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Bachelor's Thesis

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**Attitude towards environmental issues: Dutch, Italian, Estonian and
Bulgarian example**

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SUHTUMINE KESKKONNAPROBLEEMIDESSE: HOLLANDI, ITAALIA, EESTI JA BULGAARIA NÄITEL

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Resümee

Keskkonnamuutused on olnud probleemiks juba pikemat aega, kuid siiski ei mõista mitmed riigid kliimaprobleemide olulisust ning ei adu nende probleemide tõsisust. Seetõttu käiakse fossiilkütuste tootmisega väga kergekäeliselt ümber ja kasutatakse loodusressurse ebaotstarbeliselt, sageli keskendudes majanduslikele kasumitele, mitte globaalsetele kliimatagajärgedele. Mõistmata sellise käitumise tagajärgi, ei ole võimalik liikuda rohelisema energiatootmise ning taastuenergia arendamise suunas.

Et tuua keskkonnaprobleemidele rohkem tähelepanu, näitab see töö, kuidas erinevad Euroopa Liidu liikmesriigid neid probleeme lahendavad ning nendesse suhtuvad. Selles töös käsitletakse nelja liikmesriiki – Hollandit, Itaaliat, Eestit ja Bulgaariat. Riikide seisukohtade ja tegevuste uurimiseks on käsitletud riikide individuaalseid keskkonnaga seotud probleeme ja samme kliimaprobleemide leevendamiseks aastatel 2013-2018. Lisaks on uuritud valitud riikide Euroopa Parlamendi liikmete hääletusmustreid seoses olulisemate keskkonnaprobleemidega tegelevate ettepanekute suhtes.

Tulemused näitavad, et kõik antud riigid töötavad keskkonnaparandamise suunas, kuid erinevates mastaapides. Valitud riigid võitlevad erinevate probleemidega, olgu selleks kas õhu- ja põhjaveereostus, ebaseaduslik jäätmete kogumine ja hoiustamine, liigne kasvuhoonegaaside heitmine või vanade, ressursse koormavate tootmispraktikate harrastamine. Samuti mängivad olulist rolli riikide võimalused uute ning keskkonnale paremate tootmisviiside rakendamine, nende vajadus ning majanduslikud väljavaated.

Hollandi majandustegevus toetub suuresti naftatoodete tootmisele ja kasutamisele, mis on kaasa toonud tööstus- ja põllumajandusreostuse. Samal ajal on Holland üks eeskujulikematest taastuenergia kasutajatest ja arendajatest ning on eeskostjaks puhtama õhu ning kasvuhoonegaaside vähendamise vallas.

Itaalia jaoks on suurimaks väljakutseks jäätmete ebaseaduslikud kaadamiskohad, mis põhjustavad lisaks ebameeldivate aroomide levitamisele ka tõsiseid haigusi. Samuti on

Itaalias üle 15 linna, mille õhusaasted on 30 kõrgema hulgas kogu Euroopas. Kuigi riigiametnike võitlus antud probleemidega on olnud aastaid ebaefektiivne, siis Euroopa Parlamendi liikmed Itaaliast mõistavad keskkonnaprobleemide käsitlemise olulisust, sageli hääletades oma erakondadele vastu, olles erinevate keskkonnaga seonduvate probleemide parendamise poolt.

Suurimaks probleemiks Eestis on energiatootmisest tulenev reostus, mille vastu võitlemiseks valitsus on astunud, edendades taaskasutust, puhtamaid tootmisviise ja efektiivsemaid ning keskkonnasõbralikemaid kaevandamis- ning põlevkivipraktikaid. Olles ühk suurimatest kasvuhoone- ning muude mürgiste gaaside levitajatest, on Eesti teinud olulisi valikuid selle vähendamiseks, sulgedes riigi suurimad saastajad – tuhamäed Kiviõlis ja Kohtla-Järvel.

Eesti esindajad Euroopa Parlamendis hääletavad enamasti vastavalt oma poliitilistele erakondadele, sageli olles uute kliimasõbralike ideede poolt.

