

UNION OF ENTREPRENEURS
AND EMPLOYERS



**UNDERREPRESENTATION
OF CEE REGION
IN THE EU INSTITUTIONS**

ρίσατε στο
αϊκό Κοινοβούλιο

Welcome to
the European Parliament

Bienvenue au
Parlement européen

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ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU), a complex mosaic of nations and policies, has continually shifted its contours to accommodate evolving geopolitical and internal dynamics. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with its rich historical tapestry, cultural diversity, and burgeoning economies, stands as a pivotal pillar in this European narrative. However, a palpable and persistent underrepresentation of the CEE region within the upper echelons of EU institutions has surfaced as a salient concern, particularly underscored by the 2019 European Elections where CEE countries found themselves conspicuously absent from high-level positions. This absence is not merely statistical but resonates with broader systemic challenges, geopolitical shifts, and policy implications, including the increasing economic importance of CEE in driving and sustaining the EU's

economic growth. Events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine have amplified the strategic importance of the CEE region, underscoring its proactive role and contributions on the European stage. Yet, the glaring disparity in representation within key EU roles impedes the region's ability to advocate effectively for its interests, shape policy agendas, and contribute meaningfully to EU-wide decision-making processes. This report delves into the intricate backdrop of this underrepresentation, navigating through historical paradigms, geopolitical intricacies, and systemic biases that have perpetuated this imbalance. It underscores the complexities of EU appointment mechanisms, influenced by negotiations, party politics, and historical legacies, which have inadvertently resulted in a disproportionate emphasis on Western European representation.



KEY FINDINGS

In 2022, Western and Southern Europe accounted for 88% of new leadership (according to the mandate 2022 appointments for presidential positions in Institutions of the European Union, Advisory bodies to the European Union, Agencies of the European Union, and Other EU bodies), totaling 80% over the three years from 2020 to 2022—a 10-point increase from the previous 2019-2021 period. In contrast, no one from Northern Europe received a leadership role in 2022, while only one person from Central and Eastern Europe did so.

In terms of appointments relative to the number of Member States, Western and Southern Europe accounted for 71% of appointments between 2020 and 2022, showing a 9-point increase from the prior three years. Meanwhile, Central and Eastern Europe captured just above 6% and 5%, a drop from the 13% recorded for Eastern Europe earlier.

When considering the populations of respective regions, individuals from Southern Europe in 2022 secured over double their expected proportion of positions, whereas those from Eastern Europe obtained roughly half of their expected representation. Even though no one from Northern Europe got appointed in 2022, they still garnered

1.8 times their anticipated representation over the three years. While Western and Southern European Member States nominate Commissioners overseeing pivotal portfolios, such as the economy, the CEE region's representation has fewer influential roles, affecting the region's capacity to shape and influence critical EU policies and agendas.

Despite having representatives in advisory bodies like the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, the CEE region's impact is limited in terms of influence in shaping legislative proposals and policies that directly affect member states.

The underrepresentation of the CEE region, especially countries like Poland and Hungary, in EU institutions, correlates with lower turnout rates in European elections and potential disillusionment among citizens, exacerbating feelings of alienation and marginalization from the broader European project, which undermines democratic legitimacy, contributes to low turnout rates and threatens regional balance and cohesion within the Union.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The intricate tapestry of European politics has continually evolved, reflecting the ever-changing dynamics of its Member States and the broader geopolitical landscape. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), comprising nations with rich histories, diverse cultures, and burgeoning economies, has played a pivotal role in shaping the European narrative. However, a glaring disparity emerges when one scrutinizes the representation of CEE countries within the upper echelons of the European Union (EU) institutions. The 2019 European Elections marked a watershed moment, revealing a stark reality: the CEE region found itself marginalized, with quite limited representation in the top-level positions of the European Institutions in comparison to Western counterparts. This conspicuous absence resonated beyond mere numbers, symbolizing deeper systemic challenges and imbalances within the EU's governance and decision-making structures.

The ramifications of this underrepresentation became increasingly pronounced against the backdrop of significant geopolitical events and policy debates that underscored the pivotal role and contributions of CEE countries on the European stage. Notably, the geopolitical landscape of Europe has witnessed seismic shifts, with events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine amplifying the significance of the CEE region. As CEE countries showcased leadership, resilience, and unity in mobilizing support for Ukraine, the absence of commensurate representation in top EU roles became a poignant paradox. Leaders from the CEE region, such as Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, highlighted this disparity, emphasizing the imperative of equitable representation to reflect the evolving realities and challenges facing the EU. Kallas emphasized in an interview in 2023, "We (Estonia) have been members of NATO and the European Union for 19 years. Do we have ... worse people than the old Europeans? Or are we not there yet? I think the answer is that, no, actually, we have very good people. We should be on the radar for top jobs. We have been proving ourselves in both of those organizations. It's time for Europe's eastern crew to get a top job."

Additionally, the European Union's internal dynamics and policies have increasingly intertwined with broader global trends, encompassing areas such as foreign policy, energy, climate change, and digital. In this context, the underrepresentation of CEE countries not only raises questions of fairness and inclusivity but also poses tangible risks and limitations in addressing multifaceted challenges that the EU currently faces. The absence of a robust CEE presence in pivotal roles within the European Institutions hampers the region's ability to advocate for its interests effectively, shape policy agendas according to the needs of its development, and consequently to contribute proactively shaping Europe's future trajectory. Therefore, the historical context and evolution of EU appointments reveal entrenched patterns and paradigms that have perpetuated the underrepresentation of CEE countries. The appointment mechanisms, influenced by intricate negotiations, party politics, and unwritten norms, have inadvertently marginalized the CEE region, reinforcing Western European overrepresentation in key positions.



This historical backdrop, characterized by a complex interplay of factors ranging from party affiliations, and geopolitical considerations, to individual leadership dynamics, sets the stage for a nuanced exploration of the challenges and opportunities confronting the CEE region.

In summary, the background elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of the underrepresentation of CEE countries within the EU's top echelons, encompassing historical precedents, geopolitical dynamics, policy implications, and systemic challenges. As the EU navigates a pivotal juncture, characterized by evolving challenges and opportunities, addressing this disparity emerges as a crucial imperative, necessitating a comprehensive understanding, strategic engagement, and concerted efforts to foster a more inclusive, representative, and resilient European Union.

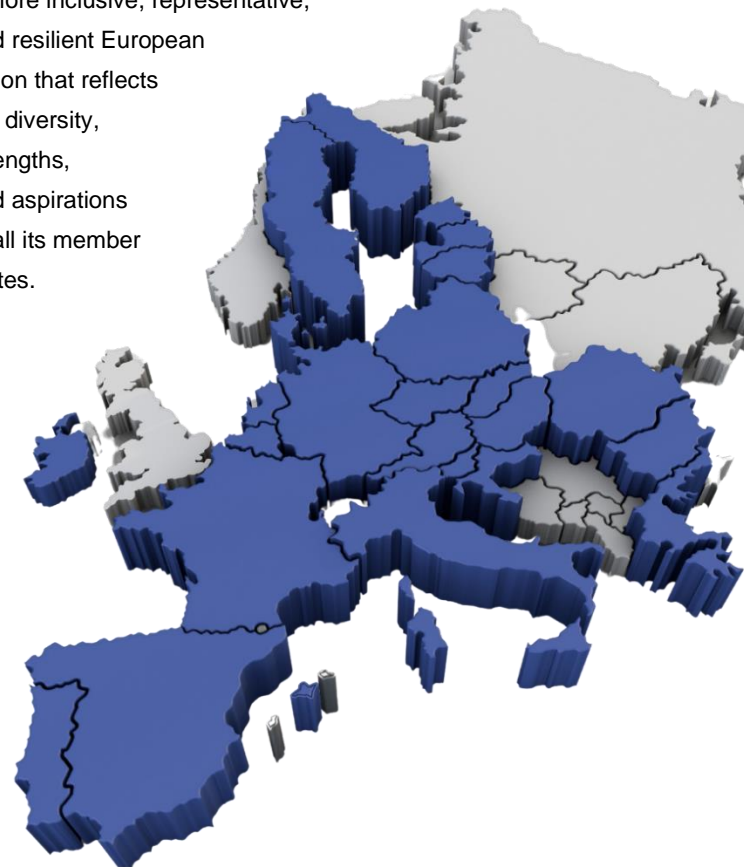
1.2. Purpose of the Report

The European Union stands at a critical juncture, grappling with multifaceted challenges ranging from geopolitical tensions to internal policy debates that shape its future trajectory. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), a vital component of the EU's diverse tapestry, finds itself at the intersection of these dynamics, yet its representation within the Union's highest echelons remains disproportionately limited. The purpose of this report is to elucidate, analyze, and address the underrepresentation of CEE countries in top EU positions, offering a comprehensive examination of the underlying factors, implications, and pathways forward.

Firstly, this report aims to provide a rigorous analysis of the historical and systemic factors contributing to the marginalization of CEE countries within the European Institutions. By delving into past appointment cycles, mechanisms, and paradigms, the report seeks to uncover entrenched patterns, biases, and dynamics that have perpetuated this disparity. Understanding the historical context is paramount to discerning the underlying structural challenges and evolving nuances that shape the current landscape. Furthermore, the report aims to explore

the existing mechanisms, processes, and paradigms governing EU appointments, critically evaluating their efficacy, fairness, and inclusivity. Additionally, this report seeks to provide actionable insights, strategic recommendations, and policy prescriptions aimed at empowering CEE countries to navigate the intricate 'Brussels Bubble' dynamics effectively. By identifying opportunities, leveraging strengths, addressing challenges, and fostering collaboration, the report aims to equip stakeholders with the knowledge, tools, and strategies needed to champion equitable representation, foster inclusivity, and shape a more resilient, representative, and cohesive European Union.

In essence, the purpose of this report transcends mere elucidation, aiming to catalyze informed discourse, strategic engagement, and concerted efforts to address the underrepresentation of CEE countries within the EU's highest echelons. By fostering a comprehensive understanding, fostering collaboration, and advocating for equitable representation, this report endeavours to contribute to shaping a more inclusive, representative, and resilient European Union that reflects the diversity, strengths, and aspirations of all its member states.



1.3. Scope and Objectives

Scope:

The scope of this report is meticulously designed to encompass a multifaceted exploration of the underrepresentation of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries within the top echelons of the European Union (EU). Grounded in a comprehensive framework, the report delves into historical contexts, policy dynamics, institutional mechanisms, and lived experiences, fostering a nuanced understanding of the complexities, challenges, and opportunities shaping this pivotal issue. The report embarks on a comprehensive analysis of the CEE region, with particular emphasis on countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Additionally, the scope encompasses a comparative analysis with Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, fostering a holistic perspective on representation dynamics. A critical component of the report involves a meticulous examination of key EU institutions, scrutinizing representation data, trends, disparities, and mechanisms governing appointments. This encompasses a detailed exploration of the European Council, the European Parliament, and evolving frameworks such as the Spitzenkandidaten system, among others. The scope extends to dissecting the myriad factors contributing to the underrepresentation, encompassing historical contexts, policy influences, cultural and linguistic barriers, economic disparities, and political dynamics. This holistic approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the intertwined dynamics shaping the representation landscape. The report ventures into exploring the challenges faced by CEE representatives, incorporating institutional barriers, lived experiences, and perspectives. Furthermore, it delves into existing initiatives, success stories, and best practices, and offers strategic recommendations aimed at fostering increased representation, inclusivity, and empowerment within the EU's highest echelons.

