resource efficient, plastic has enabled innovation in many sectors, such as construction, packaging, transportation and in the medical field. As a result it has become a key material in our daily lives. After products made out of plastic have reached the end of their lifespan, they can be reused to a certain extent but ultimately end up as waste. Therefore plastic waste needs to be considered as another resource in order to close the gap and ensure a circular economy.

However, less than 44% of the 25m tonnes of plastic waste that Europeans generated in 2014, was collected for recycling. Many EU Member States do not have adequate infrastructure to recycle their own plastic, therefore it is widely sent overseas to be recycled and turned into new products. However concerns have arisen that instead of being recycled, the plastic waste we Europeans produce, is dumped in landfill sites in countries such as Turkey or Malaysia.

2. Key Terms

- **Plastic** can be divided up into two sub-categories: Thermosets, also known as **single-use plastic**, can only be used once, such as silicone and polyurethane. **Thermoplastics**, such as PET, can be reheated and reshaped and therefore used repeatedly.
- **Microplastic** is the most harmful type of plastic, as it breaks down into small particles that get eaten by animals and permeate into our waterways.
- **Waste management** is the collection, transportation, and disposal of garbage, sewage and other waste products.
- A **circular economy** is a system where resource inputs, waste and emissions are minimised, which is achieved through maintenance, recycling and upcycling. This is in contrast to a linear economy which is a 'take, make, dispose' model of production.
- The purpose of a **landfill** is to bury waste between layers of soil, without coming in contact with groundwater or air. In such conditions waste does not decompose.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders
- First and foremost, there are the **governments** of EU Member States, which can draw up budgets according to their priorities and introduce new legislature in the field. They can utilise public broadcasting to communicate messages and can appeal to young people in the way they work and the values they promote.
- **PlasticsEurope** is a leading European association that represents plastics manufacturers active in the European plastics industry. Their goal is to improve quality of life by enabling innovation, facilitating resource efficiency and enhancing climate protection. Its platform provides leaders with the opportunity to proactively address emerging issues before they grow and become too complex and expensive for the industry and society to manage.
- On an EU level, the **European Commission** represents the ideological backbone of the European Union and develops medium-term strategies. It cannot only initiate legislation on the subject of reducing the pollution of oceans due to plastic, but it can also provide funding

to programmes and organisations in the field, develop best practices and generally spread know-how and expertise in order to further its cause.
- There are also the **European citizens** themselves, who would benefit the most from litter free oceans. Yet they are also the ones who have to act should anything be achieved in the matter, whether due to their own motivation or external influences.

4. What has been done so far?

In January 2018 the first European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy was adopted and its aim is to revolutionise the way plastic products are designed, used, produced and recycled in the EU. Better design of plastic products and higher plastic waste recycling rates will help boost the market for recycled plastics. It will deliver greater added value for a more competitive, sustainable plastics industry.

The strategy is part of Europe's transition towards a circular economy, and will also contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, the global climate commitments and the EU's industrial policy objectives. This strategy will help protect our environment, reduce marine litter, greenhouse gas emissions and our dependence on imported fossil fuels. It will support more sustainable and safer consumption and production patterns for plastics. An example out of the guidelines is to ban the use of plastic in certain products, such as cutlery, straws and cotton buds, which are all single-use plastic products. Such products would in that case be required to be made out of sustainable materials such as cardboard. Also there are set targets to reduce the consumption of food containers and plastic bags by ensuring that such cannot be provided free of charge. Collection goals have been put into place meaning that Member States will be obliged to collect 90% of single-use plastic drinking bottles by 2025 for example through deposit refund schemes. New port reception facilities have been created to take in waste brought in by ships, which will attempt to facilitate the process of waste management to ensure less gets dumped in the oceans.

5. Key Conflicts

Previously, Member States have been getting rid of part of their waste by exporting it to poor Asian countries, despite the fact that many of those developing nations lack the capacity to manage such waste. China alone took in 45 % of the world's plastic waste imports. Then at the start of this year, it refused to take more, due to local environmental concerns. China's ban on the import of plastic waste poses a serious threat to the recycling industry as nations are struggling to find new buyers. Until now this mode of waste management was the cheapest. On one hand this change in China's import policy forces countries to manage and recycle their own waste, making it easier to control and regulate. Thus more jobs are created and local economies benefit as well. On the other hand this policy could negatively affect Member States, who do not have the economic means to finance waste management in their country due to the absence of sufficient waste management facilities. This development could mean an end to the recycling of certain types of plastic and increase the risk of environmental pollution. Consequently this poses an extensive challenge for governments and legislators to find new and innovative solutions to tackle the issues of plastic pollution. Projects such as The Ocean Cleanup are trying to remove plastic from the oceans on a large scale but in the end it is only a quick fix since it does not provide a long-term solution. Recent developments show that the plastic pollution crisis is too big for recycling to fix. Recycling alone will never stem the flow of plastics into our ocean. The problem must be addressed at the source. This is where we as individuals come into play. As European Commission President Juncker said in his State of the Union Address on 13 September 2017: *"Europe must ensure we make our planet great again. It is the shared heritage of all of humanity."* We are the ones who buy, consume and get rid of plastic products, therefore it is our duty to contribute to a circular economy. To