Bulgaaria, olles Euroopa Liidu vaeseim liikmesriik, vaevleb majanduslikes raskustes, mis mõjutab ka riigi keskkonnaparandamise protsessi tähtsust. Siiski on tehtud selles vallas edusamme, 2014. aastal loodud Kliimamuutuste Leevendamise Seaduse vastuvõtmisega, mille eesmärgiks on tagada roheliste investeeringute olemasolu ning vähendada kasvuhoonegaaside levitamist.

Bulgaaria Euroopa Parlamendi liikmed on näidanud kliimaparandamise vajadust, hääletades keskkonda parandavate aktsioonide poolt, isegi kui see on vastuolus nende erakondade vaadetega.

Tuleb tõdeda, et nii riikide valitsustes kui Euroopa Liidus seaduste ning tegevusplaanide koostamisel peab arvestama ka muid aspekte kui vaid mõju keskkonnale. Oluline on tagada riikide stabilised majanduslikud seisukorrad ja ettevõtete tegevused. Samuti lähtuvad ametnikud ka oma isiklikest eelistustest ning riikide keskkonnaarengu- ja rakendusvõimetest.

Abstract

Environmental issues and climate change affect all areas of life on earth, and all the environmental issues are being affected by many aspects of human activity. This paper studies the attitudes different countries from the European Union have towards environmental issues. The countries addressed are the Netherlands, Italy, Estonia and Bulgaria, out of which the first two joined the European Union in it's earlier days and the latter two more recently.

To understand the attitudes towards environmental and climate issues, each states' individual environmental actions are studied in addition to research about their Representatives votes in the European Parliament.

As a result, it is safe to say all countries mentioned in this paper work towards improving the environment and climate problems, although facing different obstacles. The actions taken by the countries vary in size and frequency due to each states' economical prospects, abilities and necessities.

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1. Introduction

The environmental changes have been a pressing issue in the world for years, yet many of the countries today fail to recognize the extent of the problem. This reason largely contributes to the impudent use of fossil fuels and other activities closely related to causing the environmental challenges we face. Without recognizing the problem, there is little hope for more green energy production, reducing the wastefulness and adapting to new renewable energy methods.

Therefore, to shed a light on the environmental problems and how they are tackled, or in some cases, ignored, this paper concentrates on four countries, members of the European Union (EU), and their willingness to implement environmental EU laws and legislations, their attitude towards environmental problems outside EU directives and their overall adaptability to newer, greener methods in favour of environmental betterment.

The four states examined in this paper will be the Netherlands, being part of the EU since 1995; Italy, which in 1957 was one of the six states that founded the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community; Estonia, which joined in 2004 and Bulgaria, part of the EU since 2007.

The Netherlands is a country often set as an example for renewable energy consumption. It ranks eighteenth on the Environmental Performance Index (2018) and 38th on the Global Ecological Footprint list (2014), which measures human demand on nature. The Environmental Performance Index is a method of numerically marking and quantifying the environmental performance of a state's policies, taking into account ten categories, covering ecosystem vitality and environmental health.

As Ben Coates (2015) writes, the facade of the Netherlands depicts the country to be very environmentally conscious, yet according to the World Bank, the carbon emissions are among the highest in Europe and despite the rhetoric on environmental problems, the Netherlands is falling short on meeting the Kyoto protocol targets to reduce emissions.

Italy is seen as notorious in damaging the climate, mostly because of illegal waste dumping. The waste disposal issues first started in the Southern part of the peninsula, around Naples and have now become a problem also in Rome. Nevertheless, it ranks 48th on the Ecological

Footprint list in 2014 and the Environmental Performance Index (2018) puts it on the 16th position.

The main problems in Estonia, as seen by the European Commission, is the resource intensity of the industry, as well as waste handling. Estonia is on top of the list in terms of resource intensity in the EU states (Ministry of the Environment 2017) and is one of the worst power polluters in terms of CO₂ emissions (Harris 2017). The country is believed to be the most progressive of the Baltic States, but the environmental indicators put it on the sixteenth position on the Global Footprint (2014) rank and 48th on the Environmental Performance Index (2018). On the other hand, Estonia has been praised for the quality of air and water, as well as the biodiversity and eco-innovation (Ministry of the Environment 2017).

