EP

Dear delegates,

My name is Dimitrios Fragkos and I will be your Chair. Logos MUN will not be my first MUN conference, but I am excited to spend it with this committee!

Throughout the EP session we will be discussing three crucial topics. Please use this document as a guide for your research but not as your only source. It is a general overview of the topic, but every delegate should do personal research according to their delegation's involvement. You are also strongly advised to go through the European Parliament Manual on the conference's website.

Since EP will be part of a Greek MUN conference for the first time in Logos MUN, I am here to guide you through this novel committee. Therefore, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me, I am at your disposal.

Looking forward to working with all of you,

Dimitrios Fragkos
Chair *of* EP

Email: dimitris.fragkos08ps@gmail.com

Dear EP delegates,

I am Konstantinos Goussios and I will have the honor of being your Co-Chair at Logos MUN. This is a unique conference and I look forward to your diplomacy.

Throughout the European Parliament session, we will be discussing three topics, which are essential for a stronger and more sustainable Europe. Please use this document as a guide for your research but also conduct personal research according your delegation's involvement in the three topics.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Konstantinos Goussios
Co-Chair *of* EP

Email: k.gousios@acg.edu

Forum: *European Parliament (EP)*

Issue: *Facilitating the access of EU consumers to green markets*

Student Officers: *Dimitrios Fragkos (Chair);*

Konstantinos Goussios (Co-Chair)

Introduction

The worsening environmental state of the planet has created the need to shift towards an eco-friendly lifestyle. A crucial part of this transition lies in responsible consumption. To consume responsibly means to cover our needs with the minimum possible cost of natural resources and energy. Globally, some efforts are being made to achieve this goal, but the steps already taken are insufficient.

A guide to achieving this goal can be summarized in three key principles. Firstly, consumption should be reduced in order to minimize the need for natural resources exploitation. This comes in direct contrast with the actual situation, in which markets are plagued by overproduction. Secondly, products sustaining minor damages should be preferably repaired and reused, since this means lesser material needs compared with their outright replacement. The markets in which these products are sold are called green markets and play an essential role in the mitigation of existing environmental issues. Thirdly, items no longer able to be repaired should be discarded carefully and recycled, so that the materials they are made of do not get wasted.

In the European Union, green markets are not fully utilized, and further legislation can be catalytic in improving the situation. Green markets are plagued by forces aiming to halt their development, usually for economic gains, and an EU-wide legislative intervention is necessary since it has been proven that the free market is unable to improve the situation without external help.

Definition of key terms

Green market

"Types of markets that take into consideration the environmental impact of the items produced and sold through them. As such, the goods preferred in these kinds of markets are based on renewable resources, second hand, or otherwise contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions."

Greenwashing

"The process of falsely advertising or promoting misleading claims about a product being eco-friendly, in order to boost the company's and the product's reputation, or in order to divert attention away from environmentally damaging practices that took place during the item's production."

Overconsumption

"Excessive use of goods and services, which comes at a heavy environmental cost."

Circular Economy

"A model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products."

Planned Obsolescence

"The practice of designing products to break quickly or become obsolete in the short to mid-term. The general idea behind this is to encourage sales of new products and upgrades, a practice that has been banned in some countries."

Figure 1: Illustration of the differences between a linear and a circular economy

Timeline of events

Date	Description of the event
3/06/2023-14/06/1992	The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as "Earth Conference", takes place in Brazil. It was the largest gathering of world leaders on the topic of environmental protection that had ever taken place at the time.
2005	The EU initiates the European Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). Industries polluting the environment are now required to pay an amount proportional to the pollution. As a result, the industry as a whole is forced to cut down on its emissions, reducing the environmental footprint of its products.

17/10/2013	The first opinion report is adopted by the Union's Economic and Social Committee, which calls for a complete ban on planned obsolescence. Even though a decade has passed since then, and multiple new studies have been made and opinion reports adopted, significant legislation on an EU level has yet to be enacted in order to address this highly important issue.
30/11/2015 – 11/12/2015	The 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) takes place in Paris, France. This is when the Paris Agreement is adopted, a binding treaty that holds parties accountable for reaching a plethora of climate goals it outlines. It is one of the most important environmental treaties ever signed, and with its mechanisms, it has significantly slowed down the erosion of the planet's climate.
2018	EU Directive 2018/2001 is passed, also known as the Renewable Energy Directive (RED). It clearly set targets for the use of renewables and fostered the sustainability of a lot of energy-intensive industries.
2019	The European Green Deal is introduced, with the goal of making the Union climate-neutral by 2050. It encompasses a wide range of regulations that promote sustainability and green markets.
2020	In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU announces a recovery plan called "NextGenerationEU" (or "NextGenEU"). A substantial portion of the initiative is dedicated to supporting green markets and the fostering of a sustainable green economy.
2021	The "Fit for 55" package is passed, making it a legal obligation for EU member States to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030, thus making their industries less polluting and greener.

Background information

Overconsumption and Consumerist Mindset

Induced demand for several commercially available items has caused a massive increase in the amount of goods produced and distributed. The current mainstream opinion is that consuming is associated with a better overall lifestyle, and this has pushed people to buy and briefly utilize items, before quickly discarding them and acquiring new ones. This has, as a side effect, discouraged the operation of green markets, since repaired products do not align with this line. From an economic point of view, overconsumption is a result of the marginal benefit a consumer gets from consuming something larger than the marginal utility the consumer may enjoy.