achieve that, many factors need to be taken into account in order to successfully reduce the plastic pollution in our oceans. One factor is human behaviour, which is not easy to change, since humans have been proven to be creatures of habit. Thus creative ideas are needed to change the 'buy, use and dispose' mentality of the current generation. To change our consumption patterns the consumer needs adequate information on the production process of each product that he intends to buy. Better labeling alone will not protect the consumer, corporations such as Coca-Cola, Unilever, Starbucks and Nestlé, who produce single-use plastic bottles, cups and straws need to address the concerns and actively take part in developing new and innovative products that do not harm the environment. Solely banning certain products, such as plastic bags, straws and cups are a great start, however they cannot begin to touch the problems caused by microplastic, which harm marine life and indirectly us as consumers too. In conclusion it can be said that prevention has priority over cleaning up.

6. Questions to consider

- How can we ensure that being environmentally friendly is not a privilege reserved for the rich but a right for everyone?
- Local communities benefit massively from the plastic industry due to more jobs being created, however can that balance out the cost of recycling plastic in Europe instead of Asia?
- Can consumption patterns of consumers be addressed and changed without violating freedom of choice?
- Should taxes be imposed on single-use plastics to make them less financially attractive to consumers or will that only cause prices to rise?
- Can we trust consumers and individuals, if provided with enough information, to make changes to their lifestyles themselves, or is more forceful government action needed?

7. Further links

An in-depth explanation of the meaning behind a circular economy:
https://www.arcadis.com/media/9/D/3/%7B9D33B0CB-3F9D-4C16-9C74-B763D4BA442C%7DBriefing%20Paper%20-The%20Circular%20Economy_002.pdf

A factsheet by the European Commission about the EU Plastics Strategy:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/plastics-factsheet-global-action_en.pdf

General information about single-use plastics by the European Commission:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/pdf/single-use_plastics_factsheet.pdf

An analysis of European plastics production, demand and waste data:
https://www.plasticseurope.org/application/files/5715/1717/4180/Plastics_the_facts_2017_FINAL_for_website_one_page.pdf

Further facts and figures about marine litter: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/ioc-oceans/focus-areas/rio-20-ocean/blueprint-for-the-future-we-want/marine-pollution/facts-and-figures-on-marine-pollution/

Committee on International Trade (INTA)

The American trade war: In regards to recent developments in trade relations between the EU and the United States of America, what steps should the EU take to normalise trade relations with the US?

By Camille Kohn (LU) & Patricija Zorne (LV)

1. The topic at a glance

With the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America in November 2016, a political shock went through the world. A populist wave, paved by the referendum on Brexit in the United Kingdom the year before, flooded through America and made it possible for Trump's signature political view of "America first" to gain ground.

President Trump's trade policies are considered to be protectionist, and the already strained Sino-American relations have only been worsened by Trump's announcement of tariffs on Chinese goods exported to America.

However, China is not the only country to be targeted by Trump's trade policies. The European Union (EU) has also been a target of protectionist measures by the White House. In May 2018, Trump announced tariffs on imported steel and aluminium coming from the EU, prompting the EU to retaliate by imposing its own tariffs on American goods. The developing trade war could only be softened by the intervention of Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Commission President in June 2018, which has led to eased tensions.

With the danger of a full-blown trade war between two of the world's major economies still looming, especially considering President Trump's rather quick changes of mind, the European Union needs to be careful trying to find a balance between its own economic interests and trying not to destroy a long-standing friendship between Brussels and Washington.