The last country in question is Bulgaria, one of EU's biggest polluters (Hakim 2013, Reuters 2017c), resulting in a reprimand from the EU court in 2017 (Reuters 2017c). Bulgaria is the poorest member state of the EU, yet a country with one of the smallest ecological footprints in Europe, ranking 73rd (Global Footprint Network 2014). On the Environmental Performance Index, Bulgaria ranks 30th and is perhaps a new rising star in renewable energy consumption (Martino 2015).

This paper concentrates on the past six years, 2013-2018, and tries to determine if the states' overall environmental views and actions are reflected in their willingness to vote for and adapt to EU proposals.

To best analyse the states' willingness to adapt to the laws and legislations put forth in the European Union, this paper will gather information from Vote Watch Europe, which gives the ability to search and compare countries' votes towards different policies. Vote Watch Europe allows to pick certain key topics that are most relevant to tackle environmental problems, see how Members of the European Parliament from each state voted, and gather information about their voting patterns, their loyalties to their respective parties and therefore estimate their general views towards these issues. Information gathered on each countries' voting patterns will later be compared to the overall image and approach of their respective states'.

2. Tackling environmental issues outside of the European Union

In this chapter, some of the individual and state concerned approaches to environmental issues are introduced, as well as the overall conditions of the states in terms of climate problems. The examples brought are some of the most significant and vital in terms of tackling climate issues, and have gotten the most media attention. As all of the states studied in this paper are part of the European Union, the underlying laws of the EU are in play in all individual states' actions, yet the steps taken by countries in this context are principally on their own accord and need, and are not part of the pan-EU guidelines.

2.1 The Netherlands

The national environmental policy of the Netherlands is contributing to sustainable economic development as well as health and safety of the people. As a result of growth in economy as well as population, the government of the Netherlands has increased the emphasis on the preservation of the natural environment. The Netherlands have one of the highest levels of industrial carbon dioxide emission levels as well as severe pollution of the rivers, resulting from agricultural and industrial pollution, which contains organic compounds, heavy metals, phosphates and nitrates (Nations Encyclopedia 2018). The Government is pursuing an environmental policy resulting in reduction in carbon emissions and waste streams, clean rivers and the cleanup of contaminated soils (Government of the Netherlands 2018).

In 2014 the Netherlands Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment announced it's joining with the KLM's Corporate BioFuel Programme. The KLM Corporate BioFuel programme, launched in 2012, is the product of the Green Deal, made between KLM and the Dutch Government. Partners of this programme are committed to flying some, if not all of their journeys on aircrafts powered by biofuels, thus contributing to carbon dioxide emissions reductions.

The biofuels used by KLM have been recommended by the SkyNGR Sustainability Board, whose standard is set by the Roundtable for Sustainable Biomaterials, which is considered to be the most comprehensive norm globally.

The Ministry for Infrastructure and the Environment is the 17th partner to join the programme, others include big Dutch names such as Philips, Heineken, DSM, Ahold, also the City of Amsterdam and the Schiphol Group (KLM 2014).

In April 2016 the Environment Minister Dijksma signed an agreement with the Dutch transport operators to assure that by 2025 all new public transport buses will be vehicles of zero-emissions. The national agreements with all regions were drawn up at the Transport and Environment Council meeting in Amsterdam. As the Minister later commented, this agreement will give a boost to the position that Netherlands holds, regarding making transport more sustainable. She added that the Dutch companies manufacturing and developing technologies can also greatly benefit from this approach.

Another advantage with making the transport market cleaner is that the market competition will create space for new cheaper innovative technologies (Government of the Netherlands 2016a).

As Reuters reported (2017b), according to a government review, The Netherlands will miss their 2020 targets for renewable energy production and greenhouse gas emissions, despite the new investments in wind power.