Objectives:

Aligned with the delineated scope, the objectives of this report are:

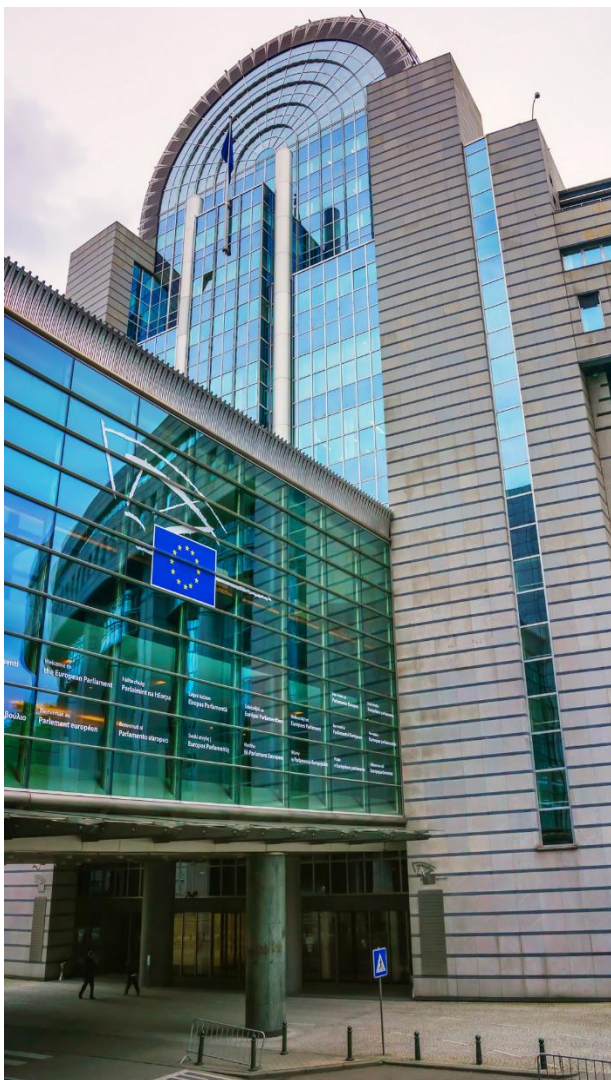
- To elucidate the historical, institutional, and systemic factors contributing to the underrepresentation of CEE countries within the EU's top institutions, fostering a nuanced understanding of the complexities and dynamics shaping this pivotal issue.
- To analyze key EU institutions, mechanisms, and appointment cycles, scrutinizing representation data, trends, disparities, and evolving paradigms, thereby offering insights into the structural, procedural, and institutional dynamics influencing representation.
- To explore the challenges, barriers, and experiences of CEE representatives, incorporating lived experiences, case studies, and perspectives that illuminate the multifaceted challenges and nuances shaping representation dynamics.
- To advocate for proactive engagement, fostering dialogue, collaboration, and strategic initiatives aimed at fostering increased representation, inclusivity, and empowerment within the EU's highest echelons, thereby contributing to shaping a more resilient, representative, and cohesive European Union.



2. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FOCUS

2.1. Overview of Key EU Institutions

The European Union, a complex organization made of institutions, bodies, and agencies, operates within a meticulously defined framework, reflecting its multifaceted nature and expansive mandate. The 2023 edition of the EU-GRLO (European Union Governance, Risk, and Compliance Overview) meticulously categorizes these entities into distinct clusters: Institutions of the European Union, Advisory Bodies Agencies of the European Union, and Other EU bodies.



Institutions of the European Union

Central to the EU's governance structure are the Institutions of the European Union, encompassing seven entities delineated in Article 13.1 of the Treaty on European Union, supplemented by two legacy institutions: the Commission of the European Atomic Energy Community and the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community. This category places a spotlight on pivotal positions such as the President, invariably a prominent public figure, particularly concerning the coveted "top jobs." Additionally, the focus extends to the Secretary-General's roles across the European Commission, European Parliament, and Council of the European Union, alongside key positions within the European Central Bank and the Courts of Justice and Auditors.

Advisory Bodies to the European Union

Advisory bodies, while integral, operate tangentially to the primary institutional framework, as delineated in Articles 13.4 TEU and 38 TEU. Comprising three entities birthed by European treaties, these bodies lack legislative or decision-making prerogatives, functioning primarily in an advisory capacity. The Political and Security Committee, intricately linked with the High Representative of the European External Action Service (HR/VP), epitomizes this category's significance. The analysis encompasses the positions of the President and Secretary-General, with a keen emphasis on the HR/VP role within the EEAS.

Agencies of the European Union

The EU's expansive mandate manifests through its array of Agencies, and decentralized bodies endowed with distinct legal personalities and specialized tasks, spanning diverse sectors from law enforcement to health and transportation. The focus gravitates toward the apex

executive positions, predominantly titled Director or Executive Director, with EURATOM agencies integral to this analysis, albeit excluding Joint Undertakings.

Other EU Bodies

The EU's institutional tapestry extends beyond traditional boundaries, incorporating a myriad of independent bodies tailored for specific objectives. Entities such as the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF), the Office of the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), and the European School of Administration (EUSA) exemplify this category's diversity. The analytical lens narrows down on the paramount executive positions, encompassing varied nomenclatures from Director to specialized titles such as European Ombudsman or European Data Protection Supervisor.

Institutional Changes and Future Prospects

The 2023 update remains consistent with its predecessor, devoid of significant alterations in entities or positions surveyed. However, discussions surrounding the prospective location of the EU's Anti-Money Laundering Agency (AMLA), slated for operationalization in 2024, augments the evolving landscape, underscoring the EU's adaptive governance framework and commitment to bolstering financial integrity and transparency.

In summation, the overview delineates the intricate labyrinth of EU institutions, bodies, and agencies, encapsulating their roles, structures, and pivotal positions. This foundational understanding sets the stage for a nuanced exploration of each country's representation within the CEE, juxtaposed with Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, elucidating regional dynamics and implications within the broader European landscape.



2.2. Central and Eastern European (CEE) Region & Sweden, Denmark, Finland Overview

Persistent Underrepresentation in EU Institutions

Twenty years after the Eastern enlargement of 2004, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries continue to grapple with significant underrepresentation in pivotal roles within EU institutions. This pervasive

underrepresentation warrants a detailed exploration, encompassing statistical analysis, regional dynamics, and implications for democratic legitimacy and cohesion. Achieving regional equality within the European Union necessitates a nuanced evaluation based on regions' Member States or their respective populations. Ideally, for each of the five regions to attain equal representation, a 20% "equality mark" or one-fifth per region is the benchmark. However, prevailing trends starkly deviate from this ideal.

Statistical Insights: Regional Disparities

In 2022, Western and Southern Europe sustained their dominance, capturing an overwhelming 88% of all new appointments of top jobs, (President, Director, and Secretary General) a notable escalation from the 80% amassed over the 2020-2022 triennium. This lopsided distribution accentuates the marginalization of regions like Central and Eastern Europe and Northern Europe, the latter experiencing a solitary appointment in 2022. When evaluated against regions' Member States or populations, glaring disparities persist, necessitating a nuanced understanding of systemic imbalances and their ramifications. When juxtaposed against the pro rata of regions' Member States, Central and Eastern Europe's marginalization becomes even more pronounced. While Western and Southern Europe amassed 71% of appointments to the leadership positions in EU institutions in 2020-2022, a marked increase from previous triennia, Central and Eastern Europe's representation dwindled precipitously to a mere 6% and 5%, respectively, plummeting from 13% for Eastern Europe. Even when calibrated against regions' populations, glaring imbalances persist. In 2022, Southern Europe's citizens clinched over double their equitable share of office-holder appointments, a disparity exacerbated by Northern Europe's citizens, who, despite receiving no appointments to a leadership position in 2022, accumulated 1.8 times their proportional representation over the triennium 2020-2022. The 2022 figures starkly corroborate concerns surrounding Central and Eastern Europe's precarious position within EU institutions. Previous promising statistics failed to materialize into a sustainable trend, with less visible appointments to EU agencies dominating, precluding any citizen from Central or Eastern Europe from ascending to a non-EU agency leadership position over the past triennium.

An overarching trend underscores Member State governments, their representatives, and appointees wielding disproportionate influence, orchestrating 62% of all appointments over the 2020-2022 triennium. In stark contrast, EU representatives directly elected by citizens remained marginalized, orchestrating a mere 1.8%

of appointments to the leadership positions as some may call "Top EU jobs", highlighting systemic imbalances and entrenched hierarchies within EU institutional frameworks. Descriptive underrepresentation poses multifaceted challenges, jeopardizing the legitimacy, efficiency, and symbolic representation of democratic institutions. When citizens confront barriers predicated on regional origin rather than meritocracy, democratic norms stand compromised. Additionally, this underrepresentation stifles institutional efficacy, impeding innovative problem-solving and exacerbating feelings of alienation. The establishment of robust political institutions necessitates inclusive elite integration, both at national and supranational levels. However, persistent underrepresentation impedes this integration, fostering perceptions of peripheralization and alienation, particularly among CEE countries. While the ramifications might differ across national and EU contexts, the overarching implications remain salient: underrepresentation engenders disenchantment, and alienation, and challenges democratic cohesion.

In essence, the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region's underrepresentation within EU institutions and Germany's societal landscape underscores systemic challenges that necessitate urgent redressal. By elucidating these disparities, this analysis endeavours to foster informed discourse, catalyze strategic interventions, and champion inclusive, representative democratic institutions that resonate with the aspirations, values, and diversity of all member states and citizens. The subsequent section will delve deeper into this issue by meticulously examining the representation of each country within the CEE, juxtaposed with the dynamics observed in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, offering a comprehensive exploration of regional disparities and implications.



2.3. Representation Data: CEE Countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia)



Bulgaria

Bulgaria has striven to carve its niche within the vast landscape of European integration since it acceded to the European Union on 1 January 2007. However, when dissecting Bulgaria's representation across key EU institutions, a pattern emerges that warrants a closer examination.

At the heart of Bulgaria's political structure is a parliamentary republic, where the Prime Minister wields significant executive power, while the President primarily holds representative responsibilities with limited veto capabilities. This centralized governance, consisting of 27 provinces and a metropolitan capital province (Sofia-Grad), forms the backbone of Bulgaria's administrative machinery. Economically, Bulgaria's landscape is dominated by sectors such as manufacturing BNG Million 10230.76 GDP, services BNG Million 9636.96 GDP, with an overall annual growth rate of 1.76 % in 2023, underscoring its role as a significant player within the EU's economic tapestry.