2. Key Terms

- A **trade war** is an economic conflict between two or more countries in which the countries impose tariffs or overly subsidise their production, thus trying to under- value the competition. The ultimate outcome of a trade war is either the crushing of the more dependent rival or an economic crisis.
- **Tariffs** are taxes charged on foreign imports. The purpose of a tariff is to raise the price of imports in relation to domestically produced goods, hopefully making consumers choose domestically produced goods over imported ones.
- **Protectionism** is the economic policy of restricting imports from other countries through methods such as tariffs on imported goods, import quotas, and a variety of other government regulations.
- **Free trade** is the policy of eliminating trade restrictions. It is the idea of the free market, applied to international trade.
- A **subsidy** occurs when the government has a need to lower the price of a product and increase quantity produced (encourage production). To achieve that, governments make payments to producers. In the context of international trade, subsidies are given to domestic producers to increase their international competitiveness.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders

- **World Trade Organization (WTO)** - an intergovernmental organization that regulates international trade and establishes a framework for trade policies.
- **European Commission -** EU's executive body, and its representative to the world in trade negotiations and trade related matters.
- **United States of America -** It was with the announcement of the president, Donald Trump, in which he expressed his intention to impose massive steel and aluminum tariffs on the EU, which marked the start for worse trade relations between the US and the EU.

4. What has been done so far?

Negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) were started in 2013 to reach a customs and free trade agreement between the US and the EU. It was expected to be finished in 2016, but due to a range of objections to some controversial details of the plan and concerns about its impact, the talks were halted indefinitely in 2016.

There is also international trade law which is based on agreements and treaties among countries, often associated with the WTO. Because of the fact that they are members of this organisation they have to follow the principles and the rules of the WTO which include non-discrimination of sovereign states and the reduction of tariffs and quotas.

European Commission President Juncker and US President Trump came to a number of agreements in their July 2018 meeting to prevent a trade war between the EU and US. The EU will import billions of dollars more in US soybeans and liquefied natural gas, and both sides will work together toward zero tariffs and other economic barriers on non-auto industrial goods. The US for now will not place a 25 percent tariff on European cars coming into the US, something Trump had previously threatened to do. They would also stop any future tariffs while they continue to negotiate over Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs placed last May.

5. Key Conflicts

While the EU and the US have always had different point of views on political topics, one can say with confidence that the two have been good partners in the past. The EU enjoys its cooperation and cohesion partly due to a past American will to see their European allies working together.

President Trump has broken with this approach: he openly criticized the EU on many occasions, considering it to be a "foe", a "competitor", and the UK to be "better off" without the EU. This partial dislike towards the European Union is especially visible in his trade policies: he considers trade tariffs to be "the greatest" and is keen on criticising economic decisions of his NATO allies, many of them in the EU.

Although the situation has noticeably de-escalated since June 2018 as Trump and Juncker together declared a "zero tariff" deal in the White House Rose Garden, caution should remain. Bart Oosterveld, director of the global business and economics programme at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, has described the deal not as a success but rather the "avoidance of a disaster". Keeping in mind the President's frequent U-turns on important political decisions, the situation could deteriorate again very quickly.

It is important to note that the US does have a trade deficit with the EU in regards to steel and aluminium, meaning that more goods are exported from the EU to the US than vice versa. This is crucial to the understanding of the whole crisis as "for Trump, defence and trade are very much linked: his tariffs were introduced on grounds of national security and the need to rely less on imports from supposed allies."

One cannot possibly analyse purely trade-related questions without taking into consideration the general socioeconomic consequences of trade wars. Having a trade war ultimately means higher costs of the concerned consumer goods, leading to a weaker purchasing power for consumers. Employment is also likely to fall in countries hit by trade tariffs due to increased production costs for companies. The resulting consequences in a world still weakened by the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008 are obvious: high unemployment and political frustration are poison for liberal democracies and a stepping stone for populist movements all over Europe.

Whilst Donald Trump defends his practices as fair and necessary, it is also dubious if his tariffs are even legal: the EU has opened a WTO case against the US, under the leadership of Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström.