After the court ruling in 2015 that found the Dutch government was failing to live up to its obligations, Economic Affairs Minister Henk Kamp started a roll-out of wind turbine farms in the North Sea region and earmarked 100 million euros in spending to combat climate change. In addition to that, parties in the new government agreed to close five coal-fired plants by 2030 (Reuters 2017a), plus increase polluters' taxes.

By the numbers mentioned in the report, Dutch renewable energy will rise to 23.9 percent of the total by 2030, whereas greenhouse gas emissions will fall by 34 percent compared to 1990 levels. The numbers predicted and the effort put in, would still miss the EU-wide goals of 27 percent and 40 percent, respectively (Reuters 2017b).

To force a breakthrough against plastic soup, State Secretary for Infrastructure and Water Management Stientje van Veldhoven joined forces with the municipalities, packaging sector and other involved parties to set new goals - reducing the proportion of plastic bottles in litter. The new targets are set to be met by the autumn of 2020 and one of its targets is to involve residents in keeping roadsides, parks and public gardens clean. Another side of the issue is the difficulty of reusing some packaging, and this issue lies with the manufacturers.

The State Secretary intends to encourage the use of smarter packaging by having manufacturers producing poorly reusable packaging to pay a surcharge for cleaning up the waste.

The transition to a circular economy is in full action, which is needed to combat climate change. In January 2018, State Secretary Van Veldhoven received the outlines for the development of a circular and sustainable Dutch economy by 2050. The plans are also related to the sectors of Biomass & Food, Consumer Goods, Construction, Plastics, and the Manufacturing Industry (Government of the Netherlands 2018).

2.2 Italy

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Italy is home to over 15 of the 30 European cities with highest air pollution. The water infrastructure is ageing, with many groundwater aquifers that are polluted or over-used and over 15 000 dump-sites, many of them illegal, are contaminating the land (OECD 2013).

As Dave Keating wrote in Politico (2014), when it comes to the issues with environment, Italy is a notorious laggard. That's because Italy is one of the most frequent violators of EU environmental laws, therefore often receiving infringement actions for the violations. The biggest being the waste crisis in the South of Italy, Campagna region outside Naples, for which the EU Court fined the state with record 40 million euro fine (Reuters 2014). The ruling emphasises the failure of many Italian governments to deal with the extremely high level of cancer and other diseases in the Campagna region.

The whole country is influenced by inefficiency, organized crime, questionable business interests and illegal waste dumps, containing waste from household items to highly toxic industrial materials and the area around Naples became the so-called ‘symbol of Italian decline’. The foul-smelling dumps and illegal burn-offs in the region continuously sent plumes of black smoke into the sky (Reuters 2014).

The Court of Justice noted in the ruling that simply closing the illegal dumps and covering them with soil wasn't sufficient enough to meet the EU environmental rules (Politico 2014). Despite the promises to build new incinerators and organic waste treatment sites, the problem

has persisted. Part of the problem in 2014 was thought to be the under-resourced and understaffed environment ministry and the embezzlement charges the former environment minister Carrado Clini faced.

According to a report from the OECD, Italy is looking to push a number of water conservation initiatives, which includes the evolution of the legal and institutional framework, therefore reforming the water supply systems and improving water sanitation.

Concerning air pollution and climate change, Italy is supporting initiatives designed to reduce the black carbon emissions, primarily in the transportation and manufacturing sector, mainly in response to the European Commission's press release 'Urging Italy to address severe pollution issues at Europe's biggest steel plant' (European Commission Press Release 2014). Italy has also co-funded nearly 200 projects through the Sustainable Mobility Fund, at a total cost of a little less than 200 million euros (Smith 2015).

Under the six-month term of President of the European Commission, Italy shed light on the importance of higher recycling targets and progress towards the elimination of landfills, tighter control of medium-sized combustion plants emissions and green job growth. Through the new financial incentives and updated policies, more solar energy technology is embraced. Agostino Re Rebaudengo, Chairman of the Italian renewable energy association, stated that the country's green energy incentive scheme has been more than successful, leading to reductions cost of photovoltaic systems (Smith 2015).