The main drivers behind the promotion of overconsumption are the unregulated advertising practices that command people to proceed to unnecessary purchases and the seemingly unlimited potential for corporate profit that stems from the urge to consume. The urge to consume derives from behavioral characteristics like bounded self-control, in which a consumer does not act rationally.

This trend has been proven disastrous for the environment since resources are dedicated to the manufacturing of unnecessary products, which people are eager to buy just to get rid of their older ones, even if they are perfectly functional or able to be repaired. Overconsumption is responsible for a great increase in carbon emissions and waste production. The mindset related to overconsumption stands as a barrier discouraging people from participating in repaired items markets and renders the efforts to limit current environmental issues more difficult.

Planned Obsolescence and Repair Markets

To promote the principles that support green markets, it is essential to shift away from discarding and replacing damaged items, and towards repairing them. However, this practice may be economically harmful to certain manufacturers who prefer that their products be bought frequently. As such, it was common to witness items being intentionally flawed, in order to make them break down faster and force the consumers to replace them, artificially boosting sales.

Deliberately incorporating defects into a product to shorten its lifespan is a practice still prevalent to encourage consumers to throw away their purchases once minor damages take place, instead of repairing them. The outright replacement of slightly malfunctioning products, though, has been associated with higher energy and consumption of resources. This also increases costs on the consumer end. On this note, the EU is taking steps to declare and protect the consumers' right to repair their appliances and electronic devices, in cases where this is less expensive than full-on replacement. Though a lot of recommendations have been made to the EU to completely outlaw planned obsolescence, it still remains legal. However, in 2022 and 2023 the issue has begun to gain popularity amongst Brussels' political circles, and the EU is expected to draft some legislation within the foreseeable future. Considering the possible income reductions for several large manufacturing corporations, there is undeniably some backlash concerning these measures, especially from tech and retail conglomerates whose profit margins will be impacted significantly.

Flea Markets

Open-air markets with minimal middleman intervention have been generally perceived as more eco-friendly than conventional large markets. Selling products directly to consumers can be economically beneficial for both parties since tariffs on entities between the producers and the final users are skipped. This type of economy also leaves space for lower carbon emissions, considering that there is less transport of goods. In addition, these markets are more welcoming to second-hand or recycled goods. They incorporate values of repair markets, in order to empower the producers and the consumers directly and to promote greater eco-friendly practices.

Greenwashing

Owing to the lack of strict regulation concerning characterizing products as eco-friendly, certain companies have been making false claims about their products adhering to environmental standards, without taking steps to reduce their environmental impact. This phenomenon can harm the promotion efforts of actual green producers since doubt is raised concerning the effectiveness of their labels.

Greenwashing threatens the well-being of green markets in general as well, since these practices cause unreliability and doubt around the purchase of green products, driving away investors and causing noticeable economic upheaval, because their confidence in these types of markets is undermined.

Eventually, greenwashing can be hurtful for the companies practising it as well, since their reputation can receive a great deal of damage if their actions are revealed. In addition, there are legal repercussions and fees imposed on companies that engage in greenwashing, as penalties for violations of consumer protection laws.

Lastly, greenwashing can negatively affect the broader economic efforts to move towards a system with a lower environmental impact. This happens because the impression given is that, no matter how many funds are dedicated towards decarbonisation, the overall progress on that matter will be minimal, because this money will be lost to corruption and unethical promotion practices, and the end target, the mitigation of climate change, will not be achieved due to the extreme economic burdens associated with it.

Stakeholders

Germany

Germany is a global leader in fostering green markets, reflecting the country's unwavering commitment to promoting environmental sustainability. It has enacted recycling programmes aiming to create a circular economy. Germany is also heavily taxing industrial polluters via the Emissions Trading System. Moreover, organic farming and modern agricultural practices play a vital role in enabling citizens to have access to eco-friendly options. It acknowledges the importance of environmental education, in order to make its population environmentally conscious. Germany has established itself as a beacon of hope for the future of green markets.

Sweden

Sweden is a fine example of a country that is committed to the promotion of green markets and other sustainable practices. The country has implemented a range of policies that aim to foster a thriving green economy. A significant portion of its energy needs is covered by renewables, and a well-developed circular economy is the byproduct of significant strides in waste management and recycling. Additionally, Sweden strongly supports the development of new and innovative green practices by investing heavily in technological research. Overall, Sweden is certainly one of the most environmentally conscious and friendly countries worldwide.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is most definitely a frontrunner in adopting green markets and promoting environmental sustainability. It is renowned for its innovative eco-friendly policies and has also made substantial investments in renewable energy sources, mainly wind and solar. Moreover, the country is pioneering modern agricultural practices that prove to be more sustainable, such as vertical farming and precision agriculture. These methods augment production while lowering water and fertiliser usage. Furthermore, the Dutch government is always supporting green startups, being of the impression that entrepreneurship in sustainable technologies and circular economy practices is a vital part of shaping the green world of tomorrow. On the other hand, however, there has been public backlash against strict Dutch environmental policy mainly from farmers when it comes to nitrogen use.