Steel and aluminium
Trade between US and EU 2017

— Iron and steel   — Aluminium

$5.2bn
$2.1bn
$1.1bn
$1.2bn
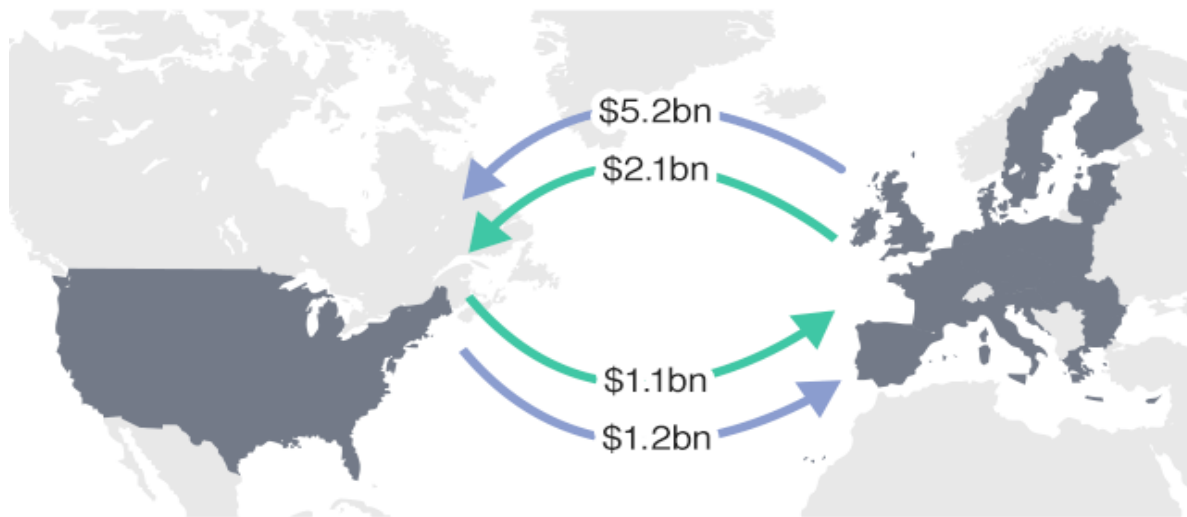
Source: UN Comtrade Database

BBC

6. Questions to consider

- How does the trade war between the US and the EU differ from other trade wars the US has been engaged in?
- How can the EU ensure reasonable retaliation measures against possible future trade tariffs whilst trying to stop the situation from escalating?
- Has the EU tried to engage with other countries on the subject? How are other countries' positions on the trade war?
- In what way does the trade war fit into a bigger picture of a political crisis between the EU and the US?

7. Further links

A video from Vox explaining trade wars

European Commission: A new phase in our Transatlantic partnership

Resume of the Commission of the meeting between Juncker and Trump as well as their official statement

New York Times on the role of the WTO in regard to Trump's policies
Information from the European Commission on the EU's trade relationship with the United States

Committee on Industry, Technology and Research (ITRE)

Sweden is about to meet its EU 2030 renewable energy targets this year. How can the EU ensure a secure and sustainable energy system across Member States whilst keeping in mind the EU 2030 energy targets?

By Linda Vaher (EE)

1. Topic at glance

The European way of life depends on diverse supplies of energy both right now and in the future. However, with the EU producing only 7% of the world's energy, it is clear that it is not sustainable in the long term, especially when considering that **the EU is producing less than half of the energy it is consuming**, with close to one third of the energy produced being nuclear.

While EU-produced energy includes 20% from renewable sources, the EU is still dependent on external sources, especially when it comes to crude oil and natural gas, with annual energy imports of about 400 billion euros. Furthermore, **the dependence on a limited number of countries leaves the EU vulnerable to disruptions** and open to political manipulations when negotiating with trade partners as the prices of energy imports can vary between member states, due to geopolitical reasons .

The power links between the Member States are also lacking as there are more than 150 gas and electricity connectors needed for interconnections that would allow transportation electricity across borders according to the priority energy projects list released by the European Commission. Only 17 countries have managed to hit the goal of building more energy connectors despite the deadline for completion, set by the European Council in the 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy, being in 2020. However, a strategy for helping the Member States build additional energy and gas connectors by 2030 has been set.