In the beginning of 2017, Italy's Environment Minister Gian Luca Galletti and Head of UN Environment Erik Solheim signed an agreement to intensify collaboration on urgent issues such as environmental education and clean energy (UN Environment). The Italian Government also made a 5 million euro contribution to the Environment Fund, which will help implement projects to boost resource efficiency, design sustainable financial systems and reinforce sustainable management of natural resources.

The Mayor of Rome announced in the beginning of 2018, that by 2024, the city is to ban diesel cars from the city centre. Rome is one of the most traffic-clogged cities in Europe while also being the home of thousands of outdoor monuments, constantly being threatened by pollution. Rome doesn't have any major industries, which means nearly all of the air pollution is caused by motor vehicles (The Guardian 2018).

The city has previously tried to ban older, more polluting vehicles on days when pollution reaches critical levels and allowing only cars with either odd or even ending number plates to circulate on alternate days. So far, both regulations are widely disregarded, both by drivers and traffic police (The Guardian 2018).

Officials in Milan promised to make the whole city diesel free by 2030, also stating the importance of preserving the ancient sights. The public transportation is also said to be switched to fully electric by 2030 (ANSA 2018).

2.3 Estonia

Estonia is one of the most forest-rich countries in Europe, with 51% of its land covered in forests and ranks sixth with 27% of the total forest land under protection. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Estonia's ambient air quality is ranking fourth in Europe (Minifacts about Estonia 2017, pp 8).

One of the biggest issues in Estonia is the production of hazardous oil shale waste from of the power industry. The Government's waste management plan for 2014-2020 focuses on clean resource-saving production, product design and the recycling of pre-existing materials (Ministry of the Environment 2016b). The industrial consumption of water in Estonia has decreased five times in comparison to the beginning of 1990s, which is the result of the reuse of water and the effective usage of sustainable production technology (Ministry of the Environment 2014c).

By 2015, the use of oil shale in Estonia had increased 21% compared to ten years prior. During the same period, greenhouse gas emissions increased 10% and waste generation 34%. In 2005 The Sustainable Development Strategy and principles of the ecological tax reform were implemented. The goal of the tax reform is to make production and consumption more efficient and environmentally friendly while decreasing taxation on labour and increase it on the environmental burden in a way that the overall tax burden wouldn't increase (Oras 2017, pp 36-37). By 2014, the resource productivity had decreased by 10,6%.

Environmental taxes, traded emissions permits and environmental subsidies have had a positive impact in reducing the quantities of nitrogen pollution through wastewater and particulate matter, the amount of renewable energy has increased and waste generation has decreased (Oras 2017, pp 37-39).

In 2014, the Government of Estonia approved a scheme for greenhouse gas emissions trading, which was an addition to the European emissions trading system (EU ETS). The aim of this new emissions trading scheme was to also include sectors like transport, agriculture, combustion plants and waste management, which weren't covered in the EU ETS (Ministry of the Environment 2014b).

During the same year, over 6 million euros were invested in the protection and preservation of Estonia's unique nature. One of the biggest achievements reached was the framework of environmental charges. The Estonian Government approved the extraction right of non-renewable mineral resources as well as the water extraction charges for the 2016-2025 period. The Government developed a value-based charging model for the future to determine the oil shale charge, which takes both the environmental load and the revenue earned into account. The National Development Plan for Oil Shale Use for 2016-2030 was also completed. With the objective to ensure economically effective and environmentally friendly mining and use of oil shale (Ministry of the Environment 2014a). The Plan ensures sustainable development and supply of oil shale reserve, therefore reducing the negative environmental impact.

The biggest semi-coke mountains of Estonia, in Kohtla-Järve and Kiviõli, were closed in 2015. The semi-coke mountains endangered both human health and the environment with its poisonous gases and contaminants emitted into the groundwater (Ministry of the Environment 2015).

In 2016, the Ministry of Environment established a minimum price for plastic bags to reduce plastic bag consumption, the minimum price will be implemented as of January 1st, 2019. To avoid the sale of oxidant-degradable plastic bags, a recommendation will also be added to the law, because customers often mistake them for biodegradable bags (Ministry of the Environment 2016a). Such bags do not fully decompose but remain in small pieces that could end up in animal food or water and cause deaths of animals, fish and birds.

