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**VOTER-TURNOUT ANALYSIS OF THE MILLENNIAL
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS**

Bachelor Thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently
and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors
has been properly referenced and the same paper
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the voter-turnouts of the millennial European Parliament elections. Thus, the premise is on the electoral years of 2004, 2009 and 2014, but to keep the research fair this study only includes European Union member states which pass requirements of having participated all of the chosen elections and they will participate in the European Parliament elections in the future as well. Additionally, third exclusion factor is not to obtain a compulsory voting system. These countries are then analysed within this guideline and compared from the highest to the lowest voter-turnout than the European Union's average. After this has been established the states with highest voter-turnouts like Denmark, Italy and Malta are reviewed briefly to find out patterns which have profited the result, like a voting system. On the other hand, the same scrutiny is then inflicted to the countries with the lowest voter-turnouts such as to Czechia, to Poland, to Slovakia and to Slovenia which then reveals indistinct variables of Euroscepticism and history of authoritarian rule. Therefore, there are a few essential lessons from which the European Union can learn for instance, by establishing a positive image in the eyes of the citizens, by tackling the critics and by supporting states with undemocratic tendencies. This phenomenon is also finally reflected through theories of International Relations to reach a coherent conclusion. Hence, this thesis uses the case study method reinforced by statistical data and then other sources, like academic papers and – books.

Keywords: Voter-Turnout, the European Parliament and the Elections.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A selected group of European Union Member States – EU22

European Parliament – EP

European Union – EU

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – International IDEA

Member of the European Parliament – MEP

National Health Service – NHS

Single Transferable Vote – STV

Voting Age Population – VAP

Visegrád Group (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) – V4

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the voter turnouts in the three millennial elections of the European Parliament. Thus, focusing on the electoral years of 2004, 2009, and 2014. The aim is to find out which of the European Union (EU) member states are keener to participate, resulting with high voter turnouts and then again, on the other side of the coin, pointing out the member states which lack interest for casting their votes. When this has been established, the research shifts to look the countries individually to study the reasons why some EU members are reluctant to participate in the European Parliament elections and why some vote more eagerly. Hence, the thesis seeks to answer the following questions: firstly, what are the common indicators to the states which are active to cast their votes and why some members are on the lower end and secondly, what can the European Union learn from this to boost up the European Union's citizens interest in the elections in general. Although these arguments will without any doubt remain to have a political setting built-in them, yet, they also provide a unique perspective for a research from which to reach out universal conclusions.

The fact is that less than half of the total EU population of 500 million people vote in the elections of the European Parliament. The issue is pressing due to the troubling times that the European Union is facing with Brexit and other anti-EU tensions. Yet, this problem is recognised by the EU officials and the European Union launched the "This Time I'm Voting For..." - campaign as a one response with a particular focus on the young voters. The objective of this campaign "-- is to promote democratic engagement in the European elections" (Code... 2018). In other words, it aims to boost up the voter-turnout in the upcoming European Parliament elections in spring. Actually, the "This Time I'm Voting For..." – campaign gave the spark and woke up the interest to look at participation percentage in the European Parliament elections more thoroughly. After all, voting is power and increasing the electoral participation among the youth is vital for the whole democratic process of the EU.

In this lies the motivation for writing this paper. The practice of voting in elections offers elements to a research with a far broader understanding than just in the European Union's context. Though, the European Union is standing at crossroads figuring out which path to take since the traditional integration policies have been questioned by the general increase of anti-EU views and the rise to

power of likeminded parties. The ongoing negotiations of Brexit which tries to determine the EU's and the United Kingdoms' future relationship after the UK has left the EU, are also an outcome of anti-EU campaign. Fortunately, the Brexit has also revealed the massive scale on how the European Union effects an ordinary citizens life without people paying too much attention to it. Nonetheless, only the federalist approach to the EU requires a strong participation of its citizens with high voter-turnouts. The two other views how to build Europe: cooperation and neo-functionality do not request citizens participation at the EU level since the emphasis on the national framework although in neo-functionalism, there is a need for participation of European Union's citizens to some extent.

This is why this research may also offer some tools how to increase the participation in the elections of the European Parliament in addition to uncovering the state of the EU today. The essence is noticing some the existing measures that the member states with high voter turn-outs use and understanding the reasons why some lack the interest to cast the ballot in which the core is supported with statistics. This then will help to reach a cohesive outlook to the situation of the EU's ideologies since the thesis is not demanding for a more active electoral participation in the EU but instead opening up the aspects which impact the phenomenon. Besides, European integration happens also in accordance of the spill over effect. Though, what must always be remembered is that voting is one's voice and the main channel to be heard in every democracy. Lastly, then wrapping everything in theoretical reflections with also including the three ways of building Europe. Exactly, this theoretical approach, the evindence of the statistical data, and the emphasis on youth makes this thesis to stand out.

Still, what must be bared in mind is that the EU does not share a unitary view to the legal concept of voting. Voting can either be a citizen's obligation or a right. For the purpose of this research, only the member states with the right to vote are included. Thus, Belgium and Luxemburg with their citizen's obligation to vote are left out. It is obvious that an obligation keeps the electoral participation rate high since failing to serve this duty is punishable. For that matter it is an easy answer for low voter-turnouts but only two of the member nations chose this option. Therefore, it is far more vital to examine the differences among the remaining EU states with the right to vote. To ensure proper understanding of the right to vote, the concept will be further explained in the terminology of this thesis.