Turning our gaze to Bulgaria's representation within the European Parliament, we find a modest figure of 17 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). This number, when juxtaposed with its regional counterparts, highlights Bulgaria's limited footprint in the legislative heart of the EU. Before its first presidency in 2018, Bulgaria also was mentioned with "Corruption, organised crime, lack of foreign investment and digital skills" in the media which makes the comments negative compared to its Western counterparts. Multiple factors might be considered as the result of the under-representation most notable one can be attributed to population as the rule to appointment is "equal State representation and population-based proportional representation". According to the Lisbon Treaty, MEP allocation in the European Parliament follows degressive proportionality, ensuring each Member State receives

no fewer than six seats and no more than ninety-six, with a total of 751 MEPs which aims for fair distribution, prioritizing larger states while maintaining relative proportionality based on population size. Turning our glance to the European Commission, Iliana Ivanova serves as the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth during the term of 2023-2024. Andriana Sukova serves as the Acting Director-General and Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Employment, Mariana Kotzeva holds the position of Director-General in the Directorate-General Eurostat, while Charlina Vitcheva heads the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE) as DG. The portfolios are observing are crucial yet they are not among the ones that might be considered a priority. Besides, EU institutions, Bulgaria barely has any representation in EU advisory bodies, with the only top position being held being Krum Garkov as the Executive agency for the Space Programme.

In summary, Bulgaria's journey within the EU showcases a nation actively engaged yet grappling with nuanced challenges of representation.



Czechia

Since joining the European Union on 1 May 2004, Czechia has embarked on a journey of collaboration and integration, offering intriguing insights into its role and position within the EU's complex institutional framework. While Czechia's active involvement in EU affairs is evident, it is imperative to explore areas where the nation may encounter challenges related to representation. Czechia is expected to report 1.1 % GDP growth in 2024 following 2.8 % in 2025 in August 2015, it also reported 4.4% the highest-growing economy in Europe.

Czechia currently boasts a representation of 21 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). While this figure grants Czechia a voice in the European Parliament, it is essential to assess how this representation compares to that of other member states. The dynamics of the European Parliament

suggest that Czechia's 21 MEPs may face hurdles in amplifying their influence when juxtaposed with countries possessing larger delegations. This disparity could potentially impact Czechia's ability to shape legislative agendas and effectively advocate for its interests.

In assessing Czechia's representation within the European Parliament (EP) and its broader influence on EU legislation, it becomes pivotal to consider the intricate dynamics that shape MEPs' roles and impact. The algorithm designed to measure the influence of each MEP on EU legislation offers a structured framework for understanding the power dynamics at play within the EP. Notably, this algorithm takes into account various criteria, including leadership appointments, legislative activities, performance metrics, and network strength, to gauge the extent of MEPs' influence on EU policies and processes. In terms of disproportionality, as explained before, the allocation of Meps partially depends on the population of the country, there is still unbalanced representation among Member States. As an example, Luxembourg's MEPs per capita greatly exceed those of both Ireland and Czechia (Luxembourg: [654,768], [6]), indicating a substantial overrepresentation relative to their populations, while Ireland demonstrates a notably higher level of representation compared to Czechia (Ireland: [5,056,935], [13]). However, Luxembourg's representation vastly surpasses both countries, highlighting significant disparities in MEPs per capita across the three nations.



Luxembourg:

$$\frac{6}{654,768} \approx 9.15 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

Czechia:

$$\frac{21}{10,495,295} \approx 2.00 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

Ireland:

$$\frac{13}{5,056,935} \approx 2.57 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

Leadership positions within the EP, including appointments to important committees and political groups, afford MEPs formal powers that enable them to influence a wide range of policies. These positions, categorized as "diffuse influence," underscore the significance of MEPs' strategic placements within decision-making bodies such as the Conference of Presidents and the Conference of Committee Chairs. Moreover, legislative activities, such as serving as rapporteurs or shadow rapporteurs on key files, provide MEPs with direct avenues to shape legislation. However, the algorithm acknowledges that not all shadow rapporteurs are equally influential, with MEPs from larger political groups wielding more substantial influence due to the support base behind them. As such, a nuanced understanding of these factors is essential in evaluating Czechia's representation within the EP and its broader impact on EU legislation, ultimately informing strategies to enhance Czechia's presence and influence within the European Union.

Furthermore, within the European Commission, Czechia's representation is currently limited. While Czechia nominates a Commissioner to the European Commission, the representation within the Commission is not as robust. The Commissioner nominated by Czechia is Věra Jourová, who serves as Vice-President for Values and Transparency. Despite having a Commissioner in a significant position, Czechia's overall influence within the Commission may be constrained. Notably, the current Directorate-General structure reveals that only two Czech officials are holding prominent positions, Ladislav Miko as Hors Classe Adviser in the Directorate-General for Health and Irena Moomova as Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Justice out of 33 DGs. Additionally, Czechia in its history holds the Chief Executive position Jiří Šedivý as the only CEE region representative in its history, which displays the lack of securing top positions across EU entities.

In addition to the European Parliament and the Commission, Czechia is represented in key advisory bodies such as the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions. The European Economic & Social Committee, which consults on proposed laws to gain insights into potential

changes in work and social situations across member countries, includes 12 representatives from Czechia. Similarly, Czechia is represented by 12 delegates on the European Committee of the Regions, ensuring that the perspectives of regional and local representatives are taken into account in EU lawmaking processes. However, despite Czechia's representation in these advisory bodies, challenges may arise in fully capturing the nation's diverse regional and thematic perspectives. The limited number of representatives could potentially hinder Czechia's ability to effectively advocate for its regional interests and ensure that proposed laws adequately address the needs of its citizens at the local level.



Croatia

Since Croatia's formal induction into the European Union on 1 July 2013, the nation has been grappling with certain challenges related to its representation and influence within key EU institutions. This underrepresentation becomes especially evident when juxtaposed with longer-standing member states, highlighting nuances that warrant deeper examination.

From the Economic dimension, In 2020, the primary sectors driving Croatia's economy included wholesale and retail trade, transportation, accommodation, and food services (20.1%), followed by industry (19.2%) and public administration, defense, education, human health, and social work activities (18.1%). Croatia's economic power, as indicated by its GDP growth and inflation rates, reflects a stable but moderate trajectory. With GDP growth remaining steady at around 2.6-2.8% from 2023 to 2025, Croatia demonstrates resilience amid economic challenges. The significant drop in inflation from 8.4% in 2023 to 2.0% in 2025 underscores successful inflation control measures, fostering stability and enhancing consumer purchasing power. While Croatia's GDP growth may not be remarkable compared to some nations, its ability to sustain moderate growth and manage inflation

signifies an environment conducive to investment, domestic consumption, and economic stability, which collectively bolster its economic attractiveness and long-term prosperity. In 2022, Croatia has contributed to the total amount of 609.9 Million Euros. The allocation of contributions to the EU budget is determined fairly based on each member state's economic capacity. Consequently, countries with larger economies contribute more while those with smaller economies contribute proportionally less. Nevertheless, upon examining Croatia's contribution, it appears that the country does not receive adequate recognition and representation commensurate with its economic input into the EU budget.

With a modest delegation of 12 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Croatia's voice within the European Parliament is somewhat muted compared to its counterparts. Because Croatia had a later accession to the EU than its Western counterparts so part since 2013, it appointed 12 MEPs in the 2009-2014 period, following a decline in 2014 elections to 11 and 2019 with 12 again with the latest number which displays stability. Although it is still arguable that Croatia has had perfect proportionality. Malta, which had access to the EU almost a decade before Croatia (2004) has held more seats compared to inhabitants per MEPs than Croatia. Importantly, Malta has a population of almost 4 times smaller (0,5 mln inhabitants) than Croatia (almost 4 mln).



Malta

$$\frac{6}{535,064} \approx 1.12 \times 10^{-5} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

For every person in Malta, there are approximately 11.2 millionths of an MEP representing them in the European Parliament.

Croatia:

$$\frac{12}{4,008,617} \approx 2.99 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

For every person in Croatia, there are approximately 2.99 millionths¹ of an MEP representing them in the European Parliament.

Therefore, it is evident that Croatia is represented less proportionately based on population in seat allocation which eventually underscores potential challenges in advocating for Croatia's specific interests, given that countries with larger delegations naturally possess a louder collective voice in legislative discussions and policy-making processes. Croatia's representation in the European Commission, embodied by Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, is significant but embedded within a structure where influence is distributed across multiple Commissioners overseeing varied portfolios. As per the top professions, Maja Bakran Marcich serves as the Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, representing Croatia's sole presence within the European Commission DG positions. It is expected to dilute Croatia's specific concerns, as they must align with broader EU objectives, potentially sidelining or underemphasizing Croatia's unique perspectives and priorities. Croatia's presence on advisory bodies, such as the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, is limited to 9 representatives each. In terms of EU agencies or other EU agencies, Croatia has held Director with Maja Markovčić Kostelac with the European Medicines agency. While these bodies are crucial for shaping EU policies, the limited number of Croatian representatives might not fully capture the nation's diverse regional and sectoral nuances, leading to potential gaps in tailored policy recommendations. It can lead to potential oversights in policies that directly impact Croatian interests, economic sectors, and societal needs.



Estonia

Estonia, since it acceded to the European Union on 1 May 2004, has become an influential Baltic player, weaving its national priorities with broader European objectives. From

¹ The term 'millionths' denotes the fraction of a single MEP (Member of the European Parliament) assigned to each individual within a population, serving as a quantitative measure of MEPs per capita

Economic Perspective, In 2020, the primary segments driving Estonia's economy included wholesale and retail trade, transportation, accommodation, and food services, comprising 20.5% of the economy; industry accounted for 19.2%, while public administration, defense, education, human health, and social work activities represented 16.7%. In 2022, the total revenue of Estonia was 373.9 Million Euros for the EU. Estonia faced a significant economic contraction with a negative GDP growth rate of -3.5% in 2023, indicating a period of economic decline or recession. However, the country rebounds in 2024 with a modest GDP growth rate of 0.6%, suggesting a stabilization of the economy and a shift towards growth.

By 2025, Estonia's GDP growth rate is projected to accelerate to 3.2%, indicating a notable recovery and a return to robust economic expansion.

Estonia is represented by a cadre of 7 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), serving as the nation's voice in the European legislative landscape. Out of the 7 members, only one (Marina Kaljurand) serves as chair of Delegation to the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee, the EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, and the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee, which can be considered as not the main internal focuses of EU. Given its modest MEP count, Estonia must navigate the intricacies of the European Parliament judiciously, ensuring its Baltic perspectives resonate amidst diverse EU narratives. Although in terms of proportion based on population and allocation of MEPs Estonia, compared to other CEE region countries seems more advantaged.

Estonia:

$$\frac{7}{1,322,765} \approx 5.29 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

Slovenia:

$$\frac{8}{2,119,675} \approx 3.77 \times 10^{-6} \text{ MEPs per capita}$$

and reflecting the level of representation within the European Parliament relative to population size.

From the analysis, we observe that Estonia has higher MEPs per capita compared to Slovenia which is a country with a close population amount. Therefore, considering MEPs per capita alone, Estonia may not be underrepresented in the European Parliament relative to countries with similar population sizes.