2.4 Bulgaria

Bulgaria is facing serious environmental problems. It is estimated that 85% of Bulgaria's river water is polluted with industrial waste and close to 70% of farmland has been damaged by emissions. There is a great amount of air pollution and in some areas, emissions are causing significant health problems. The environmental issues in Bulgaria have been intensified by the abrupt move to industrialization. Another issue greatly impacting Bulgaria's environment is the pollution coming from neighbouring countries. For example, a Romanian factory on the Bulgarian border, which is greatly responsible for the pollution in that area. There is also nuclear radiation as a result of irresponsible actions from close-by areas, the biggest incident being the Chernobyl disaster, which has created health problems also in Bulgaria (Hill 1990, Naturvernforbundet 2018).

In 2016 it was announced that Bulgaria prepares to build an EU-funded road through the Kresna valley conservation area which is home for more than 3500 species. While the idea of a motorway originated from the EU, it was planned to be created as a tunnel through the nearby mountains to grant access to Greece and Cyprus. Since the Bulgarian Government deemed it too expensive, they suggested an alternate approach. The EU understands the issue here, since both, preserving wildlife, and creating a motorway are both important in their own criteria, hence why they offered €1bn of grants for the road, on the condition that a long underground tunnel is built. Bulgarian officials have stated it to be impossible, bringing out alternative environmental dangers such as earthquake risks, soil disposal issues, depletion of water tables and high level of underground uranium, these concerns have yet to be proved by evidence, and of course the expensiveness of the construction (Neslen 2016).

Before the Bulgarian EU's Council presidency, many officials were worried about the coalition government in the country, the United Patriots (UP), which consists of three far-right parties. That's because the UP leaders have previously shown racist tendencies toward the country's Roma minority, supported violence in prevention of migrants and expressed their doubt over climate change being a real problem. As the Environment Minister Neno Dimov said in 2015, climate change is a tool of manipulation, rather than a serious concern (Cooper 2017).

In 2014 a Climate Change Mitigation Act was created, with many important issues addressed, such as the full functioning of the National Green Investment Scheme, the National System

of Inventories of Emissions of Harmful Substances and Greenhouse Gases in the Atmosphere, the administering of the National Registry for Greenhouse Gas Emission Allowance Trading and the necessary measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fuels for transport (Climate Change Mitigation Act 2014, pp 1).

3. State views represented in the European Parliament

This chapter concentrates on the countries' willingness and advocacy to implement environmental EU laws and legislations in the European Parliament (EP), as well as brings out some important initiatives and statements by these states for new policies.

The information on Member States' representatives voting patterns in the European Parliament is acquired from Votewatch Europe, which gives the opportunity to study the votes given by each state, political party and member. Votewatch Europe also enables access to documents, such as reports, on the topics chosen for further information.

As the most relevant issues in today's environmental viewpoint are greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, deforestation of rainforests as a direct result of palm oil consumption and production as well as the overall need to move towards more environmentally sustainable practices, this paper concentrates mostly on the developments in these areas.

In 2014 the EU announced to aim for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 40% in 2030. The representatives of the Netherlands were strong advocates for this policy, with the State Secretary Mansveld of Infrastructure and the Environment and the Minister of Economic Affairs stating, it would add impetus to the new international climate agreement (Government of the Netherlands 2014).

In addition, the State Secretary signed a joint declaration, which was addressed to the European Commission (EC). Amongst other things, the document supports implementing the so-called stability reserve of the Emissions Trading Scheme by 2017, instead of 2021 (Government of the Netherlands 2014). Which means, for the industry sector, the cost for emitting harmful greenhouse gases will go up, while the investments in clean and sustainable production methods will be encouraged.

By the end of the Dutch chairmanship of the EU in 2016, and by their initiative, the Member States, The European Parliament and the European Commission signed a new European Directive to combat further air pollution and to ensure cleaner air. The aims will be achieved by establishing ceilings with respect to substances with considerable impact on human health and well-being (Government of the Netherlands 2016b).