European Environmental Agency (EEA)

The EEA is a vital component of the Union that continuously makes advancements in green markets and environmental sustainability across all of Europe. It acts at the forefront of environmental data collection and processing, and provides valuable insights to European policymakers, businesses, and even the wider public. It monitors a wide plethora of environmental aspects, including water and air quality, biodiversity of fauna and flora, and climate change. Thus, it facilitates a decision-making process that is evidence-based and yields the most fruitful results, both for the citizens and for the planet. Additionally, via its various reports and assessments, the agency makes suggestions of its own to the EU and also to individual member States. On top of that, the EEA actively funds and supports research in new and innovative sustainable technologies, all under the umbrella of creating a green Europe.

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The EESC is a consultative body of the EU and plays a crucial role in advancing green policy throughout the Union. It engages in discussions that cover issues of sustainable development, climate change, environmental protection, and economic growth, amongst many others. The Committee manages to bring together stakeholders from various different sectors to address those issues, with the overall aim of bringing green prosperity to the European people.

Furthermore, the EESC encourages the development and promotion of green markets by continuously advocating for sustainable business and industrial practices, green investments, and green technologies. One example of that is the ban on planned obsolescence, which was first proposed by the Committee in 2013 but is yet to be implemented. Specifically, a key goal of the above is the implementation of the EU's bold environmental objectives.

Relevant EU directives, treaties, and events (Previous attempts)

EU Directive 2018/2001

Also known as the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), it stands as a pivotal cornerstone in the EU's commitment to fostering green markets. With an elevated degree of determination from member States, it calls for 32% of the Union's gross energy consumption to be covered by renewables by 2030. The RED also forges a path for the sustainable use of biofuels, bioliquids, and biomass fuels, laying out guidelines for financial support that can aid in the wider adoption of renewables.

By making the production of electricity sustainable, the sustainability of products whose manufacturing is energy intensive is also made sustainable. Some examples of such are the chemical industry, the primary metals industry, and surprisingly the paper industry. Thus, with the adoption of the RED, the final product that is delivered to the consumer has a lesser carbon footprint. Moreover, the operation of other products whose function is energy intensive (e.g., air conditioning units) is also made sustainable. All of the above are essential to creating a market that is green both in regards to the production and operation of what it provides.

EU Directive 92/75/EC

This Directive is responsible for the creation and implementation of the European Union's Energy Labels. According to it, all major appliances, light-bulb packaging, and cars must have such a label clearly displayed when it is offered to the consumer. The Energy Labels are a ranked scale that classifies the energy efficiency of products. Simply put, an appliance that requires more energy to create the same outcome as its counterparts is deemed to be low on the scale, whereas an appliance that requires less energy is higher. The higher a product's rank is, the less electricity is drawn, and thus both the consumer and the environment benefit.

Additionally, these labels foster an environment of healthy competition between companies to produce more efficient technology each year. This is achieved by consumers knowing from a reliable 3rd party source whether or not a product is energy efficient and being able to prefer it over another, motivated by the lower operational cost that comes with it. The raging-high electricity prices have also contributed to this, forcing Europeans to stop unnecessary use and find more eco-friendly appliances to replace their old ones. Today, Energy Labels continue to aid consumers in making the best buying decisions to favour the planet. The initial directive has been replaced by EU regulation 2017/1369 since 2017, but the core idea of the remains the same, with additional improvements being made regarding the scale and the technical ranking criteria.

Possible solutions

Ban of Planned Obsolescence

A measure that is certainly going to ameliorate the environmental impact of a lot of goods is a complete ban on planned obsolescence, i.e., a ban on products with built-in defects that have the purpose of shortening the product's lifespan. As a result of such a ban, one product would not need to be replaced constantly by the consumer, thus limiting the quantity that needs to be manufactured.

A control mechanism would need to be put in place, one that objectively tests products and verifies their quality. Additionally, said mechanism could also issue labels that clearly state the minimum time for which the product is guaranteed to operate faultlessly, similar to the EU Energy Label. This way there is more transparency towards the consumers, since they now know exactly what they are purchasing.

The downside of this would undoubtedly be the decrease in profits for manufacturers. This, in combination with the scaling down that would happen at every point of the produce-deliver-sale chain, would lead to a lot of workers and employees being laid off. The scale at which this would happen and its macroeconomic impact is uncertain, but fortunately, most specialists only foresee a small economic downturn.

Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Another solution is to increase support for SMEs that want to make a green transition via the provision of grants, low-interest loans, or even technical assistance, by the EU or by the individual member states. The above can encourage these enterprises to switch to more sustainable practices that are now made more inexpensive and affordable for them. These SMEs could also volunteer to apply new and innovative practices that could not be tested at the scale of large conglomerates, and help society evolve on its journey towards environmental sustainability.

This measure also has the added benefit of actively contributing to the economy and promoting sustainable development throughout the EU. This creates even more of an incentive for the implementation of such policies, seeing as in the long term there would be a near-certain return of investment for everyone involved.