However, another excluding factor for countries to be counted in this study is that they must have participated in all of the millennial European Parliament elections 2004, 2009, and 2014 and also that they will continue to take part in these elections. This is due to make sure a fair and equal comparison among the member states. Another reason is to maintain the aspect of learning. To learn from the outcomes and findings of how to conduct the future European Parliament elections in a way which feels approachable and engaging for people of the EU. This allows the maximum utility of this thesis. Therefore, all the new members of the European Union after the EU enlargement of 2004 are not eligible based on the first criterion. This includes the following three states: Bulgaria and Romania which joined the EU in 2006 and the newest addition of Croatia which became EU member in 2013. The United Kingdom is then excluded out of this survey based on the second criterion. It is now matter of months to Brexit when Great Britain will leave the EU.

Thence, only 22 states, shortened as the EU22, out of the total 28 EU members are observed in this research which relies mainly on statistics as a source material. The emphasis on statistics is quite logical since the foundation is on the voter turn-out comparison of the three European Parliament elections which then reveal the highs and lows of the bunch. After this the source base broadens such as to include governmental publications, academic papers and -studies and news articles. The theoretical aspects depend greatly on the book *Models of Democracy*, the third edition (2006) which is written by a political scientist David Held. The book offers an exhaustive insight to the democratic ideologies or democracy models of the world. This is a profound element since in contemporary democracies and democratic institutions such as the EU voting is the tool to participate in the decision-making.

1. TERMS AND METHODS

This chapter consists of two sub-chapters: terminology and methodology. The terminology elaborates and opens up some of the key concepts and terms which are often referred in this paper. This part will determine the following terms briefly: the right to vote, voter-turnout, the EU22, the European Parliament elections, the division of power in the EU and the European ideas of cooperation, federalism and neo-functionality. The latter sub-chapter, methodology naturally then unwraps the study methods used to conduct this research. Additionally, the methodology provides a deeper examination to the sources established in the introduction.

1.1. Terminology

The concept of citizen's right to vote or the suffrage originates in the ancient Athens. Athenian citizenship granted to her citizens an equal voting power (Held 2006, 16-17). This is according to Aristotle (1981, 362-4) one of the fundamental features of democracies: "Elections to office by all from among all. Rule of all over each and of each by turns over all." Albeit, Athenian citizens had the right to vote, it was more or less an obligation. Democracy in Athens was rooted in the principle of civic virtue in which the public - and private life are intertwined and where individuals can only live honourably if they are dedicated towards the common good (Held 2006, 14). Over times, the suffrage has been a privilege in the contrast of absolutism and suppression. Even today most contemporary democracies have the universal suffrage and far less nations chose to obtain the mandatory voting system. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), even many countries with mandatory voting choose not to punish or offer loopholes for non-voters to avoid punishment (Compulsory... *s.a.*).

Voter-turnout as a term explains itself quite naturally, it is the percentage of voters who turn out to cast their vote in an electoral ballot. International IDEA also adds two measurements: "first, the number of registered voters as officially reported by the national bodies responsible for compiling voters' lists; and second, the voting age population (VAP), which is an estimate of the proportion of a country's population that is of voting age" (Solijonov 2016, 19). It is also noteworthy that "higher voter turnout is often a sign of the vitality of democracy, while lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process" (ibid, 35-38). Still, what must

be comprehended is that there are many factors which affects voter-turnout. These factors are, for example, the following: socio-economic like population size, political such as political fragmentation, institutional like electoral system and individual such as the education (ibid). These factors may provide answers why citizens either vote or choose not vote.

The EU22 are all the remaining European Union member states which are left after going through the exclusion filters. These EU member states are following: Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. This represents a wide range of countries with differences. Nevertheless, these countries are the core of this thesis and which the arguments are built on. The analysis of these EU22 countries will also hopefully find out any common indicators which would reveal what makes one country participate more actively and why another one is lazy in casting their vote.

This paragraph briefly explains the term of the European Parliament (EP) elections because it is essential to understand. The EP elections are held every five years in which each member states select the representatives or the members of European Parliament (MEPs) to the European Parliament. The Parliament at the moment consists of 751 MEP's but after the spring election due to Brexit the seats will be reduced to 705 vacancies (EU... 2018). The number of seats varies among the member states but they are distributed proportionally. However, the European Parliament's main responsibilities are legislative, budgetary and supervisory which are outlined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which is known as the Lisbon Treaty (2007).

This in its own way shows the division of power in the EU. The Parliament acts as a law-making entity who approves or disapproves the EU's budget and also supervises Commission's work. The Commission is the EU's technocratic governing and executive body which is formed by an expert or professional from each member state. This resonates with Plato's idea of philosopher kings as the most suitable leaders and his ship's captain metaphor in the Republic emphasises that knowledge and experience is valuable (1970, 282). Yet, these legislative and executive powers are shared with the Councils of European Union which contains specific ministers or the heads of states of the member states on that particular matter. After all, most of the powers are still held by

the member states themselves in their national parliaments. Additionally, in accordance to Montesquieu's separation of powers to executive -, legislative - and to judicial power (Held 2006, 68), the EU has a separate judicial body, the European Court of Justice.

The three disciplines to distinguish the possible future guidelines of Europe are cooperation, neo-functionalism and federalism. The first cooperation explains itself quite naturally and arguing that the EU should only collaborate among the member states and participating in their national election is enough. Thus, the supranational institutions like the European Parliament and voting at its elections is unnecessary. Neo-functionalism, on the other hand, sees that some level of democracy or engagement of the people is required although it is not a must. However, federalism then, with its roots in the writings of Madison, sees that larger state offers coherent space for electorates (Held 2006, 73). With great participation in the EP elections allows the creation of European demos and hence, the youth participation is crucial.