Lastly, is also important to note that Member States are resistant to the idea of handing over any amount of control to the EU concerning their energy suppliers and a mix of sources as it is written in the Lisbon Treaty that Member States have right to make their own national policies regarding energy mix.
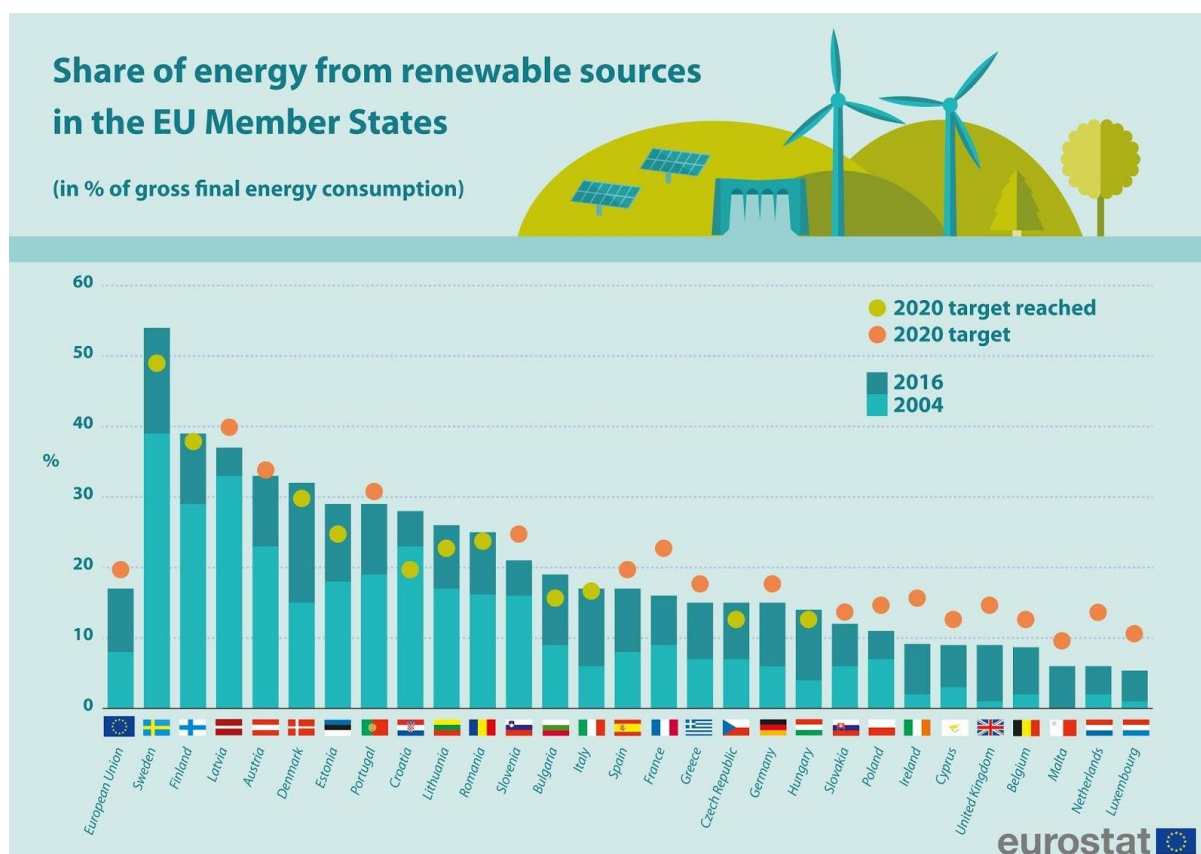
2. Key Terms

- **The 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy**: A communication setting out a framework for the EU climate and energy policies for the 2020-2030 period. The targets include a 27% share of renewable energy consumption, 27% target of energy efficiency by 2020 and electricity interconnection target of 15% by 2030.
- **The Energy Union**: The EU's Energy Union strategy, which is made up of five closely related and mutually reinforcing dimensions, including a fully integrated energy market, energy efficiency and decarbonising the economy.
- **Internal Energy Market:** The EU internal market for the products and services of the energy sector.
- **Energy efficiency:** The ratio of amount of performance, service, goods or energy received to the input of energy.
- **Projects of Common Interest (PCI)**: Key infrastructure projects that link the energy systems of EU countries. They are intended to help the EU achieve its energy policy and climate objectives.
- **Primary energy**: Energy that is harvested directly from natural resources, such as crude oil, wind and natural gas.
- **Renewable energy:** Any naturally occurring, theoretically inexhaustible source of energy, such as biomass, solar, wind, tidal, wave, and hydroelectric power, that is not derived from fossil or nuclear fuel.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders

- **The European Commission:** The European Commission is the EU's politically independent executive arm. It is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation and implementing the decisions of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. The Commission's Energy Department is responsible for the EU's energy policy and strategies
- **The European Council:** The European Council defines the EU's overall political direction and priorities. It is not one of the EU's legislating bodies, so the Council does not negotiate or adopt EU laws. One of the long-term priority areas are energy and climate policies.
- **The EU Member State:** The 28 countries that are part of the EU. Through the Lisbon Treaty they retain right to frame their own national energy policies.
- **The Russian Federation:** A neighbouring country of the EU and the world's largest natural gas reserve. It is by far the largest supplier of both natural gas and crude oil to the EU, surpassing all other suppliers.
- **Gazprom:** A global Russian energy company, mostly owned by the Russian state. The largest supplier of natural gas to Europe and Turkey. A shareholder in both the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 project.

4.What has been done so far?

Between 2005 to 2015, **the share of renewable energy in consumption almost doubled in the EU**, while consumption of energy itself went down, mainly due to improved energy efficiency.

The quantity of renewable energy being produced by EU Member States has also increased from the beginning of the 2000s until now, the average increase being 5.3% per year, with the EU-28 producing 211 million tonnes of oil equivalent (toe) in 2016 - most of the energy being generated from hydropower.