Further reading

This is why we can't have nice things, *by Veritasium*

In-depth explanation of planned obsolescence, its many aspects, and its history. (https://youtu.be/j5v8D-alAKE?si=m0PepGbDsjFwkJhT)

Emissions Trading System, *by the European Commission*

Short illustrative and allegorical explanation of the idea, function, and workings of the ETS. (https://youtu.be/q6_qNStyZYQ?si=PmxrfhE0ImRvQ28G)

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Forum: *European Parliament (EP)*

Issue: *Adopting a sustainable framework for the use of fertilizers*

Student Officers: *Dimitrios Fragkos (President);*

Konstantinos Goussios (Deputy President)

Introduction

The EU provides grounds for one of the largest food markets on a global scale. The European Union is, for the most part, self-sufficient on agricultural and food-related issues, and, barring a select number of products about which it relies on imports, such as wheat, maize, and sunflower oil, the region's food security is guaranteed. In addition, the EU is one of the top exporters of cereals, which account in total for about 10% of its total exports value-wise. This renders agricultural products essential for the well-being of the Union's economy, and without them, the region's economic power would suffer a noticeable blow.

However, the use of fertilizers is crucial for the achievement of said economic output, since the geographic conditions in Europe would otherwise prohibit agricultural production of this magnitude. The above situation has caused issues with the organization's ability to moderate the number of fertilizers used, avoid abuse, ensure that sufficient resources remain in order to provide for long-term fertilizer production, and verify their quality.

Fertilizers play an important economic role in another instance as well. They can also be exported directly to other countries, boosting the EU's revenue and influence on a global scale. Thus, they are an important component of EU exports and consequently of the EU economy. However, fertilizers' environmental impacts cannot be ignored. The extreme amounts of energy required to produce them and the residue they leave on the soil should be taken into consideration. As such, it is important to come up with solutions to tackle these issues, while preserving the economic and nutritional benefits that help the EU stay afloat.

Definition of key terms

Fertiliser

"A fertilizer is a "natural or artificial substance containing the chemical elements that improve growth and productiveness of plants. Fertilizers enhance the natural fertility of the soil or replace chemical elements taken from the soil by previous crops". There are two types of fertilizer: synthetic and organic. In this paper, the term fertilizer alone refers solely to the synthetic kind, unless indicated otherwise."

Eutrophication

"The gradual increase in the concentration of phosphorus, nitrogen, and other plant nutrients in an [aging] aquatic ecosystem such as a lake. The productivity or fertility of such an ecosystem naturally increases as the amount of organic material that can be broken down into nutrients increases. This material enters the ecosystem primarily by runoff from land that carries debris and products of the reproduction and death of terrestrial organisms. Water blooms, or great concentrations of algae and microscopic organisms, often develop on the surface, preventing the light penetration and oxygen absorption necessary for underwater life. Eutrophic waters are often murky and may support fewer large animals, such as fish and birds, than non-eutrophic waters."

Soil Erosion

"Soil erosion is a gradual process of movement and transport of the [most fertile] upper layer of soil (topsoil) by different agents – particularly water, wind, and mass movement – causing its deterioration in the long term. It can also have causes that are related to human activity, such as unsustainable land management and intensive agricultural use. The consequence of soil erosion is that it renders the land infertile and unable to cultivate plants, leading to severe socioeconomic side effects."

Overfertilization

"Refers to the use of excessive fertilizer, more than what is needed to achieve the desired crop yield. It is a commonplace practice usually in areas where farmers are less educated and specialized in their profession. It is also hugely wasteful and takes a heavy toll on the environment as the production of fertilizer is very resource-intensive. Additionally, by providing nutrients to the ground in amounts that are unnatural, the result is that they end up in the nearby water and cause significant eutrophication."

Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium Analysis

"Commonly referred to as "NPK", this is an analysis of the amount of the three most basic plant (macro)nutrients, measured in percentage of the total mass of fertilizer. This is very helpful for every agriculture worker who needs to know exactly what they are putting into the ground so that overfertilization can be avoided."

Food System

"The food system is a complex web of activities involving the production, processing, transport, and consumption. Issues concerning the food system include the governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, the degree to which we waste food, how food production affects the natural environment and the impact of food on individual and population health."

Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
15/12/1927	The International Fertiliser Industry Association (IFA) is founded. It is still the only global fertiliser association, with over 450 members encompassing all actors in the fertilizer supply chain. Its mission is to promote efficient and sustainable production and distribution of fertiliser. The Association is critical in helping to feed the Earth's population in an environmentally conscious manner.
11/06/1992	The Agenda 21 is adopted by the United Nations, following the Rio Earth Summit in the same year. It is an action plan recommender by said summit, intended to be implemented globally, nationally, and locally by intergovernmental organisations, national governments, and NGOs. It covers every area in which humankind impacts negatively the environment, including guidelines and proposals for a more sustainable use of fertilisers.
25/09/2015	The United Nations officially adopts its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal number 2 specifically deals with sustainable agriculture and deems it to be a key factor in achieving food security and improved nutrition worldwide.
15/05/2019-17/05/ 2019	The Global Symposium on Soil Erosion is held at the headquarters of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation in Rome, Italy. The Symposiums goal was to provide a platform for information sharing and discussion on the status of intervention and innovation in the field of soil erosion and such land management issues.
23/09/2021	The United Nations Food Systems Summit takes place in the UN headquarters in New York. The summit was intended to initiate new actions to deliver progress on the SDGs, each of which relies to a certain extent on more sustainable food systems.