1.2. Methodology

This thesis uses the case study method since in the heart of this paper is the comprehensive analysis with its ups and lows of participation in European Parliament elections. For this reason, the basic source base relies on statistics which are provided by the EU for the beginning of the study. Nevertheless, one notable source provider with the dependency on statistical data is necessary of pointing out. It is the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance which has already established itself in the terminology section. Besides, using International IDEA as a source is fitting due to its relevance and work towards sustainable democracy worldwide. To put it bluntly, this thesis credits to the abundance of statistics.

After the initial analysis of the statistics, the research shifts to more specific case studies with a wee deeper insight to the member states which perform high and low in terms of voter-turnouts. This, then allows more sources to be utilised like the ones mentioned in the introduction: governmental or organisational publications, academic papers and – studies, and news articles. Like referring to a joint statement of the Visegrád Group about the regional organisation's

involvement and participation in the EU but then again, the framework of the Visegrád - organisation is discussed in Gyárfášová ja Mesežnikov 25 Years of the V4 as Seen by the Public (2016) - academic paper. Yet, there is a continuation of statistical references throughout the length of this thesis. Overall, this type of research illustrates the quantitative research method.

Although, there is an emphasis on the quantitative research method of case study, the research lacks a clear hypothesis. It simply aims to learn to state of the voter-turnouts at the EP elections by relying on the provided data. Hence, the lack of hypothesis and inclusion of theories involve aspects of qualitative research methods. The theoretical reflections offer a unique approach with enabling a universal research by releasing the case sensitivity. These theories are based on David Held's book, *Models of Democracies* which lightens bunch of democracy theories. Held covers the different democracy models from the ancient – to the contemporary world: from Plato to republicanism and to liberal democracy and offering insights to Marxism and to Francis Fukuyama's thought of the end of history and also covering many other democracy ideologies and thinkers. Basically, the *Models of Democracies* provides a solid ground from which to explore other democracy models deeper and further for the purpose of this thesis.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE STATISTICS

In this chapter, like the title suggests, the aim is on statistical analysis. The statistics provided by the European Parliament reveal the voter-turnouts of the EP elections in 2004, 2009 and 2014. This data is processed by enforcing the exclusion factors established in the introduction. These excluding factors are that the member state's voting system is based on free will and to the right to vote, the member state must have participated in all of the three elections and finally, it will also take part in the European Parliament elections in the future. Thus, excluding the following EU members: Belgium, Luxemburg, Bulgaria, Romania and the United Kingdom. The data of the remaining and eligible EU22 is then collected into a single table which is created for this thesis and can be located below this paragraph. The table adds to the existing statistics the calculated average of each country and of the EU in general. It then firstly, reveals the European member states which have higher voter turn-out than the EU average which are marked bold on the table. Secondly, the table shows the other end of the spectrum, the member states with considerably lower voter-turnout than the EU average which is noted on this table in italics.

Table 1: The voter-turnouts of EU22 at the European Parliament elections

THE PARTICIPATING EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2004 (%)	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2009 (%)	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2014 (%)	THE VOTER AVERAGE OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN 2004, - IN 2009 AND - IN 2014 (%)
Austria	42,43	45,97	45,39	44,60
Cyprus	72,5	59,4	43,97	58,62
<i>Czechia</i>	28,3	28,22	18,2	<i>24,91</i>
Denmark	82,39	59,54	56,32	66,08
Estonia	26,83	43,9	36,52	35,75
Finland	39,43	38,6	39,1	39,04
France	42,76	40,63	42,43	41,94
Germany	43	43,27	48,1	44,79
Greece	63,22	52,61	59,97	58,6
Hungary	38,5	36,31	28,97	34,59
Ireland	58,58	58,64	52,44	56,55
Italy	71,72	65,05	57,22	64,66
Latvia	41,34	53,7	30,24	41,76
Lithuania	48,38	20,98	47,35	38,90
Malta	82,39	78,79	74,8	78,66

Netherlands	39,26	36,75	37,32	37,78
<i>Poland</i>	20,87	24,53	23,83	23,08
Portugal	38,6	36,77	33,67	36,35
<i>Slovakia</i>	28,35	19,64	13,05	20,35
<i>Slovenia</i>	16,97	28,37	24,55	23,30
Spain	45,14	44,87	43,81	44,94
Sweden	37,85	45,53	51,07	44,82
The EU	45,47	42,97	42,61	43,68

Source: Karttunen, O (2018) The voter-turnouts of EU22 at the European Parliament elections

What can be seen on the table is quite alarming in terms of active participation. Less than half of the EU citizens cast their vote with 43,68 percent as an average and hardly a quarter of the potential votes are casted by the member states: Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia with the lowest voter turn-outs. Electoral participation is rather poor even in the countries which have higher voter turn-out than the EU average. Only one member-state scores higher than 70 percent of the average voter turn-out with Malta and its nearly 80 % of voter turn-out. Though ranking above the EU average, less than half of the population in the four states: Austria, Germany, Spain and Sweden participate in the elections. The rest of the countries: Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Ireland and Italy have a moderate voter-turnout.