In 2013, a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from medium combustion plants was put up for a

vote. The directive passed the vote with one abstention, from Romania. This legislative act acquired many statements, from which this paper concentrates on two - Estonia's and Dutch. The two Members stand for different sides of the directive, although both voting for its passing (Votewatch Europe 2015a).

The statement by Estonia recognises the need for the Medium Combustion Plants Directive and its positive impact on the air quality but regrets that not all elements of the Directive are coherent with the European Union's overall climate and energy framework. Estonia sees danger in the Directive creating a disproportionate burden on existing small biomass plants in rural areas, which in turn is contrary to encouraging the uptake of renewable energy (Votewatch Europe 2015a).

On the other hand, the statement by The Netherlands, Sweden and Germany see the importance of controlling air pollution as essential. In their view, a compromise was made, but the steps taken weren't big enough to make a substantial difference. A consequence, as they see, is that the reductions of emissions from medium combustion plants will be impossible with cost effective measures (Votewatch Europe 2015a).

Voting for moving towards a more circular economy, which is an approach to sustainability by the creation of economic models where no negative environmental impact is produced, the votes in the EP were greatly split, causing many rebel votes in the countries addressed in this paper.

For example, all Italian members of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) party voted for this resolution, thus casting their vote against the party's general views, which are to oppose European integration and therefore including the adoption of a united circular economy model. Another rebel was from the European People's Party (EPP), where one of two members voted in favour of the motion, again going against the party's stance on the matter.

For the Netherlands, the rebel votes came mostly from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), where three out of seven members voted against the circular economy motion. ALDE is known to be pro-European, supporting European Integration and the European Single Market (ALDE 2018).

Rebel voters from Bulgaria were mostly also from the EPP, with two remaining abstinent and two voting for the motion (Votewatch Europe 2015).

When voting for the cost-effective emission reductions and low-carbon investments, the proposal barely passed, with only 54,2% being in favour of it. Yet not many MEP's casted rebel votes but stayed true to their respective party's. As the minority opinion states, despite the good intentions of this reform from the environmental point of view, they consider it too risky. Stating their main concern to be the effect it has on the jobs in industries, for example steel industry, which is already in competition with China (European Parliament 2017b).

The only rebel representatives from Italy were from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) with five rebel votes out of 26, voting against the proposal.

Same thing occurred in case of The Netherlands, all three members of S&D casted rebel votes, going against their party and the cost-effective emission reduction and low-carbon investment proposal.

From Bulgarian and Estonian MEP's, both members of the S&D, casted rebel votes. One of the Members from Bulgaria voted abstinence. The Estonian representative voted against the proposal, thus casting a rebel vote in respect to her political party (Votewatch Europe 2017a).

Deforestation of rainforests and palm oil production are one of the many actions causing our climate to deteriorate. Palm oil is the worlds most widely used oil and has also become one of the causes of widespread devastation of ecosystems. The islands of Sumatra and Borneo have seen the most rapid deforestations due to palm tree plantations. As the reports' explanatory statement (European Parliament 2017c) says, the risks were underestimated and the devastating results in relation to the excessive and practically unregulated cultivation of palm oil are now evident. In 2017 the proposal to focus on this issue in the frameworks of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came to a vote in the Parliament.

The Dutch members of the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) all casted rebel votes, being against this motion, whereas all of the Italian EFDD members casted rebel votes by supporting it. In the case of Bulgaria, only one MEP voted against the proposal, thus being rebellious towards his party, S&D (Votewatch Europe 2017c).

In the end of 2017, the cornerstone of Europe's climate policy EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) was linked to the Swiss ETS to meet the global climate objectives more efficiently. That is, because, EU alone contributes to merely ten percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and therefore cannot halt global warming on its own.

Representatives from Bulgaria and Estonia were all in favour of this linking of trading systems, yet the four Dutch representatives from ENF and three from European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) were all against it, casting rebel votes to their respective party’s. In the case of Italy, all voting members of the EFDD stayed abstinent, thus being rebellious, since their party voted mostly against this legislation (Votewatch Europe 2017b).