With the year 2020 around the corner, **11 countries among the 28 Member States have already hit their national goal of energy from renewable sources**, lead by Sweden, Finland and Latvia, while the EU itself is about 4% away from the goal. As renewables will play a key role in European

energy needs after 2020, in June 2018 the Member States agreed to set a new goal for the 2030 targets of 32% renewable energy, with plans for a review in 2023 on whether or not the goal should be raised even higher.

As for reducing the dependency on Russian gas, different approaches have been taken. On one hand Poland and Lithuania have built liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, resulting in a 11% and 22% drop in their fuel import bill respectively between 2014 and 2018, while the South Europe Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is 76% completed as of second quarter of 2018. The TAP has been named as one of the Projects of Common Interest for its role in opening up the Southern Gas Corridor, an EU concept at the heart of its energy strategy. **The new pipeline will further diversify and strengthen energy supplies to Europe and add to the number of sources from which Europe receives natural gas**.

5. Key Conflicts

One of the biggest conflicts when it comes to energy security in Europe is the disagreement on the Nord Stream 2 project, with Western European countries (or their companies) being stakeholders in the said project but many of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) and the European Commission opposing the pipeline. It is also important to note that the original Nord Stream pipeline was not well received either with Estonia and Lithuania, as well as their neighbour Poland, being especially vocal about their opposition, citing possible ecological damage and security concerns.

Environmentalists in both Germany and Russia, alongside the opposition of the pipeline, have heavily criticised the Nord Stream 2, with later arguing that the pipeline is a threat to the Kurgansky reserve, a coastal Baltic refuge home to rare animals such as Baltic ringed seal and around 250 species of birds, located about 20 kilometers from the border of Estonia.

Opposition has also brought up the fact that the sensitive and vulnerable ecosystem of the Baltic Sea is also littered with World War II era bombs and other toxic substances such as chemical weapons, thus calling for more and better data before taking action.

In 2014, Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, proposed an Energy Union that included a single mechanism to negotiate energy contracts. While the idea of an Energy Union was picked up, the idea of common gas-purchasing platform has since been dropped, since Member States are reluctant to give control of their energy sectors to the EU as energy policy is seen as a fundamental element of national sovereignty.

Deriving from that, as Member States are in charge of their own national energy policies, the Nord Stream pipelines also shine light on another serious problem that comes with imported energy from external sources - the vastly different opinions of Western and Central & Eastern Europe on the reliance of the Russian natural gas. While Western Europe see the pipelines as easy access to cheap natural gas, Central and Eastern Europe see it as a reduction in the diversification of European energy sources, and would in turn like to find other sources as CEEC generally pay more for Russian natural gas than their fellow Member States in the Western Europe.

Arguments have also been made that instead of a "speak with a single voice" strategy that the European Commission has suggested for external energy market, "a polyphony of coordinated voices" would be as suitable, if not moreso.

Introduced in 2017, The Gas Supply Regulation was created to help prevent potential supply disruptions and respond to them if they happen. It introduced the solidarity principle: Member States must help each other to always guarantee gas supply to the most vulnerable consumers even in severe gas crisis situations. However, when it came time to take action in the following winter, some

Member States failed to help their neighbours due to huge demands at home, mirroring the question that is in much of the political discussions in Europe - how to balance national interests with broader solidarity. With many of the Member States also failing to meet the [2020 goal of 10% interconnectivity](), it is clear that further debate on the subject is needed.

6. Questions to consider

- How can the EU help the rest of the Member States reach the 2020 renewable energy targets and diversify their energy suppliers?
- Should the Member States focus more on upgrading EU wide connecting energy infrastructure or instead focus more on national production of renewable energies?
- What further steps can, if they even should, be taken to motivate the Member States to present a united front with common goals when negotiating with external energy suppliers?

7.Further research

A collection of introductory videos about the topic:
- https://youtu.be/6nMVZWtcFHw
- https://youtu.be/I8Wj6qQVCrQ
- https://youtu.be/RK0BkKHAZ8Y
- https://youtu.be/6MlMJaOdmdE

Third Report on the State of Energy Union by European Commision
https://bit.ly/2jsjTPX

EU Energy Policy under the Treaty of Lisbon Rules: Between a new policy and business as usual by Jan Frederik Braun
https://bit.ly/2pOPWNx

LNG Versus Russian Gas In Central And Eastern Europe: Playing Poker On A Continental Scale
https://bit.ly/2OkvZwV

From Single Voice to Coordinated Polyphony EU Energy Policy and the External Dimension by Jörn Richert
https://bit.ly/2NFKPc9

Committee on Regional Development (REGI)

Too far to reach: Europe's peripheral regions. As Europe continues to urbanise, how can the EU reduce regional inequalities and guarantee services, such as education and healthcare, to all its citizens?