Another worrying discovery, is that most of the EU22 countries have consistently plummeting voter-turnouts at the European Parliament elections. This decreasing trend is most vividly seen in Slovakia with 2004 voter-turnout of 28,35 percent decreasing to 19,64 in 2009 and finally at election 2014 being merely 13,05 percent. Still, in many of the EU22 states, the voter-turnout fluctuates by having irregular peaks and lows in the voter-turnouts. Nevertheless, only two countries have managed to increased voter-turnout in every election. These are Germany and Sweden and they are also in the group with a higher voter-turnout that the EU average.

These EU22 states representing the highs and lows can be put into groups with similarities. All the member states which have low voter-turnout in EP elections are Eastern Central European countries. In addition to geopolitical location, these countries have also a shared history. All of them joined the union in the 2004 enlargement and during the Cold War era they have been under the Soviet oppression or influence. Thus, the states quite recently transformed into liberal democracies. The EU22 countries with higher voter-turnout than the EU average, however, have

multiple geopolitical positions. The Southern European: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain, Scandinavian: Denmark and Sweden and Germanic: Austria and Germany member states are more actively participating at the elections. In this context, Ireland stands out as a geopolitical oddity. Nevertheless, because these countries represent a diverse group, it is far more beneficial to examine a few of these actively participating countries individually which then may also reveal geopolitical impact to the voting tendencies.

Hence, the next chapters will conduct a deeper but brief research of these states of the highest and lowest voter-turnout than the EU average based on the table above. This will include the following states of the highest voter-turnout: Malta, Denmark and Italy. Then again, on the other hand, investigating the reasons and the issues of the states with the lowest voter-turnout which are Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The first three states belong also to a same regional organisation, the Visegrád Group. Thus, they will be reflected through that framework.

3. MEMBER STATES WITH HIGHER VOTER-TURNOUT THAN THE EU'S AVERAGE

This chapter aims to reach an understanding and to enlighten some of the reasons why Malta, Denmark, Italy and the Southern Europe in general perform better by casting their vote more eagerly at the EP elections than the average of the EU22. The three sub-chapters will then investigate separately these countries one by one: Malta, Denmark and Italy. However, with Italy's case, there will be an additional dimension of the Southern Europe as a general region. According to the Table 1: The Voter-Turnouts of EU22 in the European Parliament Elections, the Southern European EU member states tend to have the highest voter-turnout at the European Parliament ballots. Thence, to unravel outcomes, there is a possibility to find out joint indicators for this active participation. Still, what we must bear in mind, is that the actual voter-turnout at the European Parliament elections is declining in all of states like Malta, Denmark and Italy with the highest voter-turnout average at the European Parliament election of the EU22 (see Table 1).

3.1. Malta

There is an abundance of variables which influence the Maltese citizens' decision to cast their votes at the European Parliament elections. Yet, firstly, it is vital to get a good picture of Malta as a democratic republic. Malta is a small island-nation surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea with a population of less than half a million people. The former British Crown Colony gained her independence 1964 and in 1974 became a republic (Hirczy de Miño, Lane, 1999). Malta also joined the European Union in 2004 (Malta..., *s.a.*). Since then the republic has developed into a stable model for sustainable democratic participation.

Thus, to put Malta's high voter-turnout average at the EP elections with 78,66 percent into perspective, it is crucial to have to look to the voter-turnouts at the national elections. International IDEA' statistics reveals that the state proceeds to receive high voter-turnouts at its parliament elections, too, with more than 90 percent voter-turnouts at every millennial ballot (*s.a.*). Unfortunately, this also reveals around 10 percent difference in the citizens' activity when it comes to taking part at the EU level - and national level elections. Still, a simple explanation for this

difference is that voting at the EU elections is not seen as necessary unlike voting at the national level. This is a good instance of political factor (Solijonov 2016, 36). In this case, it has a reducing effect to the voter-turnout.

Still, undeniably, Malta's voter-turnout results are impressive. One contributor for this result is Malta's voting system. This institutional factor illustrates the single transferable vote (STV) system which intriguingly is also used in Ireland. The system works in a way in which the candidates are ranked and chosen on preference. "There are three distinguishing features of Malta's version of STV which should be noted: (1) the transfer of transferable votes to continuing candidates in proportion to their respective strength in the pool of transferable ballots examined at any one particular count; (2) the use of so-called casual elections (count-backs) to fill vacancies; and (3) the dual character of the first-preference vote which, since 1987, is not only a candidate-preference vote but, in given circumstances, also a party vote determining control of government." (Hirczy de Miño, Lane, 1999)

Another clear contributing variable for higher voter turn-out is the country's small population. With less voters, each registered vote is more powerful and thus, the political impact is more evident (Solijonov 2016, 35). Besides, other socio-economic factors have an impact, too. As a small island-nation the Maltese citizens are able recognise the fruits and benefits of the EU in their daily lives more vividly. For instance, in business opportunities within the common market and in the customs union and how the free movement of labour and people has spiked up the tourism industry.

3.2. Denmark

Denmark is parliamentary monarchy located in a peninsula and on islands between North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The small kingdom is one of the Nordic countries and as such it is an example of democratic activities and participating political affairs. However, like Malta, the gap between the national election's – and the European Parliament elections' voter-turnouts is massive. On one hand, the voter-turnout of the Danish parliament elections in 2015, was nearly 86 percent (Denmark, *s.a.*). But on the other hand, around 66 percent of Danes voted in average at the

millennial elections (see Table 1). The difference is 20 percent which litters Denmark's position to less exemplary of a nation with such a high voter-turnout average at the EU level elections.