Kadri Simson's appointment as the Commissioner responsible for Energy underscores Estonia's strategic positioning within the European Commission. While Estonia leverages this platform to articulate its energy imperatives, navigating the broader Commission milieu requires adept policy positioning and collaboration with fellow member states. Besides the commissioner, Estonia has three officials serving in the Directorates-General (DGs): Signe Ratso holds the position of Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (RTD), Maive Rute serves as Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW), and Henrik Hololei works as Hors Classe Adviser in the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA). Estonia's engagement extends to bodies like the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, with 6 representatives each. These platforms offer Estonia avenues to influence legislative deliberations, align regional perspectives, and advocate for nuanced policy formulations tailored to Baltic realities. In addition to the institutions, the body of European regulators for electronic communications had an Estonian Director from 2010 - 2014, and European Union Agency for Cybersecurity Executive Director from 2019-2022 although since 2004, these were the only top appointments in 73 Institutions and Bodies. Therefore, It is concluded that as a part of the CEE region Estonia, is still greatly underrepresented when it comes to Top leadership jobs.

progress and challenges. The country's GDP per person has been on an upward trajectory, rising from around 69% of the EU average in 2017 to 74.7% in 2022. Additionally, Hungary has seen significant improvements in its labor market, with the employment rate reaching 80.2%, well above the EU average, and the unemployment rate remains low at 3.6% in 2022. Despite these advancements, certain segments of society, particularly those facing material deprivation, have not fully benefited from the economic growth.

Investment and economic growth have been bolstered by fiscal and monetary policy stimulus, resulting in one of the highest investment rates in the EU since 2017. However, the structure of investments has not favored productivity growth, with a shift towards less productivity-enhancing sectors like construction. As a consequence, labor productivity in Hungary remained 32% below the EU average in 2022. Expansionary economic and fiscal policies have contributed to rising inflation, exacerbated by external balance deterioration and soaring house prices, especially accelerated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. These macroeconomic challenges, coupled with structural issues like weak education and health outcomes, hinder further productivity growth and economic resilience. Efforts to address these challenges will be crucial for Hungary's sustained economic development. In 2022, Hungary contributed significantly to the European Union's revenue, bringing in 1842.8 million euros. This financial contribution reflects Hungary's economic activity and its position within the EU's economic framework. In terms of seating at the multiple European Institutions, as a country in the CEE region Hungary has held 0.783% of the total seats.

Representing Hungary, the nation boasts 21 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), ensuring a robust voice in European legislative proceedings. It is interesting to note that none of the Hungarian members chairs a committee.

The absence of Hungarian members chairing committees could be linked to current political complications. Hungary has one commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, who serves



Hungary

Hungary, since it acceded to the European Union in 2004, has actively navigated its path within the EU's intricate political, economic, and social fabric. Hungary's economic landscape presents a mixed picture characterized by both

in the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR). Notably, Hungary does not have representation in any of the other 33 Directorates-General (DGs). Hungary holds four other leadership positions at the executive level. László Ignéczi currently serves as the Director of the BEREC Office (Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications). Adam Farkas has previously held the position of Executive Director of the European Banking Authority. Zsuzsanna Jakab fulfills the role of Director at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Additionally, Ferenc Banfi serves as the Executive Director of the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training. Hungary's representation within European governance structures appears notably inadequate, highlighting a concerning level of under-representation. There is a lack of proportional presence in key leadership positions across various European institutions underscores the need for greater inclusivity and equitable participation within the European Union.



Latvia

Latvia, a member of the European Union since 2004. Latvia is expected to display 1.4 GDP Growth in 2024, followed by 2.7 in 2025. The most important sectors are wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation, and food services (23.1%). In 2022, Latvia had a total revenue of 382.1 Million Euros. Considering its contribution to the EU, Latvia deserves more seats on the table. Beginning with the European Parliament,

Latvia is represented by 8 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), serving as advocates for Latvian interests. Assessing its population (1,830,211), Latvia has reserved adequate seats although, only one member serves as the Vice President (VP) of the European Parliament, namely Roberts ZĪLE, which is another point that can display none of the other members chair any committees. ZĪLE's primary responsibilities include overseeing Access to documents, Conciliations (with Vice-President Barley and Vice-President Oetjen), and chairing the Audit Panel. Additionally, he is engaged in various working groups such as Buildings, Transport, and Green

Parliament, ICT Innovation Strategy, and Information and Communication Policy. Moreover, ZĪLE holds membership in the Chancellery of the European Citizen's Prize and serves as a replacement for the President for the Baltic/Nordic/Arctic countries (with Vice-President Hojsík and Vice-President Hautala).

Valdis Dombrovskis, serving as the Commissioner for Trade displays an important portfolio in the European Commission, creating an opportunity for Latvia's influence in shaping European economic policies, fostering financial stability, and advancing an inclusive economic agenda. In addition to the commissioner, within the European Commission, Latvia has other significant positions: Normunds POPENS assumes the role of Deputy Director-General within the Directorate-General for European Affairs and Cooperation (DG EAC - Education, Youth, and Culture), while Ilze Juhansone serves as the Secretary-General within the Directorate-General for Secretariat-General (DG SG). Latvia's representation on the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, with 7 representatives each, amplifies its influence on socio-economic policies, regional development, and legislative consultations. Regarding other EU advisory bodies or Agencies, Latvia has held no top-level (Director/President/Secretary-General) position since it acceded to the EU. However, despite its pivotal role in shaping collective European narratives and fostering regional stability, Latvia's representation in the EU is still considered limited.



Lithuania

Since joining the European Union in 2004, Lithuania has taken on a significant role in shaping the political, economic, and social landscape of the EU. Through its active involvement, representation, and contributions, Lithuania demonstrates a steadfast dedication to EU integration and cooperative governance.

In 2022, Lithuania experienced economic challenges primarily due to the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which significantly impacted its economic

recovery. The country faced surging inflation, reaching 18.9%, one of the highest rates in the EU. This inflation surge was largely attributed to the spike in energy prices following the invasion, which translated into broader inflation throughout the year. Despite efforts to mitigate the economic impact, inflation peaked at 22.5% in September 2022 before gradually easing to 15.2% by March 2023. Economic growth for the year stood at 1.9%, with a contraction in the final quarter driven by reduced real disposable incomes, weakened consumption, and subdued international demand. Looking ahead, Lithuania's economic growth is expected to remain weak in 2023, characterized by high inflation, rising interest rates, and lackluster domestic and international demand. However, investments supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion policy funds are anticipated to contribute positively to growth in the coming years, although risks persist due to geopolitical tensions and energy developments.

Despite the economic challenges, Lithuania's labor market showed signs of resilience in 2022, with the activity rate reaching a record high of 79.0%. However, total employment is projected to decrease slightly in 2023 due to the impact of the energy crisis on the economy. The unemployment rate, which fell to 5.5% in Q2 2022, rose slightly in subsequent quarters and into 2023, with higher rates observed in towns, rural areas, and among low-skilled individuals. Skills mismatch and shortages remain significant concerns for Lithuanian firms, hindering employability, competitiveness, and potential growth. Addressing these challenges is crucial for Lithuania's digital and green transition. While the labor market tightened considerably in 2022, with the ratio of job vacancies to unemployed people at its highest in 15 years, skills mismatches and shortages persist, posing risks to productivity in labor-intensive sectors. Despite these challenges, efforts to enhance labor market efficiency and address skills gaps are underway, with a focus on improving the match between available skills and employer demands to foster sustainable economic growth. In addition to the economic challenges faced in 2022, Lithuania contributed significantly to the European Union's revenue, bringing in 655.2 million euros. Despite

the economic setbacks caused by surging inflation and geopolitical tensions stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Lithuania remained an integral part of the EU's economic framework, contributing to the overall financial stability of the union. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the voice that has in the Union. Lithuania is represented by 11 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), with three of them serving as chairs in different committees, Petras AUŠTREVICIUS serves as the Chair of the D-AF Delegation for Relations with Afghanistan. Andrius KUBILIUS holds the position of Chair in the DEPA Delegation to the European Parliamentary Assembly and Juozas OLEKAS acts as the Chair of the D-BY Delegation for Relations with Belarus.

While the mentioned Lithuanian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serve as chairs in specific committees, it is indeed worth considering whether they hold other crucial portfolios within the European Parliament. Irginijus Sinkevičius holds the position of Commissioner within the Directorate-General for the Environment (DG ENV) and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE). As Commissioner, Sinkevičius plays a key role in shaping and implementing policies related to environmental protection and maritime affairs at the EU level. Rytis Martikonis serves as the Chair of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board within the Directorate-General for Secretariat-General (DG SG). In this capacity, Martikonis is responsible for overseeing the regulatory scrutiny process, ensuring that EU legislation is robust, effective, and aligned with the Union's objectives and principles. In addition to the commissioners, Kestutis Sadauskas holds a position within the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE). His role in this directorate involves contributing to the development and implementation of policies aimed at promoting sustainable management of maritime resources and fostering economic growth in the maritime sector. With 3 Directorate - Generals, Lithuania appears to hold more seats than other CEE regions. Other 73 analyzed, EU institutions and bodies, only leadership position was held by Lithuania which being the Director Gaile Dagiliene of Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union.

In conclusion, Lithuania's engagement within the European Union is characterized by strategic leadership, collaborative diplomacy, and proactive participation across institutional frameworks. As Lithuania continues to navigate evolving geopolitical landscapes, harnessing its EU footprint, fostering Baltic synergies, and shaping collective European narratives remain essential for advancing shared objectives, promoting regional stability, and ensuring sustainable growth within the European Union.



Poland

Poland, since accession to the European Union on 1 May 2004, has become a pivotal member state with the potential to significantly influence EU decisions across a multitude of sectors. The economic profile of Poland reflects both resilience and challenges amidst a changing global landscape. After weathering the COVID-19 pandemic, Poland emerged as one of the EU's fastest-growing economies, driven by robust policy support, low unemployment, and sustained foreign direct investment. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine introduced significant economic pressures, including elevated commodity prices and energy shocks, impacting real incomes and consumption growth.

Inflation rates have surged due to rising global energy prices and domestic demand pressures, making Poland one of the EU countries with the highest inflation rates in 2023. The energy shock, coupled with supply chain disruptions, has raised operating costs for businesses, leading to increased consumer prices and dampened economic activity. Despite challenges, Poland's competitiveness remains intact. Its low labor costs and stable cost-competitiveness, supported by a depreciation of the zloty and gains in labor productivity, have sustained strong exports and inflows of foreign direct investment. However, the country faces obstacles to sustained growth, including low levels of investment, innovation, and structural issues in the education system. Unemployment in Poland is historically low, leading to acute labor shortages and skills mismatches. The integration of displaced persons from Ukraine has eased some labor

market pressures, but challenges persist in ensuring sustainable employment opportunities and addressing housing and public service strains. Public finances are strained due to increased defense spending, energy support measures, and aid to displaced persons. In 2022, Poland brought a total of 7179.7 million euros in revenue to the EU, reflecting its significant economic contribution to the European Union. However, despite its active participation in various EU institutions, including the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, and the European Commission, Poland's representation in the higher echelons of the EU remains a point of concern. On average, Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, lag in representation. It is particularly evident when analyzing total appointments and factoring in population sizes. It is notable to address the fact that Tusk was previously the EC President. Saying, for instance, that Poland's importance to the EU has been marked by Tusk's appointment as European Council President. Nevertheless, Poland's actual influence remains limited because of the low number the appointed officials from Poland for the European Commission, which is 5 in 33 DGs. Janusz Wojciechowski Commissioner for Agriculture holds an important portfolio in terms of maintaining food security in Europe and 5 Directorate-Generals in the Commission also reflect consistency in high-level roles although it is still controversial if this number is compatible with other Western countries. In addition to Tusk, from 2019 to 2022, Jerzy Buzek has held the presidency of the European Parliament, and two other Director roles in other EU Bodies. The total percentage is equal to 0.783% in all EU institutions and bodies, the same as in Hungary.