By Danylo Bobylov (UA) and Karoliina Kondylis (FI)

1. The topic at a glance

Inequalities between European regions has been a concern of the European Union (EU) since its creation. Consequently, so has the extent of which national governments or EU intervention can help reduce them. This includes many spheres of life, such as education, healthcare, economical situation, employment and so on.

Currently, the EU consists of 28 Member States, all at different levels of development and living standard. Many think that all Member States are equal and no difference exists between them. However, research shows educational or healthcare inequalities especially in the last countries to join the Union, such as Croatia and Romania. Medical inequality also exists within EU. Some Member States also lack the funds to buy high-quality equipment to make better research. The reason behind it can be a problematic financial and economic situation of individual Member States.

Different levels of unemployment in EU regions also poses a serious problem in the equal development of all Member States. Workers in EU countries can't find jobs because they haven't got enough skills for the available jobs. As we can see that all these things are connected and should be equal to all citizens. That is why it is highly important to find the key problems and solutions of the issue and fight for equality in all regions of the EU.

2. Key Terms

- **Regional development:** is the provision of aid and other assistance to regions which are less economically developed. Regional development may be domestic or international in nature.
- **Equality:** is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and believing that no one should have poorer chances in life due to their place of birth, gender, the social and economic background of their parents or because of other characteristics.
- **Regional disparity (inequality):** is the uneven distribution of income or other variables, such as education across different regions.
- **Educational inequality:** is the unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to: school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, and technologies.

3. Key Actors and Stakeholders

- **National governments:** the main actors in the regional development of every EU country.
- **European Commission:** The European Commission (EC) is responsible for forming the overall EU system and strategy, suggesting new EU legislation and policies, making sure everything is run the way it's supposed to and fixing the EU budget. It is also of high importance regarding the support of international development and aid delivery. Along with the other main EU institutions, the European Commission develops the overall strategy and political direction of the EU.
- **European Health Parliament:** is a platform of 55 young professionals/students from across Europe, which is fighting for a high level of medicine throughout the EU Member States.
- **The Cohesion Fund:** An EU fund that aims to reduce economic and social disparities between Member States. Is aimed at Member States with a Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant less that 90% of the EU average. Currently provides funds to Member States, such as Estonia, Croatia, Poland and Portugal.
- **The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF):** Aims for social and economic cohesion and decreasing regional inequality. Provides funding for the areas of: innovation and research, the digital agenda, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a low-carbon economy.

- **European Social Fund (ESF):** An EU Fund promoting educational and employment opportunities across the EU.

4. What has been done so far?

In between 2007-2012, the European Union has managed to create 769 000 job opportunities, invest in more than 200 000 small businesses, it has sponsored 72 000 research projects and improved the overall living standards in European cities using 11 000 projects. In addition, it has brought a broadband coverage to 5 million EU citizens. Regarding healthcare, countries such as Finland and Belgium have achieved a significant increase in the equal distribution of health services. Data recorded in 2016 show extensive inequalities regarding the distribution of income in the EU. In the EU, the top 20% of the population (with the highest income) received 5,2 times more income than the bottom 20%. This ratio varied considerably across the Member States, from 3,5 in the Czech Republic and 3,6 in Slovenia, Slovakia and Finland, to for example 6,0 to 8,2 in Bulgaria, 7,1 in Lithuania and 7,0 in Romania.

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation

2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies

3. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs

4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy

5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management

6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency

7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructures

8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination

10. Investing in education, training and lifelong learning

11. Improving the efficiency of public administration

The EU's Regional development priorities for 2014-2020

5. Key Conflicts

Educational inequality in the EU regions is higher than it might seem. This situation can be the result for example of national ministries' disinterested in the development of peripheral area educational. Lower quality and availability of education can lead to low-quality workers, which can stand in the way of developing a strong economic and financial system of the EU region.

Health inequality shows the differences in health status or the distribution of health determinants between population groups. The Jacques Delors Institute has stated that "Universal access to quality healthcare has to be regarded as one of the core aims of European welfare states." Unfortunately, the EU has failed to equally distribute health services around its Member States. Health inequalities mostly affect low-income households. Countries with strict austerity measures, such as Greece and Latvia have met an important decrease in medical care for lower incomes. Medical inequalities can also affect peripheral areas within a country, with long distances and lack of access to quality healthcare.