This clarifies the fact that even with well-established socio-economic, institutional and political factors supporting the democratic participation, there remains the uncertain wild card. This uncertainty may as well be caused by the public image of the EU or how the citizens' see the union and feel its closeness. The reason may even lie in the wordings of EU publications or the quality of the MEP candidates which deepens the disinterest to cast a vote at the EP elections. If issue is merely a "cosmetic" one, the electoral interest can be wakened up and increased with bringing up the benefits and positive aspects of engaging in the European Union's democratic practice. Hence, to alter this in a member states like Denmark, a campaign such as the "This Time I'm Voting For..." - campaign mentioned in the introduction is a wise move from the EU. After all, the aim of this EU-wide campaign is to increase participation (Code... 2018).

3.3. Italy and the Southern Europe

In Italy, the voter-turnout activity at the European Parliament elections has been decreasing which is evident in the Table 1 even though the millennial average (64,66 %) still remains high among the EU22. However, this downwards curve is also visible at the national parliament elections. On three consecutive elections the voter-turnout has declined in each ballot. In 2008 the turnout was 80,54 percent, then in 2013 it was 75,19 percent and finally in 2018 election, it was 72,93 percent (Italy, *s.a.*). Hence, there is also the interest gap similar to the examined countries that the citizens cast less likely their vote in the EP elections than their national ones. With Italy's case it is roughly a 10 percent difference.

However, also member states like Greece and Spain have high voter-turnout average at the millennial European Parliament elections and these countries with Italy were also heavily affected by the euro-crisis. It was caused by the build-up of private and company debt with borrowing more than they could afford, and this was most clear in the Southern European states which are more to be shaken by economic crisis due to their economies tendency to rely on agriculture, tourism and low skilled manufacturing (Esposito 2014, 3-6). The measures to tackle the crisis were the European Union wide and thus, bringing the matters of the EU closer towards the citizens. This,

region-wide economic instability, created a favourable variable for the Southern European citizens to cast their vote and let their voice heard at the European Parliament elections in 2009 and in 2014. In other words, it peaked the stakes of the issues dealt in the EU.

4. MEMBER STATES WITH LOWER VOTER-TURNOUT THAN THE EU'S AVERAGE

The focus of this chapter is to reveal some the reasons why Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia and Czechia fail to receive a high voter-turnout at the European Parliament elections. Less than quarter of the population votes in these republics (see Table 1). All of these countries share a similar past. All of the areas of the current states (Slovenia, Czechia and Slovakia weren't established yet) fell under the Soviet field of influence after the second world war. The Soviet Union or The Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics (U.S.S.R) reflected the world through Marxism. The ideology had its roots in class struggle and the idea of socialistic revolution because the capitalists exploit the workers who must revolt in order to receive an equal society. Karl Marx who is the founding father of the ideology wrote in the Communistic Manifesto the following: "Political power, properly so-called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another." (Marx, Engels 1969, 127). However, the leaders of U.S.S.R argued in accordance to the orthodox Marxism that the transition from socialism to communism is not possible without the leadership of the disciplined revolutionaries (Held 2006, 118). Therefore, shifting the states towards an authoritarian rule which then created a disadvantage for the democratic growth and – participation.

4.1. Slovakia and the Visegrád Group

Slovakia is a young republic located in Central Eastern Europe bordering with Poland and Czechia in the north, Austria in the west, Hungary in the south and Ukraine in the east. Slovaks perform the worst when it comes to casting their vote in the European Parliament elections but unfortunately Slovaks additionally lack the interest to vote in general. The recent national election in Slovakia display this downfall of democracy. According to International IDEA, the latest voter-turnout in Slovakia's parliament election in 2016 was 59,82 percent (Slovakia, *s.a.*). This obviously, is an improvement in the context of the EP elections since the average voter-turnout for Slovakia at the EU level elections is around 20 percent revealed by Table 1 seen above.

Nonetheless, Slovakia forms a regional organisation, the Visegrád Group together with Hungary, Czechia and Poland. The two latter members have also the lowest voter-turnout averages at the

EU level elections. The Visegrád Collaboration was established in 1991 with a political aim to stabilize the region, to promote each other's pursuits to join the European Union and to deepen integration within the various fields of education, science, civil society development, crime fighting and environment (Gyárfášová, Mesežnikov 2016, 7-8). As an organisation, Visegrád Group also supports the European Union and claims: "that the EU is the best framework to face and tackle both internal and external challenges" (V4 Statement... 2018). Hence, it is baffling how this does not transfer to the citizens voting behaviour and, in this matter, to the member states themselves. All the member states have governments which are more or less euro-critics which has become more transparent during the refugee crisis. This then has also effected the views of the Visegrád Group and in the same time bringing the member states together and thus, strengthen the influence power of the whole region. "As a consequence of the crisis the EU has to face major challenges, like the necessity to guarantee the protection of external borders and the differentiation between genuine asylum seekers and illegal and economic migrants. Our experience has shown that only those solutions that have been approved by consensus bring the best results in practice and are able to effectively address the crisis" (ibid).