Background Information

Utility of Fertilisers

Fertilisers are responsible for the recent increase in the agricultural output of the EU. Without the resources deriving from them, the production of food-related items in the region would decrease by half. Plants need nitrogen to grow. This is found in abundance in the atmosphere, but it is inaccessible to them in this form. As such, plants rely on fertilisers, which provide nitrogen in a readily accessible form.

Unsustainable Fertilizer Production

The European Union is accountable for 9% of the total global fertilizer production, and a significant part of it is directed towards exports to countries in need of an agricultural boost, such as Russia, Egypt, and Morocco. As such, export revenue is deeply connected to the maintenance of viable geopolitical relations between these countries and the EU. Trade with Russia has diminished significantly within 2022, but the country has not ceased to be the bloc's main fertilizer export.

However, the production of such quantities of fertilizers is not sustainable within the European Union, since the vast majority of conventional fertilizers require specific, non-renewable fossil resources, which are imported and subject to depletion. To understand the magnitude of fossil resources being used for fertilizers, nitrogen fertilizers alone use 5% of the world's gas. In addition, the EU acquisition of such minerals is dependent on the bloc's relations with the extracting countries. Thus, the stable and continuous production of fertilizer cannot be guaranteed.

Besides, a key ingredient of conventional fertilizers, ammonia, is extremely energy-intensive to produce. Seeing as a lot of the energy used is non-renewable, this puts even more of a strain on the sustainability factor of such operations.

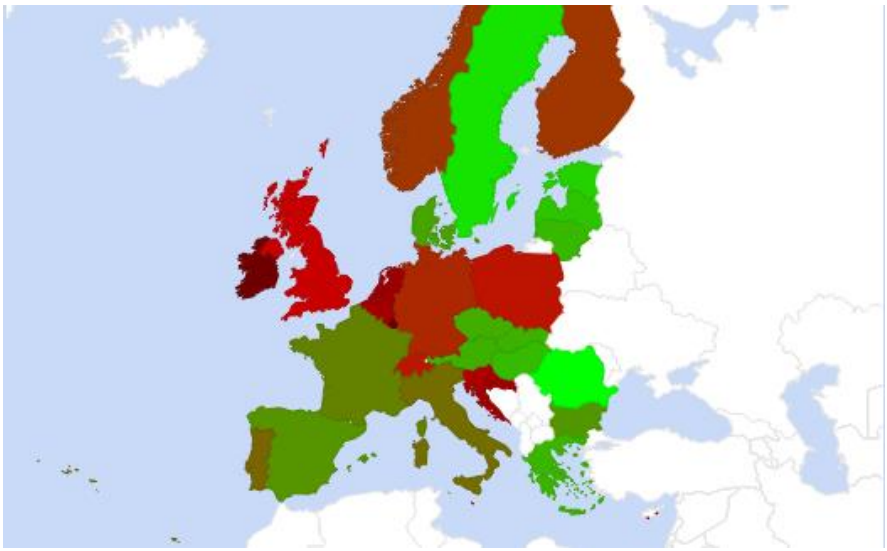

Figure 1: EU and UK Nitrogen Pollution

The Issue of Overfertilization

Despite overfertilization essentially constituting a waste of resources and causing severe environmental issues, it is a commonplace practice across the EU. This occurs due to the neglection of the long-term environmental effects of nitrogen pollution and the unpredictability of plants' nitrogen needs. Overfertilization can lead to massive nitrogen pollution. When nitrogen is drained through rivers to oceans and lakes, it can weaken the maritime ecosystems' resistance against eutrophication, threatening fish and coral populations and limiting their ecological value.

Although nitrogen is the most common and sought-after element when discussing fertilizers, phosphorus can also deal great damage to both the plants it is supposed to boost, to natural aquifers, and to the final consumers. In particular, excessive phosphorus contamination can lead to crop failure, practically diminishing the agricultural output, instead of increasing it. Furthermore, it can threaten the quality of water reservoirs, rendering them hostile to certain lifeforms, and, considering that most phosphorus passes on to the food chain and ends up ingested by humans, often in quantities exceeding the recommended values, it can pose a direct health risk. It is important to mention that phosphorus overuse also constitutes a waste of resources, since this mineral is found in finite reserves. The possibility that these reserves be depleted or otherwise rendered inaccessible is very high.

Synthetic and Organic Fertilizers

It is of paramount importance to note the difference between synthetic and organic fertilizers, for the latter has a much different environmental footprint than the former. Synthetic fertilizers are the ones that were mentioned in all previous sections of this paper. They are produced in industrial plants using minerals, gasses from the air, and inorganic waste (byproducts of the petroleum industry). They have a high NPK analysis, and thus they initially provide more nutrients to the ground. However, due to their chemical nature, these nutrients can sometimes be leached, i.e., washed away, contaminating local water and causing eutrophication.

Organic fertilizers are fundamentally different in that their nutrients derive from natural sources, mainly plant or animal waste. They are the friendliest to the environment, as they need much less energy to be produced and are minimally susceptible to leaching. Moreover, their effect lasts longer, meaning that they require a more infrequent application. This happens because organic fertilizers are fully biodegradable, and as such create additional nutrients while they break down in the soil. Additionally, even though organic fertilizers may have a lower NPK than synthetic, they also have a lot of secondary (macro)nutrients and also micronutrients which are all absent in the latter. These allow for plants to grow better and deliver healthier yields. On top of that, these microorganisms contained in them contribute towards a better soil quality and composition. At last, they have a very high water retention, meaning less watering is needed, which at large scales is seriously damaging to the local environment and population due to the possibility of water shortages.