Given that Member States have vastly different average incomes and the disparity between earnings in capital and peripheral regions within Member States, income inequality is an important problem in the EU. Being a hardworking person with equal talents and abilities can bring you different incomes in different EU countries. Furthermore, not every region offers similar opportunities for workers: people [tend to move to larger cities and capitals in pursuit of better schools and employment opportunities](). At the same time, the EU attempts to improve territorial cohesion, making every part of the country contribute to economic progress, through the use of [European Structural and Investment Funds](). Furthermore, it should be obvious that not everybody can live in cities, and city life has a number of unique challenges, such as [higher levels of pollution, crime and people living in expensive rental apartments](). EU's regional policy might be fighting an uphill battle but it is necessary nonetheless. The financial support of the EU is one of the main keys to development in Member States and solving this problem is a stepping stone to equality in other spheres of life.

Income inequality - quintile share ratio, 2016
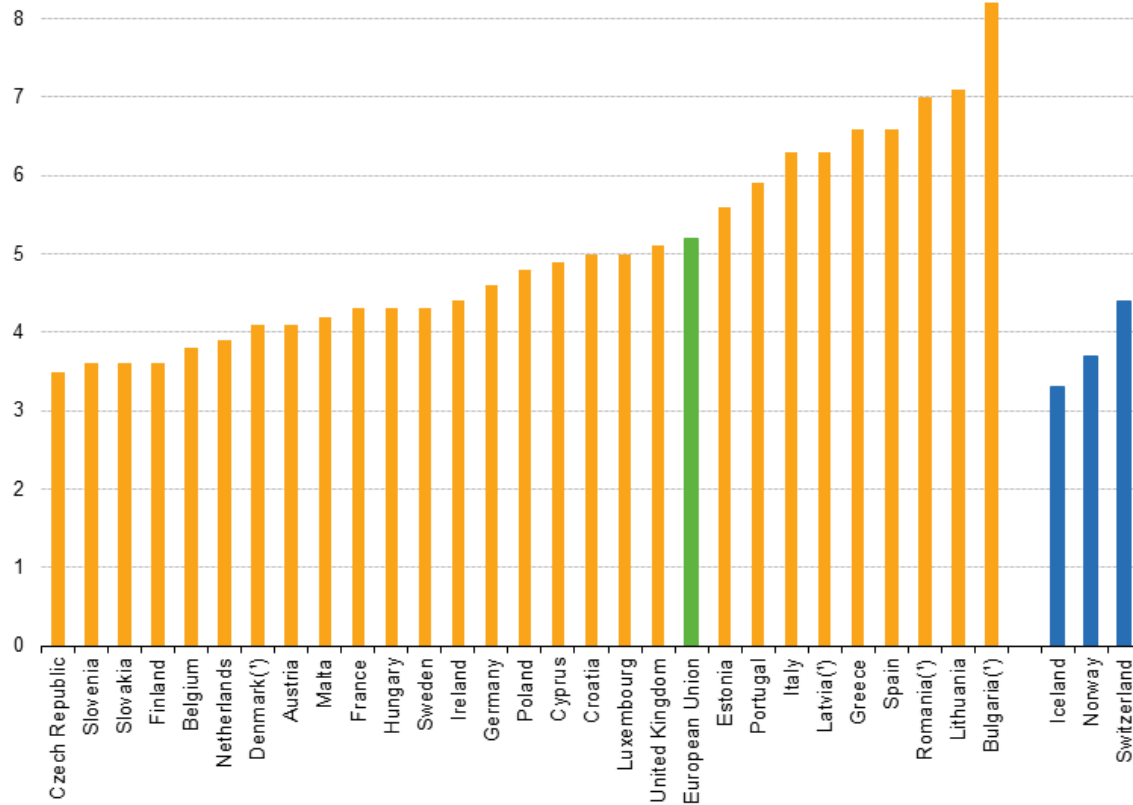
(¹) 2017 data

ec.europa.eu/**eurostat**

The [share of income](#) going to the top 20% of the population in EU Member States.

6. Questions to consider

- What key problems can be attributed to regional inequalities in the EU?
- How do inequalities in the educational system of specific Member States affect the EU as a whole?
- Given that basic education takes years to complete, what should the EU and Member States do to combat high unemployment?
- If the Member State's budget only allows one of the two options, should it prioritise financing a few central hospitals or lots of regional health centres?

7. Further links

European Commission - Homepage of EU Regional Policy
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/investment-policy/

Intereconomics - Immeasurable Inequality in the European Union
https://archive.intereconomics.eu/year/2011/1/immeasurable-inequality-in-the-european-union/search/green+growth/40/

Bruegel - Income inequality begins to fall once again
http://bruegel.org/2018/04/european-income-inequality-begins-to-fall-once-again/

Euronews - Which countries have the worst income inequality in Europe?
https://www.euronews.com/2018/04/26/which-countries-have-the-worst-income-inequality-in-europe-

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