Moreover, the underrepresentation exacerbates existing challenges, including low voter turnout in European elections within Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in countries like Poland and Hungary. The 2019 European elections witnessed subpar turnout rates in these regions, reflecting disillusionment and alienation from the EU's leadership structures. This disenfranchisement is further exacerbated by selective media narratives and limited engagement from pro-European officials, thereby perpetuating divisions and undermining collective efforts to foster unity and collaboration within the EU.



Romania

Romania, having joined the European Union on 1 January 2007, represents a member state that has navigated a complex journey within the EU, characterized by both achievements and challenges. Despite its active engagement in various EU institutions, including the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, and the European Commission, Romania's representation in key decision-making roles within the EU remains an area warranting scrutiny. Romania's membership has enabled its participation across many domains, boasting 33 members in the European Parliament and holding the Council presidency during January-June 2019. Romania, an Emerging Innovator within the European Union, showcases a performance level of 33.1% of the EU average, albeit below the average of its Emerging Innovator counterparts. Despite witnessing incremental growth, Romania's performance trajectory remains below the EU's, indicating an expanding performance gap. With notable strengths in broadband penetration, medium and high-tech goods exports, and knowledge-intensive services exports, Romania navigates relative weaknesses in areas such as population with tertiary education and job-to-job mobility of highly skilled professionals. In 2022, Romania experienced a total revenue of 2647.0 million Euros, and its GDP growth is forecasted to reach 1.8% in 2023, 2.9% in 2024, and 3.2% in 2025, reflecting its evolving economic landscape and aspirations for sustained growth.

However, Romania's representation contrasts with its Western European counterparts, such as Spain. Spain, a member since 1 January 1986, has established a more formidable presence within the EU's decision-making structures. With 59 members in the European Parliament and multiple Council presidencies since 1989, including an upcoming term in the second half of 2023, Spain's influence is palpable. Further solidifying its pivotal role, Josep Borrell Fontelles serves as the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This contrast underscores Romania's restrained influence within the EU compared to Spain's more extensive engagements across critical EU bodies. When we consider

advisory bodies such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, which play instrumental roles in shaping legislative proposals and ensuring regional perspectives are integrated into EU policies, Romania's representation remains somewhat limited. Specifically, Romania has 15 representatives on each of these advisory bodies. Besides the main institutions, Romania additionally holds significant positions across various EU agencies and offices. Cosmin Biangiu served as the Executive Director of the European Labour Authority from 2020 to 2022, contributing to labor-related initiatives and policies within the EU. Sorin Docaru assumed the role of Director at the European Union Satellite Centre from 2019 to 2023, playing a crucial role in satellite-based intelligence and security operations. Madlen Sarben served as the Director of the European Training Foundation from 2009 to 2017, fostering cooperation and development in vocational training and education across Europe. Additionally, Laura Codreț Kövesi served as the European Chief Prosecutor at the European Public Prosecutor's Office from 2019 to 2022, overseeing legal proceedings and investigations related to cross-border crimes. However, despite these appointments, Romania's representation in key EU institutions remains relatively limited. Eastern Europe, including Romania, accounts for only 3.1% of EU representation to the Office, with Romania contributing 25% of this total. This disparity underscores the need for enhanced representation and involvement of Eastern European countries like Romania in EU governance and decision-making processes.

The underrepresentation of Romania within the EU's decision-making bodies has broader implications for the Union's cohesion, legitimacy, and effectiveness. This limited representation raises concerns about the marginalization of Central and Eastern European countries, potentially undermining the EU's foundational principles of fairness, inclusivity, and equal representation. Additionally, the disparities in representation contribute to challenges such as low voter turnout in European elections within Romania and other Central and Eastern European nations. The 2019 European elections highlighted suboptimal turnout rates in these regions,

reflecting potential disillusionment and alienation from the EU's leadership structures. Addressing these disparities is crucial to fostering unity, and collaboration, and ensuring that all member states, including Romania, have equitable opportunities to shape the European Union's future trajectory.



Slovakia

Slovakia joined the Union in 2004 since then it delivered interconnectedness, cooperation, and a shared vision that defines the EU. Slovakia's multifaceted engagement, representation, and contributions within the European Union's framework are noteworthy and integral to the union's functioning. Slovakia is a parliamentary democratic republic with a head of government - the prime minister - who holds the most executive power and a head of state - the president - who is the formal head of the executive, but with very limited powers. Although it is controversial if the country receives enough recognition or visibility for its contribution. Currently, There are 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from Slovakia, with two of them serving as chair and VP of the European Parliament. Vladimír BILČÍK as the Chair of Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee overseeing Montenegro's accession to the Union. In particular, focusing on the functioning of the country's democratic institutions, the fight against organized crime and corruption, social policies, and the protection of the environment. On the other hand, Martin HOJSÍK, as the Vice-president of the Parliament, manages a variety of crucial responsibilities, including Human Rights and Democracy, High-level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity. Additionally, he acts as a replacement for the President for the Baltic/Nordic/Arctic countries (with Vice-President Zīle and Vice-President Hautala). In terms of disproportionality, Slovakia with 8 members, is less represented compared to Cyprus.

Slovakia with a 5,795,199 population of 14 MEPs:

$$\frac{14}{5,795,199} \approx 2.41 \times 10^{-6}$$

Cyprus with a 1,260,138 population with 6 MEPs:

$$\frac{6}{1,260,138} \approx 4.76 \times 10^{-6}$$

Comparing the MEPs per capita of Slovakia and Cyprus, we observe that Cyprus has higher MEPs per capita than Slovakia. On average, each citizen in Cyprus is represented by a higher number of MEPs compared to citizens in Slovakia.

Turning our gaze into the Commission, Maroš Šefčovič, serving as the European Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, epitomizes Slovakia's influential role in shaping Europe's green transition, fostering sustainable development, and advancing inter-institutional collaborations. Although in 33 DG's, there are no other leadership positions secured by Slovakia which presents the lack of recognition. European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, each with 9 representatives. From the other EU Agencies and Bodies, one other high-level position has been acquired by Slovakia is Executive Director of European Banking Authority Peter Mihalik, for a very brief period in 2020 out of 73 Institutions since 2004. Slovakia, whose revenue was calculated at 1031.6 Million Euros in 2022, is a crucial member of the union as a result there should be more representatives in Important Portfolios.



Slovenia

Since becoming a member in 2004, Slovenia has played a significant role in the European Union (EU) as a parliamentary democratic republic, with a prime minister serving as the head of government and a directly elected president as the head of state. Despite its relatively small size (2,119,675), Slovenia has contributed substantially to the EU's economic and political landscape. Slovenia's economy is characterized by diverse sectors, including industry, wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation, food services, and public administration. In 2022, Slovenia contributed approximately 716.0 million Euros to the EU's revenue, underlining its financial

commitment to the Union. During the period from 2020 to 2022, Slovenia's economy experienced faster growth rates compared to the EU average. Despite challenges such as high inflation and a weaker external environment, Slovenia's GDP surged by 5.4% in 2022, driven by increased consumer spending and investment. However, economic growth is projected to slow down over the forecast period (2023-2025), with growth rates expected to reach 1.2% in 2023 and 2.2% in 2024, amid high uncertainty and inflationary pressures.

Slovenia's representation in the European Parliament (EP) includes 8 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) with one of them (Matjaž NEMEC) serving as chair to the committee of Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union, including the EU-Morocco, EU-Tunisia and EU-Algeria Joint Parliamentary Committees. While this representation reflects Slovenia's population size and democratic structure, the proportion of MEPs per capita seems adequate based on population.

In terms of leadership positions within the European Commission, Slovenia has nominated Commissioner Janez Lenarčič, responsible for Crisis Management including coordinating EU responses to crises and emergencies, ensuring effective crisis preparedness, and enhancing cooperation among EU member states in crisis management efforts. However, Slovenia's representation in other key Commission portfolios may be limited, potentially affecting its influence and visibility within EU decision-making processes. Furthermore, Slovenia holds significant roles in other EU agencies. Marjeta Jager serves as Deputy Director-General at the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA), while Nina Gregori acts as the Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Asylum. Additionally, Tomas Lovrencic serves as the Director of the EU Satellite Centre. Slovenia appoints 7 Members to the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions. Slovenia's representation in key EU institutions and agencies reflects its active participation in EU governance and its commitment to advancing common objectives and priorities within the European Union.

Through its representatives, Slovenia contributes to shaping EU policies, promoting cooperation, and addressing challenges across various domains, thereby strengthening its role within the European Union. However, it remains a question mark whether Slovenia is receiving enough seats at the table to fully reflect its contributions and interests within the EU framework.

2.4. Representation Data: Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden)



Denmark

Denmark, a member of the European Union since 1 January 1973, presents a unique dynamic within the EU framework, characterized by its distinctive political choices, economic prowess, and strategic engagements. In economic terms, Denmark's GDP growth was relatively subdued at 0.5% in 2023, showing a modest increase to 0.9% in 2024, and a further improvement to a projected 1.6% in 2025. This trajectory indicates a gradual but steady expansion of the Danish economy over the forecast period. Let's delve into Denmark's representation and its implications within the broader European landscape. Denmark boasts 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), providing the nation with a distinct voice in the European legislative arena. While this representation ensures that Danish perspectives are articulated, it's essential to assess how these 14 MEPs navigate the complexities of the European Parliament, especially in comparison to nations with larger delegations. Out of the 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), only two currently hold chair positions. Morten Løkkegaard serves as chair in the D-IN Delegation for relations with India. The agenda under his purview focuses on negotiations concerning the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, as well as regional and international security issues, collaboration on environmental protection, sustainable development, technology, research, innovation, energy, and human rights. Christel Schaldemose chairs the D-JP Delegation for relations with Japan. In December 2018, the Parliament approved the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership and Economic Partnership Agreements, effective February 1, 2019,

enhancing the parliamentary dimension within the partnership. With these two examples, Denmark's lack of officials serving as chairs in any committee is evident, except for two delegations. This demonstrates the underrepresentation of the country's influence within the European Parliament, attributable to the limited appointments of its representatives as chairs in various committees. Moving to Margrethe Vestager's role as the Executive Vice-President for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age shows Denmark's significant presence and influence within the European Commission. Importantly, Vestager was chosen twice for the DG COMP, which is contrary to the treaties.