Regardless of there being a substantial environmental advantage in organic fertilizer, its use has yet to become standard practice. One significant obstacle in the way towards their adoption is cost. Simply put, the mass production of synthetic fertilizers has allowed companies to sell it at much more affordable prices due to economies of scale. What's more, because of its lower NPK, more organic fertilizer needs to be applied to provide the same amount of nutrients as the same quantity of synthetic. Furthermore, farmers would need to make changes to their equipment if they were to make the switch, due to the fact that this form of fertilizer is bulkier and cannot be handled by conventional machinery. To conclude, without any government interference the situation will remain the same, as farmers lack financial incentives.

Stakeholders

France

France has the largest agricultural production in the EU and the largest fertilizer consumption. Considering the country's large population and significant representation in the EP, major reform proposals will be taken into consideration more easily if they find the French government in accordance with the plan.

Poland

Poland is the largest EU fertilizer producer. The country is trying to align itself with the goals of the CAP, an effort that has stagnated to a large extent in recent years due to the crisis in neighboring Ukraine. However, it is generally viewed that some reforms need to take place, and a shift towards more naturally sourced fertilizers has been considered, even if not fully implemented by the Polish government.

Netherlands

The Netherlands is one of the largest EU nitrogen producers and consumers. Nitrogen emissions in the country have been consistently high throughout the years leading to the so called "Stikstofcrisis"; that is, nitrogen crisis. As a result, the Dutch government decided to adopt a strict environmental framework which led to a massive amount of public backlash.

Russia

Russia has been one of the largest importers of EU fertilizers. The Russian territory is prime for farmland. Even though there were some noticeable obstacles to the imports during the first months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they have since surged once again, and Russia is heavily dependent on any decisions taken by the EU concerning the subject. The country, however, has slowly been trying to diversify the fertilizer imports in order to curb that dependency.

EU Commission

The EU Commission, one of the highest executive authorities in the EU, has defined a plan for a unified approach towards any subjects related to the agricultural sector, called the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This has been put in place to ensure that, given the fragility and the special needs of this industry, problems that may arise can be dealt with on a European scale. As such, it is important to note that any plans for fertilizer reforms need to be aligned with this policy.

Relevant EU directives, treaties, and events (Previous attempts)

EU Directive 91/676/EEC

Also known as the EU Nitrates Directive, this directive proves to be a milestone in the protection of the environment from agricultural sources of nitrogen, i.e. fertilizer. Specifically, it tackles the contamination of water with the substance, which leads to eutrophication. It does that by mandating that EU countries establish mandatory action programs for water biomes in which high nitrogen levels could be especially problematic, while also conducting continuous testing to ensure that said programs have the desired effect. Additionally, it establishes codes for sustainable agricultural practices that farmers can voluntarily adopt while also providing special training to them when required.

The drawback of this approach is that it deals with the issue on a surface level. It talks about action programs without going into much specifics as to what they entail and also brings the adoption of environmentally conscious farming up to the discretion of the farmer. Furthermore, the criteria for when special training ought to be provided is vague, leading to a significant percentage of the workforce in the field being uneducated on critical matters relating to the consequences of environmental neglect. To be more effective, it would need to first correct the above omissions and then move on to creating a firm legal framework for the environmental responsibilities of all actors in the sector of agriculture.

Possible Solutions

Provision of Education and Training

The most fundamental of all measures that have to be taken in order to tackle this issue is by far providing the relevant education and training to every agricultural worker. Currently, farmers, especially in rural areas, are not at all informed about the serious consequences of improperly applying fertilizer. Moreover, they are not taught how to select the most fitting fertilizer for their crops and are also not taught how to apply it efficiently using modern technologies. One cause of that is that the people in such occupations have rarely pursued a higher education in their field, and rely on generational knowledge or unreliable sources. Once again, this is especially the case in rural and poverty-stricken areas.

To effectively face this problem, a lot of solutions are available. First, national governments could provide training sessions and workshops in local community centers. Furthermore, informational guides could be provided to farmers in more remote areas that cannot attend the above. Last, financial incentives could be given to people wishing to pursue farming as a profession so that they can first obtain a degree or any other specialized education in the sector of agriculture or environmental sciences.

Promotion of Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture is an approach to agricultural management that uses new technologies, such as satellite geopositioning, remote sensing, autonomous machinery, and data analysis, in order to optimize various aspects of farming. Smart farming, as it is also known, certainly involves the efficient application of fertilizer. The way that this is achieved is via its site-specific approach. By collecting and analyzing a plethora of data about a field, farmers can adjust the amount of fertilizer applied to specific areas according to the needs of the crops. This is done via satellite mapping and can significantly limit overfertilization and the associated negative effects.

Subsidy Reform

One feasible solution for the promotion of the sustainable use of fertilizers is a major reform of government subsidies. Up to now, they have not been proven to be as effective as wished. This is because no emphasis is being given to the quality and sustainability of the final product.A reform to this kind of subsidies could include provisions for the substitution of synthetic fertilizers with organic. This would help farmers cover costs related to the switch and thus encourage them to do so. Furthermore, the subsidies could cover the modernization of agricultural equipment that would help in the accurate application of fertilizer while also monitoring crop and soil health so that application happens only when needed.