3.1 Results

As is evident, many MEP’s vote on environmental issues more on the basis of their country’s interests, rather than strictly following their corresponding party’s views.

As the Netherlands is the most environmentally aware and open to change out of the states examined, it is surprising how many MEP’s were against the stricter and more researched approach to palm oil consumption and the deforestation caused by it. Since the members’ votes were not fully in accordance with their country’s or their party’s views, it might be that they had different interests in mind, for example concern for businesses. Palm oil production is relatively cheap compared to the production of other oils, and is also very widely used, not only in food products but also cosmetics, energy and pharmaceutical industries.

At the same time, the advocacy for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and strong leadership in combating air pollution is more in accordance with the country’s overall approach to climate issues.

From the examples above, the Italian representatives seem to be more open to environmental betterment than the state itself is capable of. For example, all of the members of the EFDD voting for the adaption of a circular economy, not only going against their party’s stance, but also when considering difficulties Italy is facing in terms of environmental conditions and the questionable readiness to move towards a circular economy. The members of the EFDD were also rebellious in voting in favour of the thorough examination of the existing palm oil production and deforestation issue, which shows the members’ concern for the environment.

The Estonian MEP's voted mostly in accordance to their party's and mostly in favour of notions for the environmental betterment, therefore supporting the country's individual views as well.

As with Italy, the Bulgarian members also seem to vote rebelliously mostly when voting for the climate betterment purposes. As mentioned before, Bulgaria is facing many challenges in terms of their environmental condition and the officials and politicians are not always speaking up for the climate issues. Yet it seems the MEP's see the need for improvement and vote accordingly.

4. Summary

Environmental issues are very widespread and caused by many factors, such as pollution, gas emissions and disruption of natural ecosystems contributing to it and therefore it is important to tackle the problem from all possible sides.

The country's studied in this paper - the Netherlands, Italy, Estonia and Bulgaria - are all working towards improving the environment. The different approaches they take are very much related to the unique issues each state has to deal with, alongside their capabilities and necessities.

The Netherlands are very dependent on fossil fuels and are struggling with high levels of industrial and agricultural pollution, while being very future-focused in trying to push for cleaner air and minimizing the greenhouse gas emissions, also supporting, developing and implementing projects in renewable energy areas.

The biggest issue in Italy is the copious amount of waste and illegal dumping grounds as well as being a country with over 15 cities having the highest air pollution markers. Although the inland officials seem to struggle with fixing these issues, the Italian Members of the European Parliament are very cautious towards climate change and its causes. The Members show great concern, casting rebel votes in terms of their party's in the European Parliament in favour of new, environmentally more beneficial actions.

Italy is moving towards fixing its environmental issues, with already two major cities, Rome and Milan announcing their plans to free the cities of diesel cars in the upcoming years. With the Environment Minister Galletti taking office, positive changes in climate change prevention have been made, such as investing 5 million euros in the Environment Fund (UN Environment).

Estonia's power industry has been producing hazardous oil shale waste, but the Government is pushing for cleaner production and recycling, as well as ensuring effective and environmentally friendly mining and oil shale use. Being one of the biggest polluters in terms of greenhouse and other gas emissions, Estonia has taken steps to improve that area by closing the biggest semi-coke mountains and approving a scheme for greenhouse gas emissions trading in addition to the EU ETS.

The representatives that Estonia has in the European Parliament seem to be mostly voting in compliance with their respective party's, usually voting for the new and environmentally more effective ideas.

Bulgaria, being the poorest member of the EU, is struggling to boost its economy, which strongly reflects to dealing with climate issues as well, still, they see the need to make improvements, with the Climate Change Mitigation Act being a good stepping stone, promising to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring the functioning of green investments.

The Bulgarian MEP's are definitely more climate improvement focused, often voting in favour of issues other members of the party vote against.

Of course, when making government plans or voting for different legislations, people also take into consideration factors other than simply stopping the climate change. For example, the officials often have to keep businesses in mind, to ensure economical stability, as well as their personal preferences and the capabilities of their states' to implement any new notions.

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(lõputöö pealkiri)

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