Since Denmark has longer time spent in the EU, it has been involved in multiple portfolios. The majority are Agriculture (3 appointments), Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation, and Customs (3 appointments). In specific key policy domains, such as Economic and Financial Affairs, France has had six appointments while Denmark had three. In this context, examining Denmark's involvement in portfolios like Agriculture and Economic and Financial Affairs underscores the disparity in representation among EU member states. Despite Denmark's contributions and interests in these areas, its representation appears to be comparatively limited when compared to Western countries. This disparity raises questions about the distribution of influence and decision-making power within the European Commission. Currently, two Director-Generals are serving in the European Commission: Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, who heads the Directorate-General for External Action (DG EAC), and Ditte Juul Jørgensen, who leads the Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER). Moreover, with 9 representatives each in bodies like the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, Denmark engages in broader consultations, yet the challenge persists in fully encapsulating its multifaceted regional and thematic concerns. In terms of Top leadership positions, Harald Rømer served as the only Northern representative in the European Parliament at the Secretary-General from 2007-2009, although compared to the CEE region, Northern countries have held more positions in the top leadership positions, 13 top-level positions

(Director, Secretary General, Executive Director) in 73 different institutions, which still is relatively low since it is accession to the EU.

With Denmark's robust economy and contributions to the EU budget (in 2022 Denmark will have contributed 3189.7 million euros in total), the nation actively participates in funding programs that foster European cohesion, development, and sustainability. While the EU budget operates on principles of fairness and addressing collective needs, Denmark's fiscal contributions warrant a nuanced examination concerning its strategic priorities, benefits, and returns.

Denmark's multifaceted engagements within the EU underscore its commitment to collaborative governance, economic integration, and regional cooperation. However, addressing representation nuances, maximizing leadership opportunities, and ensuring consistent policy articulation remains pivotal for Denmark to harness its potential fully. As the European landscape evolves, Denmark's strategic recalibrations and engagements will shape its EU trajectory, influence, and collaborative endeavors.



Finland

Finland, an integral member of the European Union since 1995, has consistently leveraged its Nordic identity and robust political system to engage proactively within EU institutions. In addition to its innovation leadership, Finland exhibits commendable economic performance within the European Union. With a GDP per capita of 36,300 PPS, Finland surpasses the EU average, reflecting a robust and resilient economy. Despite facing challenges in certain innovation dimensions, Finland's average annual GDP growth of 2.3% underscores steady economic expansion. Moreover, Finland's employment share in manufacturing, particularly in high and medium-high-tech sectors, remains substantial, contributing to the country's industrial prowess and technological advancements. In terms of entrepreneurship and business dynamics, Finland demonstrates a vibrant ecosystem conducive to innovation and growth. The country's high levels of total entrepreneurial activity (TEA)

at 7.9% and significant foreign direct investment (FDI) net inflows of 4.3% of GDP highlight its attractiveness to investors and entrepreneurs alike. Finland also contributes 2560.3 Million Euros in 2022. Even though it is not how the seats are assigned, it is claimed that economic disparities are effective in terms of the representation of a country. Therefore, assuming that the CEE region is struggling economically, to justify the reason for fewer seats, there is still a gap as northern countries are also not receiving even though they contribute to the well-being of the EU in a respectable amount. Taking a closer examination, Finland has 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing Finland, the nation ensures its voice resonates in the European legislative arena. These MEPs play a pivotal role in articulating Finnish perspectives, advocating national interests, and shaping collaborative EU narratives. Among Finland's MEPs, Heidi Hautala holds a prominent leadership position within the European Parliament. Serving as Vice-President, Hautala represents the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, bringing her extensive experience and expertise to the forefront of EU policymaking. She is actively involved in the Sakharov Prize Community, advocating for human rights and democracy alongside Vice-President Hojsík. Additionally, Hautala oversees the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and engages in European Political party matters alongside Vice-President Wieland. Jutta Urpilainen's nomination as Finland's Commissioner responsible for International Partnerships underscores Finland's emphasis on global engagement, sustainable development, and fostering the EU's external relations. This portfolio allows Finland to influence international partnerships, development agendas, and global policy frameworks, reflecting its commitment to multilateralism and collaborative diplomacy.

In addition to the commissioner, there are three other DGs from Finland in the European Commission. Among these officials are Signe Ratso, Deputy Director-General of the Directorate-General for Research and Technological Development (RTD); Maive Rute, Deputy Director-General of the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs (GROW); and Henrik Hololei, Hors Classe Adviser of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA).

In the European Economic & Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions, with 9 representatives each, Finland holds a strong voice. While Finland boasts a mandate duration of 7.7% in the Northern region, its presence in crucial decision-making bodies falls short of reflecting its significance on the European stage. Sirkka Hämäläinen's position as an Executive Board Member at the European Central Bank stands as a lone beacon of Finnish leadership within EU financial institutions. However, the absence of additional Finnish officials in comparable roles underscores Finland's limited representation in shaping monetary policies and financial regulations at the EU level. Similarly, Markku Markkula's presidency of the Committee of the Regions highlights Finland's dedication to advocating for local and regional interests within the EU framework. Ville Itälä's tenure as Director-General of the European Anti-Fraud Office is commendable, yet it remains one of the few instances where Finland holds a top-level position within an EU agency. With only 10 Finnish officials appointed to prominent roles since its EU membership, Finland's representation pales in comparison to its potential contributions and aspirations for a more equitable and inclusive European Union.



Sweden

Sweden, a prominent Nordic nation with a rich history and vibrant culture, has been an integral member of the European Union since 1995. Its strategic location, robust economy, and commitment to European integration have positioned Sweden as a key player within the EU framework. Sweden's economy exhibits robust fundamentals despite facing significant challenges. In 2022, the economy expanded by 2.6%, following a strong growth rate of 5.4% in the previous year. However, high inflation and subsequent monetary tightening have revealed structural vulnerabilities, particularly about high private debt and the housing market. The decline in household spending, driven by higher interest payments on debt, coupled with reduced construction activity due to rising costs, has hindered growth. The vulnerabilities in Sweden's economy, highlighted in the In-Depth Review,

stem from issues in the real estate market and high levels of private debt. House price growth consistently outpaced income growth, exacerbating concerns. The escalation of energy prices and inflation following Russia's aggression against Ukraine added further strain. Inflation surged to 8.1% in 2022, with electricity prices soaring, although they are expected to stabilize in 2023. Fiscal support has been limited, with the government cautious about using expansionary policies due to inflation risks. Despite these challenges, Sweden continues to prioritize innovation to support productivity and competitiveness. The country boasts high levels of research and development spending in the business sector, double the EU average at 6.4% of GDP in 2021. Swedish firms lead in developing new products, processes, and services, benefiting from a conducive business environment. To sustain this position and facilitate the economy's twin transition, Sweden must ensure a steady supply of skilled labor.

The Swedish labor market remains robust, with most pandemic-related job losses recovered by 2022. However, challenges persist in achieving inclusivity, particularly for low-skilled individuals and those with migrant backgrounds. It brought 11,611.1 million euros in revenue to the EU in 2022. It's essential to ensure that Sweden's representation in EU decision-making reflects its significant economic contribution (if that is one of the criteria examined in terms of representation). Sweden boasts vibrant representation in the European Parliament, with 21 dedicated Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), two of them serving as the chair of the Delegation for Relations with Iraq & Committee on Development. Influential Commission Representation is exemplified by Ylva Johansson's role as the Commissioner responsible for Home Affairs, showcasing Sweden's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges, fostering security, and advancing collective solutions. In addition to the Commissioner, Stefan Olsson also carries Deputy Director-General in Employment. Other EU institutions and bodies so far had 9 top-level positions, such as Directors, and Secretary General which equals 1.76% in 73 Institutions. Given the examination, it's evident that Sweden is significantly underrepresented, highlighting the necessity for fairer representation and inclusion within EU institutions.

2.5. Comparative Analysis of Representation with Other Regions

The representation of regions within the EU's leadership positions serves as a barometer of inclusivity, equity, and shared decision-making. This section provides a summary of the examination of representation by region that was made during the country profile.

Western and Southern Europe

Since the enlargement of the EU, Western and Southern Europe have consistently dominated the landscape of leadership appointments. Their cumulative share, exceeding 80% of all new appointments, underscores a persistent imbalance. Such dominance is not merely quantitative; it is also qualitative. A deeper dive reveals that most of these appointments pertain to prestigious roles within EU institutions, endowing these regions with substantial influence over policy formulation, decision-making, and agenda-setting. In its History, no CEE or Northern region representatives have held the presidency in the European Commission, while for the European Parliament, the Presidency has only been appointed to Jerzy Buzek from 2009-2012.

Central and Eastern Europe

Contrastingly, Central and Eastern Europe's representation trajectory is marked by systemic under-representation and limited visibility as country profiles evidence during the second section. Despite comprising a significant portion of the EU's demographic and geographic landscape, these regions secure a disproportionately low number of leadership positions. The ramifications extend beyond mere numbers; they manifest in policy outcomes, resource allocation, and the perceived legitimacy of EU institutions among citizens of these regions.

Northern Europe:

Northern Europe occupies an intermediate position, witnessing incremental improvements in recent years. However, these advancements are tempered by a lingering

under-representation, particularly in prestigious roles within EU institutions. The region's dynamic economic landscape, social welfare models, and geopolitical significance warrant

more equitable representation in terms of numbers and influence.

Table 1. Member State Data Overview

MEMBER STATE	POPULATION	MEPS	INHABITANTS PER MEP
AT Austria	8,970,350	18	498,352.78
BE Belgium	11,686,140	21	556,958.10
BG Bulgaria	6,687,717	17	393,100.41
HR Croatia	4,008,617	12	334,051.42
CY Cyprus	1,260,138	6	210,023.00
CZ Czech Republic	10,495,295	21	499,776.90
DK Denmark	5,910,913	14	422,922.36
EE Estonia	1,322,765	7	189,023.57
FI Finland	5,545,475	14	396,105.36
FR France	64,756,584	79	819,834.54
DE Germany	83,294,633	96	867,818.93
GR Greece	10,341,277	21	491,488.24
HU Hungary	10,156,239	21	483,159.48
IE Ireland	5,056,935	13	389,766.54
IT Italy	58,870,762	76	773,983.18
LV Latvia	1,830,211	8	228,776.38
LT Lithuania	2,718,352	11	247,123.82
LU Luxembourg	654,768	6	109,128.00
MT Malta	535,064	6	89,177.33
NL Netherlands	17,618,299	29	607,182.03
PL Poland	41,026,067	52	788,654.75
PT Portugal	19,892,812	21	947,800.57
RO Romania	19,051,562	33	577,614.61
SK Slovakia	5,795,199	14	414,657.07
SI Slovenia	2,119,675	8	264,959.38
ES Spain	47,519,628	59	805,759.63
SE Sweden	10,612,086	21	505,813.14
EU EUROPEAN UNION	500,611,389	705	13,206,106.69

3. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO UNDERREPRESENTATION

3.1. Political Dynamics

One of the main reasons for the underrepresentation of the CEE region is the political dynamics evolving in the area. The historical foundations and subsequent evolution of the EU framework reflect a discernible West-centric trajectory, wherein the interests and administrative capacities of its Western European founders wield significant influence over institutional norms and decision-making processes. The Treaty of Rome in 1957, which laid the groundwork for the European Economic Community (EEC), primarily catered to the economic integration objectives of its six founding members, thus shaping a governance paradigm that inherently disadvantaged newer CEE member states emerging from decades of communist rule.