This exposes a paradox since how can there be decision-making based on consensus if three quarters of the population fail to vote. Also, in contrast, based on International IDEA's statistics both Poland and Czechia share the low voter-turnout results at national elections with Slovakia. Poland with only with 50,92 percent of a turnout at 2015 parliament elections, and then Czechia with higher voter-turnout 60,84 percent at 2017 parliament elections (Poland, *s.a.*: Czechia, *s.a.*). This demonstrates an unfortunate reality in which the democracy is threatened or - in crisis. Hence, now it is not just an issue with the lack of voting at European Parliament elections but in national elections, too. Some of the reasons for this, may be because of the authoritarian history in region and then other reasons can appear as socio-economic ones. Poland, particularly, is subjected to population instability due to emigration and the nation's large population size is unfavourable for supporting to vote. With a lot of eligible voters, a single vote's impacts less which is contrast to Malta's case, and with the constant movement from one place to another can decrease people's willingness to take part in the political process and thus, to vote (Solijonov 2016, 35).

4.2. Slovenia

Slovenia has a similar story like the Visegrád States. But unlike Visegrád Group, Slovenia was a region of former Yugoslavia. Yet, it as well is a young post-communistic democracy which is having a low in voter-turnout both at the European Union level - and at national elections. According to International IDEA, only around half of the voter-aged Slovenians casted their vote at national elections (Slovenia, *s.a.*). The circa 50 percent voter-turnouts have been now twice in row at the Slovenian parliament elections (*ibid*). These results affirm and give a reason also to the poorer voter-turnout average at 23,30 percent (see Table 1) out of EU22 at the European Parliament elections. Without a tradition to vote at the parliament elections, it correlates to a low a voter-turnout at EU level.

However, Slovenia like most European democracies is on-going a phase of decreasing voter-turnouts. This is regardless of the nations' histories towards voting and free elections, both new - and old democracies face this unfortunate development. Yet, the trend is much more aggressive among the post-communistic states. (Solijonov 2016, 43) This chapter and the previous chapters 2 and 3 can verify this statement. In fact, the focus on the voter-turnouts at European Parliament elections is crumbling since it is not just a problem of the European Union but also a severe issue at national level too. How can voter-turnout grow if countries like Slovenia lack the general interest to vote.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE FOUNDINGS

This chapter aims to point out reasons for the voter-turnout result of EU22 from which can be learned from. This then is divided into two sub-chapter. In this, the notions of federalism, neo-functionalism and cooperation are also reflected. The first section is about general reflection in which the severity of the issue is measured and to give suggestions how to improve and on which topic to focus. Another sub-chapter then is about theoretical reflections. In this part, the phenomenon and lessons are seen through theories and how they can explain this.

5.1. General Reflection

Firstly, it far harder to find common variables for the states with higher voter-turnout average at EU22. Thus, there are fewer clear lessons what can be learnt from these states with higher voter-turnout average. Yet, the fact how distant or near the European Union is seen by its citizens plays a key aspect. For instance, the Southern European states' economies benefit greatly on the EU's agricultural policy and the EU's impact on tourism. Besides, the EU also intervened in some of these states' actions during the financial crisis. It was the battle between austerity and spending (Esposito 2014, 3-6). Thence, it has brought the EU closer to the citizens and voting at the European Parliament is far more meaningful.

Still, the biggest favourable feature for reaching the greatest number of citizens to cast their vote, is the actual state of the democracy. Democratic participation needs to be firmly established and thus, there needs to be a tradition of voting in free elections. All the states with the highest voter-turnout among the EU22, have long or relatively long history as liberal democracies. Nevertheless, the European democracies are facing declining voter-turnouts, but this development is less severe in the established democratic states (Solijonov 2016, 43). This also reveals, another side of the issue. The younger democracies, the post-communistic republics are having far more rapid decrease of voter-turnouts (ibid).

Hence, there are far more coherent lessons to be found from the low voter-turnout countries at the EP elections. The overall low voter-turnout in post-communistic states is also linked to the poor

performance at the European Union level. All of the post-communistic states are young republics and they still have scars left from the authoritarian rule. Therefore, the “-- euphoria of sovereignty and independence has sometimes hampered and continues to obstruct acceptance of the EU’s operating institutional framework; instead of conforming, these states have shown a tendency to propose new norms that may inevitably shock the older member states and their diplomats” (Schmidt 2016, 137). The idea of an independent and sovereign nation-state is something to be cherished and be proud of among these states, which then again creates an obstacle to the EU collaboration and joint decision-making undermining one country’s sovereignty over greater good. The post-communistic states may feel that the EU is a replacement of the Soviet Union taking away their self-rule.

Additionally, the countries with the lowest voter-turnout average in the EU, like the Visegrád Group are highly euro-critic, as well. But what must be kept in mind, today’s Eurosceptics, may change their views to support the EU if their fortunes improve within the organisation (Hooghe 2007, 10). Therefore, if these post-communistic states began to feel the EU as useful and their influence grows in the union, the states may alter their views. It could also, then have a positive boost to the citizens’ interest to cast their vote. However, it does not solve the issue that these states do not only have low voter-turnouts at the European Parliament elections but also at national level, too.

This problem is a fundamental one since having a functional and liberal democracy is one the corner stones of the EU’s membership requirements. Secondly, due to the division of power in the EU, the European Parliament shares its powers with the Council of Ministers which legitimacy is granted by the member states. The Council of Ministers: “— has at its disposal powerful legal instruments (above all, ‘regulations`, ‘directions` and ‘decisions`) which allow it to make and enact policy.” (Held 2006, 299). It shows that the EU functions even without a strong support for the European Parliament since member states, in the end, retain the most power themselves. This follows the thoughts of the ideas of neo-functionalism and cooperation theory for. Thence, it vital that member states keep having high voter-turnouts at national parliament elections too. The national leaders and governments should have a stable support from the citizens and thus, bringing out opinions to the EU which resonates among large number of its citizens.