Standardized Eco-Labeling

A common problem that environmentally conscious farmers have is not always knowing the sustainability and eco-friendliness of a specific fertilizer. This is due to the lack of such an indication on the packaging from an objective 3rd party. The EU could easily undertake such a task, seeing as it has already done so in the sector of electronics with its energy labels. Taking into account the means of production, the composition, and other relevant properties of a specific fertilizer, the Union could issue a scaled rating for it, informing buyers of its environmental sustainability.

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Forum: *European Parliament (EP)*

Issue: *Fostering the inception of a European Army*

Student Officers: *Dimitrios Fragkos (President);*

Konstantinos Goussios (Deputy President)

Introduction

The question of stability on the European continent has traditionally been a sensitive one, as Europe has been the continent experiencing some of the most violent conflicts during the previous centuries. After a long period of brutality and subsequent division of the continent, an image of a peaceful and welcoming continent was built after the collapse of the Iron Curtain.

With recent security issues, however, militarization has taken place once again in several European countries. Some voices in the EU have raised the possibility of enhanced cooperation between the individual members' militaries. While there is pretty strong political alignment among the EU countries, the EU itself does not maintain a concrete structure to integrate its militaries. It is important to note the possibility of the creation of a unified European army, or the greater military communication and cooperation and the drawing of a unified, Union-wide foreign policy, in order to better combat the security issues tormenting the continent today.

Definition of key Terms

Iron Curtain

"The political and cultural barrier erected in Europe after the end of the Second World War, cementing the continent's division and separation in two camps, one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union."

Military occupation

"The placement of troops on the territory of another state without its consent. Usually, these troops are hostile and assume unilaterally the control of that territory, without necessarily incorporating it to their homeland."

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

"A military alliance covering the United States, Canada and 29 other European countries. Not all European NATO countries are EU countries, and not all EU countries have obtained a NATO membership. NATO's foundational treaty is called the North Atlantic Treaty and constitutes the basic guideline on which the alliance is structured."

Figure 1: NATO's logo

Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
8 May 1945	End of the Second World War in Europe
5 March 1946	First mention of the Iron Curtain divisions
4 April 1949	Singing of the North Atlantic Treaty, creation of NATO
9 November 1989	Fall of the Iron Curtain, end of the Cold War
2006	Agreement on the 2% of GDP NATO military expenditure requirement
8 August 2008	Russian armed intervention in Georgia
24 February 2022	Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Background Information

Historical Background

After the end of WW II, the armed forces of most European countries were weakened, and, while the countries were nominally independent, their territories hosted a large number of foreign forces. The regions occupied by the Soviet Union were later politically aligned with it as well, and subsequently fully dependent on its military. Similarly, countries under the control of the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA) or allied militaries were put within the sphere of influence of the USA, after joining NATO. The border between the countries of the one alliance and the other was called the "Iron Curtain", and it was extremely hard to cross.

With the end of this long-standing division in 1989, the path was cleared for the former Soviet-aligned countries to join the alliance and be put under the military protection of the USA. In the following decades, the prospect of an armed conflict in the continent of Europe went dormant, but never fully ceased, due to some acts of aggression, mainly on behalf of Russia.

The European states' security was delivered a major threat in 2022, after the commencement of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where it became apparent that, without the support of the US military, other European countries lack the possibility to adequately defend themselves. This has sparked a recent wave of militarization in certain individual EU countries, but has also altered the Union's geopolitical situation as a whole, reminding the EU policymakers that the impression of a peaceful coexistence amongst the states on the continent is shattered.

Current Situation

Today, each member state of the European Union is fully responsible for the country's national security. As such, issues of a military aspect are, for the most part, regulated independently of the EU's efforts to integrate the continent. This leaves upon the member states' individual governments the freedom to allocate as much of their budget to defense matters as they consider appropriate, without EU interference. However, most EU countries are NATO members as well. NATO, which, in addition to its European members, encompasses Canada and the United States as well, is characterized by a key clause in its foundation treaty, called Article 5, which states that an attack on one of its member states may be perceived as an attack on the entire alliance, and trigger a collective response.

The United States of America (USA), dedicating an astonishing 750 billion USD to fund their military annually, are considered the most powerful military power. By being part of the alliance, European countries may neglect their own national militaries, considering that, in case of threat, the USA will step in to cover them. This has as a direct result the failure of several NATO members to meet the military expenditure requirement set at 2% of GDP.

Essentially, this means that most European countries that are part of NATO do not need to dedicate their resources to boosting their army, but, as a consequence, their militaries would be inadequate for a direct confrontation against a major world power.

Figure 2: Percentage of GDP allocated to the military in EU countries and surroundings, as of 2015

Arguments in favor of a common army

Several arguments supporting the outright replacement of national armed forces with an integrated organization on a European level include the increased militarization on a global scale, which has provoked concern about the competence of EU nations' independent armies, and about their ability to properly defend themselves and stand on the world stage without dependency on NATO. It is also stated that the enhanced coordination in the EU defense sector can provide for a great boost in the process of European integration, unifying yet another aspect of the individual states' political systems and transferring this responsibility to the supranational authorities. This move could also help operate the military with decreased costs.