Following the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, these nations embarked on transformative economic and political transitions, seeking alignment with EU norms and standards. However, the transition process was fraught with administrative challenges rooted in the legacy of communist-era bureaucracies ill-prepared for the complexities of EU governance structures. Countries such as Poland faced formidable hurdles in harmonizing domestic laws and regulations with EU directives, revealing a stark contrast in administrative capacity compared to their Western European counterparts.

Recent years have witnessed the rise of illiberal tendencies in Hungary and Poland, where governments have implemented measures challenging core democratic principles and the rule of law. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government has introduced constitutional changes and legislative reforms that critics argue undermine judicial independence and media freedom. Such developments have strained relations with EU institutions, underscoring broader concerns about democratic backsliding within the Union.

Electoral participation across Central and Eastern European countries has varied, influenced by socio-economic factors and perceptions of EU governance. Slovakia's 2019 presidential election, marked by historically low voter turnout, underscores broader trends of political apathy and disillusionment with mainstream parties. These trends reflect a deeper sense of citizen alienation and skepticism towards EU institutions perceived as distant and unresponsive.

Analysis of the European Union Geographical Representation in Leadership Observatory (EU-GRLO) reveals disparities in representation within EU institutions, particularly concerning CEE nations. Discussions surrounding geographical representation resonate predominantly within pro-government circles in Hungary and Poland, highlighting underlying ideological divisions and regional dynamics. The EU-GRLO serves as a critical tool for understanding and addressing these challenges, advocating for greater inclusivity and representation within EU leadership structures.

It is important to underline the complexities surrounding representation disparities within the EU and necessitate a nuanced understanding of historical legacies, administrative challenges, and socio-political dynamics shaping the region.



3.2. Population

In the realm of EU governance, the process of appointing officials is a delicate balancing act between "equal State representation and population-based proportional representation." This intricate interplay is deeply entrenched in the treaties that serve as the legal bedrock of the European Union, particularly the Treaty on the European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and the Lisbon Treaty (2007). These foundational documents not only establish the principles of democratic governance but also delineate the operational framework for the EU's main institutions, including provisions for the selection of officials. The EU's commitment to equitable representation is palpable in its efforts to strike a harmonious balance between state-centric and population-based criteria. This multifaceted approach seeks to ensure that each region achieves a 20% "equality mark," serving as a benchmark for proportional representation. However, as evidenced by the research in this document underscores a troubling reality. While Southern Europe consistently exceeds this benchmark, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) grapples with significant underrepresentation. In 2022, Eastern Europe realized a mere 13.8% of its proportional representation potential, starkly contrasting with Central Europe's 18.9%. Meanwhile, Western and Southern Europe maintain a stronghold, often surpassing their proportional shares. To be more precise, despite Poland's substantial population and contributions to the European project, its appointments do not mirror its demographic weight as evidenced by the representation data focusing on Poland. This incongruity highlights the broader challenges faced by CEE nations, where underrepresentation belies their population, historical contributions, and evolving roles within the Union.

Despite post-2004 EU enlargement efforts, entrenched patterns persist. Western and Southern Europe, leveraging historical precedents and administrative advantages, continue to dominate prestigious EU positions, capturing over 80% of appointments since 2004. Conversely, citizens from Central and Eastern Europe frequently encounter representation ceilings, limiting their influence within EU decision-making bodies.



Beyond statistical imbalances, these representation gaps have far-reaching implications. The erosion of trust in EU institutions among CEE citizens is tangible, fueling disillusionment and potentially shaping voter behavior. Such sentiments pose a threat to EU cohesion, governance efficacy, and the Union's foundational ethos of solidarity.

Addressing underrepresentation transcends mere numerical recalibrations; it's a strategic imperative for fortifying a cohesive, inclusive, and representative European Union.

3.3. The amount of time since the accession of its Member States

The duration of time since a country's accession to the European Union significantly influences its representation and influence within EU institutions. Countries that have been EU members for a longer duration tend to have established networks, deeper institutional knowledge, and greater experience in navigating EU decision-making processes. As a result, these countries often secure more seats and leadership positions within EU bodies, reflecting their historical engagement and contributions to European integration.

However, despite the passage of time since accession, both the Nordic countries and those in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) continue to receive relatively low representation in key EU institutions. While the Nordic countries and CEE states have made significant strides in aligning with EU policies and standards, their

representation remains disproportionate compared to their population sizes and geopolitical importance within the EU.

The discrepancy in representation between old and new EU member states underscores broader dynamics of power and influence within the European Union. Established EU member states, often referred to as the "old EU," seek to maintain their dominant positions within EU institutions by preserving existing power structures and distribution mechanisms. This tendency reflects a desire to safeguard their interests and preserve the status quo, often at the expense of newer member states seeking greater representation and influence.

Moreover, the old EU's efforts to retain its position can manifest in various forms, including resistance to institutional reforms that would redistribute seats more equitably among member states. While the EU emphasizes principles of equality and solidarity among its members, entrenched interests and historical precedents can impede efforts to achieve greater representation for all member states, particularly those from the Nordic and CEE regions. Of the total 73 EU institutions, bodies, and agencies, Western Europe commands the lion's share, holding a commanding 60.7% of seats. This dominance reflects the historical and economic powerhouses of the EU, including countries such as Germany, France, and the Benelux nations, which have long been at the forefront of European integration efforts and wield considerable influence over EU policies and decision-making processes.

Southern Europe follows, comprising 27.2% of seats across EU institutions. Countries in this region, including Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal, play crucial roles in shaping EU policies, particularly in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, and Mediterranean affairs. Their representation underscores the importance of addressing regional challenges and promoting cohesion across Southern Europe.

Conversely, Northern Europe commands a mere 6.7% of seats, reflecting the relatively lower representation of countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and the Baltic states within EU institutions. Despite their significant contributions to areas such as innovation, sustainability, and digitalization, Northern European countries continue to grapple with underrepresentation in key decision-making forums.

Central Europe and Eastern Europe together hold a modest 5.4% of seats, highlighting the challenges faced by countries in these regions in asserting their interests and priorities within the EU. Despite their diverse cultural and historical backgrounds, Central and Eastern European states are often relegated to the periphery of EU decision-making, exacerbating feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement among their populations.

3.4. Economic Disparities

The economic disparities between the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and the older EU member states, particularly in terms of GDP growth and income levels, underscore the challenges of East-West convergence within the EU. The Eastern enlargement in 2004 brought about significant economic transformation, with countries like Poland and Hungary experiencing strong growth after the early 1990s recession. However, while the region has made strides in catching up economically, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 disrupted this trend, leading to varying performances among CEE countries. Despite post-crisis growth, disparities persist, with Poland managing to escape recession while other countries like the Baltic Three faced double-digit contractions. Moreover, imbalances in the Single Market,



characterized by large labor outflows from the East to the West, underscore the socioeconomic challenges facing the region. For instance, around 5 % of the Polish labor force resides in other EU member states, contributing to population decline and dependency ratio concerns in sending countries. Moreover, the repatriation of mobile workers, while occasionally endowing the home economies with valuable skills and experience, paradoxically contributes to a 'brain drain' phenomenon, exacerbating social and economic dilemmas in the countries of origin. The economic disjuncture between the Eastern and Western blocs also delineates an 'inner periphery' paradigm within the EU, wherein newer member states contend with distinctive challenges in labor market dynamics, trade union engagement, and wage structures. For instance, a conspicuous lack of trade union membership persists in East-Central European countries, with less than one-fifth of wage and salary earners in Poland or the Czech Republic affiliated with such organizations, a sharp contrast to the nearly 70% observed in Scandinavian member states. This disjuncture underscores a persistent proclivity towards enhancing competitiveness at the workers' expense, manifesting in wage dynamics that fall short of the economic potential inherent within these nations. Despite robust economic growth, East-Central European enterprises evince a tendency to accord diminished priority to human capital concerns relative to their Western European counterparts, thereby impeding participation rates in lifelong learning and professional development initiatives. To fortify sustained economic growth and foster enduring competitiveness, a compelling imperative emerges for augmented social investment, encompassing robust allocations towards education, healthcare, and societal integration initiatives. Nonetheless, the disparate prioritization of human capital issues within East-Central European business circles underscores the exigency for the EU to champion enhanced social dialogue, invigorated investment in human capital, and cohesive policies that proactively redress the underlying economic and social dissonances between the East and West. The concept of the "old EU" represents the established Western European core of the European Union, comprising countries like Germany, France, and the Benelux nations,

which historically have had significant influence in shaping EU policies and priorities. The urge to maintain dominance within the EU among these old EU member states is evident in various aspects, including the allocation of resources, decision-making processes, and policy priorities, all of which may inadvertently marginalize the interests of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region.

One manifestation of this dominance is in the allocation of EU funds and resources. Data shows that a disproportionate amount of EU funding is directed towards the old EU member states, particularly for infrastructure projects, research and development, and agricultural subsidies. For instance, in the current EU budget cycle (2021-2027), the largest recipients of EU funds include countries like Germany, France, and Italy, while many CEE countries receive comparatively less funding per capita. This uneven distribution perpetuates economic disparities and reinforces the dominance of the old EU in shaping the EU's economic agenda.

Moreover, decision-making processes within the EU often favor the interests of the old EU member states, potentially marginalizing the voices of CEE countries. The EU's institutional framework, including the European Council and the European Commission, gives significant weight to the opinions and preferences of larger Western European countries. Qualified majority voting mechanisms and the power dynamics within EU institutions often result in policies that align more closely with the priorities of the old EU, disregarding the concerns of CEE countries.



Policy priorities set by the old EU member states also reflect their desire to maintain dominance within the union. For example, initiatives related to climate change, digital transformation, and defense cooperation tend to be driven by the preferences of Western European countries, which have greater political and economic clout within the EU. While these initiatives may benefit the union as a whole, they may not always address the specific needs and challenges faced by CEE countries, such as infrastructure development, energy security, and regional disparities in economic development. According to data from the European Commission, in the current EU budget cycle (2021-2027), the largest recipients of EU funds include countries like Germany, France, and Italy, which collectively receive a significant portion of the EU's budget for infrastructure projects, research and development, and agricultural subsidies. For instance, Germany is slated to receive approximately €28 billion annually from the EU budget, followed by France with around €15 billion per year, and Italy with approximately €13 billion per year.

In contrast, many Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries receive comparatively less funding per capita. For instance, countries like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic receive EU funding, but the amounts are significantly lower compared to the funds allocated to the old EU member states. For example, Poland, the largest recipient among the CEE countries, is expected to receive around €13 billion annually, which is less than half of what Germany receives despite having a larger population.

These disparities in funding allocation reflect the dominance of the old EU member states in shaping the EU's economic agenda and priorities. While EU funds are intended to promote cohesion and convergence among member states, the uneven distribution of funds perpetuates economic disparities and reinforces the influence of the old EU member states within the union, the CEE region represents a substantial portion of the EU's territory and population, making it an integral part of the European economic landscape. However, underrepresentation in decision-making processes

and resource allocation mechanisms undermines the region's ability to advocate for its specific economic interests and priorities. This lack of representation can lead to policies and initiatives that do not fully address the unique challenges faced by CEE countries, such as infrastructure development, energy security, and economic convergence.