Still, the fact that a member states themselves does not manage to engage their citizens to vote even in national elections is an issue that the EU does not have the tools to tackle this itself. Instead, the member states themselves are responsible to resolve the low voter-turnouts among the electoral spectrum. This then, would require changes to the young voters' views about the EU and to the voting system, but generating views need an establishment of democratic education and altering an institution such as voting system is often not possible without a constitutional reform. Albeit, this process would not be simple but adopting a new voting system like the single transferable vote (STV) system, could boost up the voter-turnout. The STV system is used in Malta (Hirczy de Miño, Lane, 1999) and in Ireland which both belong to the group of the EU22 members which have higher voter-turnout than the EU average. Against this thesis' preference towards idea of the right to vote, even compulsory voting could be an alternative to establish a sustainable tradition for the democratic participation.

Nevertheless, the up-coming European Parliament in spring 2019 will reveal the extent of how much the Brexit process evoked the citizens' interest towards the European Union. The United Kingdoms decision to leave the European Union has showcased the EU's enormous impact to a single member state. In the UK the voices demanding another Brexit referendum are getting louder, like the People's Vote -campaign. It provides the following arguments to reason it's pursues to have another referendum. Firstly, the prices are increasing due to lower value of the pound. Secondly, the National Health Service (NHS) will not receive additional money after Brexit but instead the professional staff will be leaving and the government is prepared for medicine shortages. Thirdly, it will cost £50 billion to leave the EU and finally, the phoniness of some of the leading pro-Brexit campaigner which have now resigned and left the mess behind. (We... *s.a.*) Therefore, regardless of the Brexit's outcome, it has at least one positive aspect. It has shown the EU citizens how beneficial it is to be a member of the European Union.

All in all, this research has introduced a few approaches that the European Union should focus on in the future. The European Union is regardless of the opinions towards federalism a hybrid of federal structure and the European Parliament is example of this development with gaining powers in every treaty. Therefore, it is crucial to provoke citizens to cast their votes in the elections with the emphasis on the young voters. Firstly, the greatest asset for increasing citizens' engagement at the EU level is reaffirming the presence and influence of the EU. Secondly, in the member states

with low voter-turnouts, it is necessary to take actions to teach and wake up citizens' interest to take part in the decision-making. "-- Lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process." (Solijonov 2016, 52). This is most alarming when the young people lack interest for democratic practise because without participation the whole system may collapse. Hence finally, the EU could also learn from Germany and Sweden which have managed to increase their voter-turnouts at the European Parliament elections (see Table 1) and to implement the German and Swedish measures to all the member states. Unfortunately, this aspect was only briefly mentioned in this thesis, since the focus was on the voter-turnouts of EU22 countries with the highest and lower voter-turnout than the EU average.

5.2. Theoretical Reflection

The European Union represent a unique organisation in the world. It has a lot of features of a federation even though not fully being one. Initial idea of federalism originates in Madison's *The Federalist*. He states that in a large state with free market economy, there are greater social diversity which then can ensure versatile base for electorates (Held 2006, 73). In order words: "— A republican leviathan is necessary to secure life, liberty, and property from the tyranny of local majorities..." (Krouse 1983, 66). This then embodied in the EU means such as having the common currency, euro and sharing the internal market. The member states have willingly given up some of their sovereignty but remaining the final power in many areas of their domestic and foreign affairs (Held 2006, 299). This sits well with all of the ideas of cooperation, neo-functionalism and federalism.

However, the EU is an example of enhanced political regionalisation in cosmopolitan democracy (Held 2006, 308). The principle of this cosmopolitan democracy is as following: "In a world of intensifying regional and global relations, with marked overlapping 'communities of fate', the principle of autonomy requires entrenchment in regional and global networks as well as in national and local polities" (ibid). In other words, nation-states, local entities are intertwined with the regional and global frameworks. Thus, it is crucial to encourage citizens' participation in every phase resonating with the federal approach about the EU's future This has been traditionally performed by voting at the elections.

Yet, the right to vote has changed throughout the course of history from an exclusive privilege to a universal suffrage for all citizens regardless of gender or owning property. In fact, the first major political philosophy taking a stand for equal participation was ironically Marxism. The theory sees, particularly with Engels' standpoints, that capitalism includes the class divisions and sexual exploitation in which the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat (Held 2006, 97-98). The impact of Marxism and more notably the implementations of socialism in the Soviet Union have had a profound effect for the democracy developments in the Eastern Europe. Without classes and class struggle, there is no legitimate reason of dispute since only classes have different interests and thus, making the way for authoritarian rule (ibid, 121).

When the Soviet Union's grip weakened and then eventually collapsed in the end of the 80s and beginning 90s, the wave of changes and political reforms swept across the Central and Eastern Europe were fondly welcomed (Held 2006, 217). The atmosphere of suddenly widened possibilities when the previously unchangeable institutions and order were no more (Callinicos 1991, 8). This created an optimistic environment which laid the foundation for deeper integration of the European Union and the gave opportunity for the enlargements. The beginning of the post-soviet era also gave space for Francis Fukuyama's argument of the end of history. This notion highlighted the remarkable consensus that the world shared concerning the legitimacy and viability of the liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1989/90, 22). In today's in Europe this consensus is questionable and it is hard to be found among the young voters. A liberal democracy in which only half of the possible voters are heard has severe legitimacy issues.