Efforts to launch a common army

Owing to the lack of a structured frame for international collaboration, the European Union's member states militaries do not communicate efficiently outside of NATO, in a manner completely independent of the United States. As such, this causes spending problems, renders military upgrades inefficient and undermines efforts to advance the process of European integration. Such a frame was not considered a priority during and immediately after the cold war, due to the increased role of the USA in European security matters. However, recent calls by the European Parliament to increase the level of communication and cooperation between EU members on that aspect have not been unnoticed, and a major step forward is the discussion about forging a common foreign policy across the EU. So far, there have not been calls for the full replacement of NATO institutions, but steps towards the inception of a common EU army, or, at least, towards much greater integration between individual members' armies have been entertained. Considering, though, that this is a major project, further efforts are required.

Stakeholders

France

France has been a key supporter of further military integration within the EU. The country has received certain complaints, mainly from Germany, due to its strict and inflexible approach towards the subject, but it is generally considered that France will gradually become open to more negotiations and will do its part to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation concerning defense. Taking into consideration that France is the only country within the bloc with nuclear weapons, and its widespread presence in Africa, it may play a key role, not only towards the strengthening of the European defense policy, but also towards the gradual independence from the US.

Germany

Germany has traditionally been one of the most enthusiastic members concerning further European military integration. Despite being both the most economically powerful, the most populous and the one with the greatest representation in EU institutions, Germany did not pursue the armed forces integration, as it was not a priority. However, due to the recent instability in eastern Europe, the process is gaining momentum.

Poland

Poland is currently launching the most ambitious army expansion program in the EU, aiming to set up the strongest land forces within the bloc. Viewing the country's path to become one of the most important players concerning the EU's defense strategy, it is of great significance to incorporate its might into a possible EU army. Poland has maintained traditionally positive relations with the other members of the Union, and especially with Hungary. Cooperation, though, could be proven difficult to achieve, taking into consideration the recent tensions with Russia, and that the Polish state has been at odds with Brussels at policymaking.

Relevant EU directives, treaties and events (Previous attempts)

EU Parliament Resolution A9-0296/2022

In this resolution, passed on January 18, 2023, the European Parliament reaffirms its willingness to enforce and expand the EU common security and defense policy, through an array of measures aimed at strengthening military ties among EU members, as well as boosting cooperation between EU and NATO on a supranational level. The resolution recognizes the importance of international security beyond the strict borders of the EU, in light of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and calls for steps to be taken in order to enhance EU military missions on a global scale. Despite not explicitly calling for the creation of a unified European army, the resolution is a clear step towards greater military cooperation, endorses the enlargement of NATO, and urges the EU to fulfil its potential as a global military power.

Possible solutions

Full-scale integration of the EU militaries

A main argument being pushed forward is the gradual abolition of the EU member states' armies, and their replacement by a single one, tasked with covering the entire continent. Centralized command centers would be crucial for that.

However, this initiative may be obstructed by the occasional inability of the EU legislative bodies to facilitate coordination among the member states, and cause disagreements concerning the details of the process, such as the integration of the defense ministries and the creation of related governing bodies on a European level.

In addition, considering that this is a move that asks for nations to surrender part of their sovereignty for the sake of European integration, it needs to enjoy universal support across all member states, in order to be viable. Also, it is necessary for the individual countries to cease maintaining an independent foreign policy, and incorporate the EU common security and defense policy in all aspects of their external relations, since they will not be able to intervene militarily without the involvement of the entire EU. Nonetheless, this option allows for the total independence of the European defense institutions from their American counterparts, since it implies the increase of the European states' defense budget, and, subsequently, the ability to protect their own borders and proceed to military activities as they see fit. This, could bring the EU at odds with the United States on NATO, considering that the latter would witness their influence on the European internal defense affairs being limited. In order to avoid potential tension, the EU Army could be part of a larger NATO initiative, a kind of regional command force. This would strengthen NATO as well.

Creation of an EU military command structure

The EU has stated its devotion to the maintenance of international peace and security within and around its borders. Nonetheless, the EU lacks a concrete framework related to the implementation of this objective, and the creation of a structure able to command the actions of the independent armies, in cooperation with their respective governments, but without the capacity to overrule their wishes, could be a stepping stone towards helping develop closer ties militarily among the member states, without compromising their sovereignty or their defense policy.

Retention of the Status Quo

Some EU member states, most prominent of which is Poland, seek to ascend to the status of a regional military power, and block military integration efforts. As such, it is sometimes advocated that there is no need to proceed, at least for now, to the unification of EU militaries, since national armies, aided by the United States and the NATO army command structure are able to cooperate on a deep level, ensuring the territorial integrity of the European Union, stability in the region and deterrence against aggression by foreign states, without the surrender of the control of the members' armed forces to the EU administration.

While this approach has some merit, it may not be sustained in the long run, since it comes in contrast with the axiom of the gradual and ever-closer European integration that poses the base of the European Union's actions. In addition, it may be used by certain countries in order to advance their own national interests, oftentimes disregarding those of the European Union as a whole, and prolonging the bloc's defensive reliance on NATO. Some countries may veto the EU army for leverage.

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