Hence, it is an obstacle which the European Union according to European federalism needs to overcome but then the theories of cooperation and neo-functionalism would argue that the obstacle of low voter-turnouts concern only some the member states. As this thesis has pointed out that the post-communistic states battle with this legitimacy issue the most both at national - and the EU level. The European Union has adopted the distribution of wealth by supporting more poorer member states, but in return the poorer countries respect the EU's functions and the membership requirements. This is in accordance of the doctrine of the English School. This theory states that the richer countries have a responsibility to take care of poorer states (Suganami 2003, 227-53). On the other hand, there is a condition for financial aid which is the poorer nations duty to alter

their views towards the common incentives like the liberal values (ibid). In the European Union this policy has been successfully integrated the Southern European countries which also tend to receive relatively high voter-turnouts at the EP elections. Though, this is not the case of the post-communistic member states of the EU which then forms a barrier between the member states. This barrier may as well cripple the whole European Union in the long run. Therefore, it was vital to find tools to break the barrier for the survival of the EU.

CONCLUSION

This thesis oversees only the surface of the complex sum of variables effecting the voter-turnouts in the European Parliament elections. Thus, in many ways this research fails to answer to some of the original research questions set in the introduction. However, even though this inconvenience, the paper remains true to its preface and manages to bring depth to the analysis in the given guidelines. This is because of the abundant use of statistics and the theoretical emphasis. A long the way, there are also other discoveries related to the phenomenon which unfortunately, were left out of the research due to different focus.

The shortcomings of the initial research argument reveal that there are no simple instructions for receiving high voter-turnouts in the European Parliament elections. All the EU22 members with the highest voter-turnouts than the EU average, are in fact facing declining participation rate. These countries: Malta, Denmark, Italy and the Southern Europe in general also quite diverse group and have huge differences among themselves. Hence, there are difficulties to find out clear common indicators or similarities. Although the most visible one must be that all of the states are established democracies with tradition for electoral engagement. Also, when the citizens feel the impact and presence of the European Union, it has a positive influence which is the case in many of the studied nations. This argument has strengthened itself due to Brexit. One of the outcomes of this process has alerted the awareness of the scope of the EU's influence.

Yet, far more conclusions can be drawn from the EU22 member states which have the lowest voter-turnout average in the EP elections. These states: Slovakia, Slovenia, Czechia and Poland are young post-communistic republics which do not have strong tendency for voting. This lack of electoral interest is not only present at the EU level but also in national parliament elections. The downfall of voter-turnouts is alarming but the European Union has not proper tools to tackle the it since the change needs to come from the member states within. To add up, the support for anti-EU statements and opinions are widespread in the Central Eastern European countries which does not help to polish the image of the EP elections. Hence, they provide clear lessons what can be learnt from. The European Union should concentrate on these countries with low voter-turnout and try firstly to alter their views towards the EU but secondly, assist these countries to take measures to turn the course of voting and electoral participation.

Finally, this research presents the state of democracy in the European Union. In many ways this democracy is jeopardized but there are some hopeful signs, like the developments in Germany and Sweden. These member states have succeeded to increase voter-turnouts in every millennial EP election. Unfortunately, this was a topic was not examined due to the fact that both Germany and Sweden are situated close to the middle group in terms of voter-turnout average of the millennial European Parliament elections (see Table 1). Even without this aspect, the thesis provides an understanding to the problems of democratic participation in the EU. It is actually necessity since regardless of the diverse development approaches, like federalism, neo-functionalism and cooperation, of the European Union, voting remains essential and especially. Hence, to sum up, this research highlights two essential lessons for the European Union. First one being about boosting voter-turnouts in the established democracies and the other one is the lack of sustainable democracy patterns in the post-communistic EU22 member states. Tackling these areas will then help to engage the European youth to perform these democratic practises.

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APPENDICES

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Table 1: The voter-turnouts of EU22 at the European Parliament elections

THE PARTICIPATING EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2004 (%)	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2009 (%)	THE VOTER TURN-OUT IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2014 (%)	THE VOTER AVERAGE OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN 2004, - IN 2009 AND - IN 2014 (%)
Austria	42,43	45,97	45,39	44,60
Cyprus	72,5	59,4	43,97	58,62
<i>Czechia</i>	28,3	28,22	18,2	<i>24,91</i>
Denmark	82,39	59,54	56,32	66,08
Estonia	26,83	43,9	36,52	35,75
Finland	39,43	38,6	39,1	39,04
France	42,76	40,63	42,43	41,94
Germany	43	43,27	48,1	44,79
Greece	63,22	52,61	59,97	58,6
Hungary	38,5	36,31	28,97	34,59
Ireland	58,58	58,64	52,44	56,55

Italy	71,72	65,05	57,22	64,66
Latvia	41,34	53,7	30,24	41,76
Lithuania	48,38	20,98	47,35	38,90
Malta	82,39	78,79	74,8	78,66
Netherlands	39,26	36,75	37,32	37,78
<i>Poland</i>	20,87	24,53	23,83	23,08
Portugal	38,6	36,77	33,67	36,35
<i>Slovakia</i>	28,35	19,64	13,05	20,35
<i>Slovenia</i>	16,97	28,37	24,55	23,30
Spain	45,14	44,87	43,81	44,94
Sweden	37,85	45,53	51,07	44,82
The EU	45,47	42,97	42,61	43,68

Source: Karttunen, O. (2018) The voter-turnouts of EU22 at the European Parliament elections *

* Collected from:

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