Moreover, the underrepresentation of the CEE region within the EU can hinder its economic relevance and competitiveness on both regional and global scales. Without adequate representation, CEE countries may struggle to attract investment, develop competitive industries, and fully integrate into the European single market. This, in turn, limits the region's ability to leverage EU resources and funding opportunities for sustainable economic growth and development.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of the CEE region undermines the EU's credibility as a truly inclusive and representative union of member states. It perpetuates disparities in political influence and economic opportunities among EU member states, which can breed resentment and undermine solidarity within the union. A more balanced and inclusive EU, on the other hand, can foster greater cohesion and cooperation among member states, leading to more effective policymaking and a stronger collective voice on the global stage.



4. INITIATIVES AND SOLUTIONS

4.1. Existing Initiatives for Increased Representation

In the pursuit of increased representation within the European Union (EU), a longstanding endeavor has unfolded over the years. Various initiatives, policies, and frameworks have been introduced to confront disparities, enhance inclusivity, and foster equitable participation among Member States. Recognizing the paramount importance of regional representation, several existing initiatives have been instituted to amplify the voices of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and ensure their adequate representation within EU institutions.

An overview of existing initiatives reveals the Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy, which are directed at reducing economic and social disparities among EU regions. These allocate substantial resources to CEE countries, fostering economic development, infrastructure enhancement, and regional integration. By prioritizing investments in CEE regions, these initiatives have facilitated greater integration, connectivity, and collaboration.

Another pivotal initiative is the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Initiative, inaugurated in 2009 to strengthen relations between the EU and its Eastern neighbors. Through fostering political dialogue, economic cooperation, and sectoral integration, the EaP Initiative has bolstered collaboration, alignment, and engagement between CEE countries and the broader European community. This fosters mutual understanding, shared prosperity, and regional stability.

Furthermore, the Visegrád Group (V4) Cooperation, founded in 1991, promotes regional cooperation, economic development, and cultural collaboration among CEE countries. By convening regular summits, initiating joint endeavors, and undertaking collaborative projects, the V4 Cooperation has strengthened ties, fostered unity, and amplified the collective voice of CEE countries within

EU decision-making processes. This ensures their interests, priorities, and perspectives are adequately represented and considered.

Moreover, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), designed to support regional development, innovation, and competitiveness, allocate significant financial resources to CEE countries. Leveraging ESIF resources, CEE countries have implemented transformative projects, initiatives, and reforms, enhancing their competitiveness, resilience, and integration within the EU framework. Concurrently, collaboration, partnership, and solidarity among Member States have been fostered.

Through various regional development initiatives and programs, the EU bolsters CEE countries in implementing strategic projects, fostering innovation, and enhancing connectivity across sectors, regions, and communities. By investing in key priority areas such as infrastructure development, digital transformation, and sustainable growth, these initiatives have facilitated greater integration, collaboration, and partnership among CEE countries. This enables them to harness their potential, address common challenges, and proactively contribute to EU objectives and priorities.

In conclusion, while these existing initiatives represent notable strides in promoting increased representation, collaboration, and engagement among CEE countries within the EU framework, continuous efforts, innovations, and investments are indispensable. Addressing remaining disparities, fostering inclusive growth, and ensuring equitable participation among Member States necessitate ongoing commitment. By building on these foundations, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and prioritizing regional priorities, the EU can strengthen its dedication to unity, solidarity, and shared prosperity. This sets a precedent for inclusive governance, sustainable development, and collaborative leadership in the 21st century.

4.2. Recommendations for Improvement

Amidst the pivotal juncture faced by the European Union, marked by dynamic geopolitical shifts, evolving regional priorities, and an imperative for inclusive leadership, it becomes imperative to craft comprehensive and actionable recommendations that redress existing disparities, bolster collaboration, and promote equitable representation following the 2024 European elections.

In Strengthening Parliamentary Engagement and Collaboration:

- The establishment of specialized committees within the European Parliament emerges as a vital strategy to ensure robust parliamentary engagement and collaboration. These committees would assume the responsibility of overseeing leadership appointments, and meticulously aligning nominees with the EU's foundational values, principles, and regional representation. Furthermore, fostering regular dialogues among Parliamentarians, EU officials, and regional representatives serves as a critical avenue to deliberate upon leadership priorities, confront challenges, and devise collaborative strategies. The implementation of transparent nomination and confirmation processes is of paramount importance, affording Parliamentarians and citizens insights into candidate qualifications, evaluations, and selection criteria.

Regarding Enhancing Candidate Quality and Preselection Criteria:

- The imperative to elevate the caliber of candidates and preselection criteria cannot be overstated. Launching tailored leadership development programs aimed at CEE officials represents a proactive measure to equip them with the requisite skills, expertise, and networks vital for effective EU leadership roles. Emphasis on meritocracy in leadership appointments becomes pivotal to ensure that neighbors possess a demonstrable track record of governance excellence, regional engagement, and seamless integration within the EU framework.

The establishment of collaborative vetting mechanisms, involving CEE governments, EU institutions, and independent experts, assumes significance in rigorously evaluating candidate qualifications, experiences, and alignment with EU priorities.

In Fostering Balanced Negotiation and Collaboration Strategies:

- Efforts directed at fostering balanced negotiation and collaboration strategies emerge as linchpins for effective EU governance. Encouraging the formation of regional consortiums among CEE countries holds promise in facilitating collaboration on leadership appointments, negotiation of strategic concessions, and amplification of collective influence within EU decision-making processes. Developing frameworks that underscore mutual benefits offers CEE countries the opportunity to secure strategic concessions, policy commitments, and collaborative initiatives in exchange for their support on leadership appointments. The establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms assumes equal importance, addressing potential disputes, disagreements, or challenges to foster unity, cohesion, and shared prosperity during negotiation and collaboration processes.



Institutional Acknowledgment and Commitment:

- Institutional acknowledgment and unwavering commitment to geographical representation and inclusive leadership represent foundational imperatives. The issuance of joint declarations reaffirming the Council and Commission's dedication to these principles emerges as a necessary step. Concurrently, the implementation of robust accountability mechanisms ensures institutional adherence to commitments, delivery of promises, and steadfast prioritization of regional representation in leadership appointments. Periodic reviews, evaluations, and assessments of leadership appointments stand instrumental in enabling EU institutions to monitor progress, identify challenges, and refine strategies based on evolving regional dynamics.

In Conducting Comprehensive Analysis, Baseline Measures, and Goal Setting:

- Conducting comprehensive, data-driven assessments to delineate baseline measures, historical trends, and regional disparities in leadership appointments constitutes a critical mandate. Facilitating workshops,

consultations, and dialogues among Member States to delineate clear, actionable goals, targets, and milestones for enhancing geographical representation ensures alignment and tangible progress. The development of performance metrics, evaluation criteria, and monitoring frameworks assumes pivotal significance in assessing progress, measuring impact, and ensuring alignment with established goals and objectives.

On Transparent, Inclusive, and Affirmative Action Policies:

- Implementation of transparent selection processes and the initiation of affirmative action initiatives targeting underrepresented regions, communities, and demographics within the EU represent catalysts for fostering inclusivity, equity, and shared prosperity. Organizing stakeholder engagement forums, consultations, and dialogues to solicit feedback, insights, and recommendations from EU citizens, representatives, and organizations on enhancing geographical representation ensures inclusivity and broad-based participation in the decision-making process.



5. CONCLUSION

This report explores the persistent underrepresentation of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Northern Europe in top EU positions, highlighted by the aftermath of the 2019 European Elections. Despite the pivotal roles these regions play in shaping European affairs, their presence in key EU institutions remains disproportionately low. The analysis emphasizes the necessity of taking proactive steps to rectify this imbalance, stressing the significance of interacting with EU institutions, developing exceptional candidates, and deftly negotiating the intricate dynamics of EU appointment procedures.

Looking ahead to the 2024 European Elections, CEE and Northern European countries have a unique opportunity to assert their presence and influence within the EU. These regions can strive for equitable representation at the highest levels of EU decision-making by implementing the suggestions in this report, which include proactive engagement, giving priority to candidate quality, and skillful bargaining. Ultimately, fostering greater inclusivity in EU appointments is not only imperative for reflecting the diverse interests of member states but also essential for strengthening the Union's effectiveness and legitimacy on the global stage.



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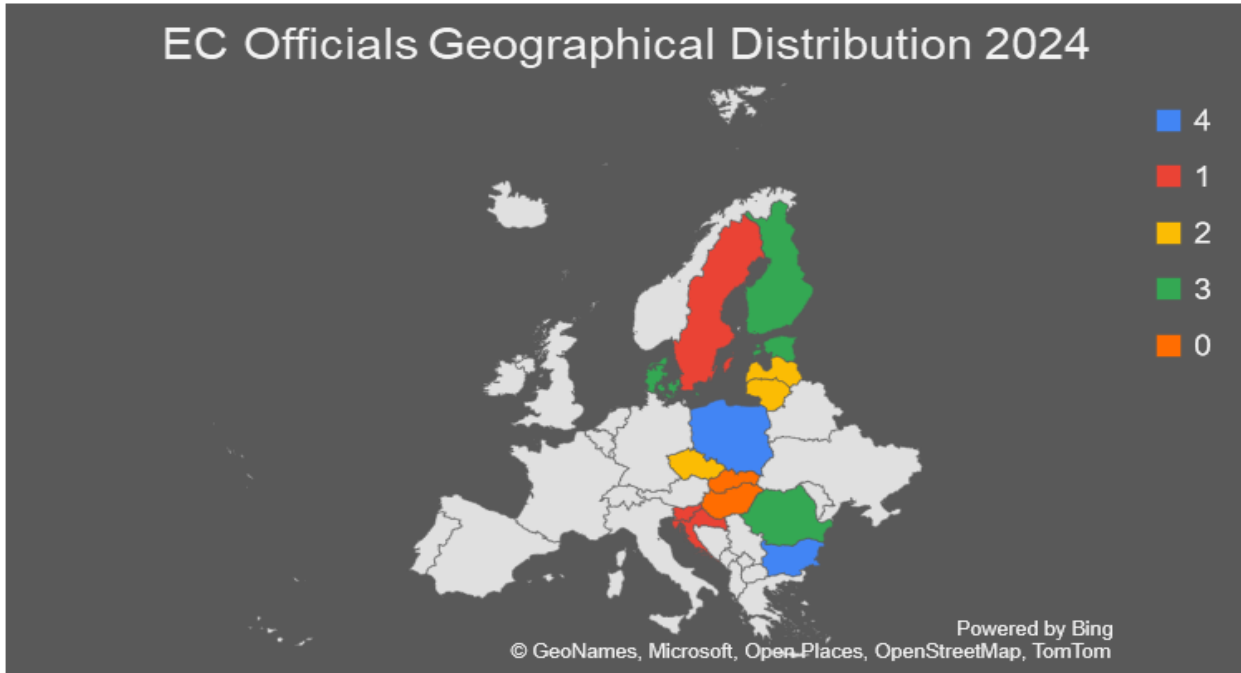
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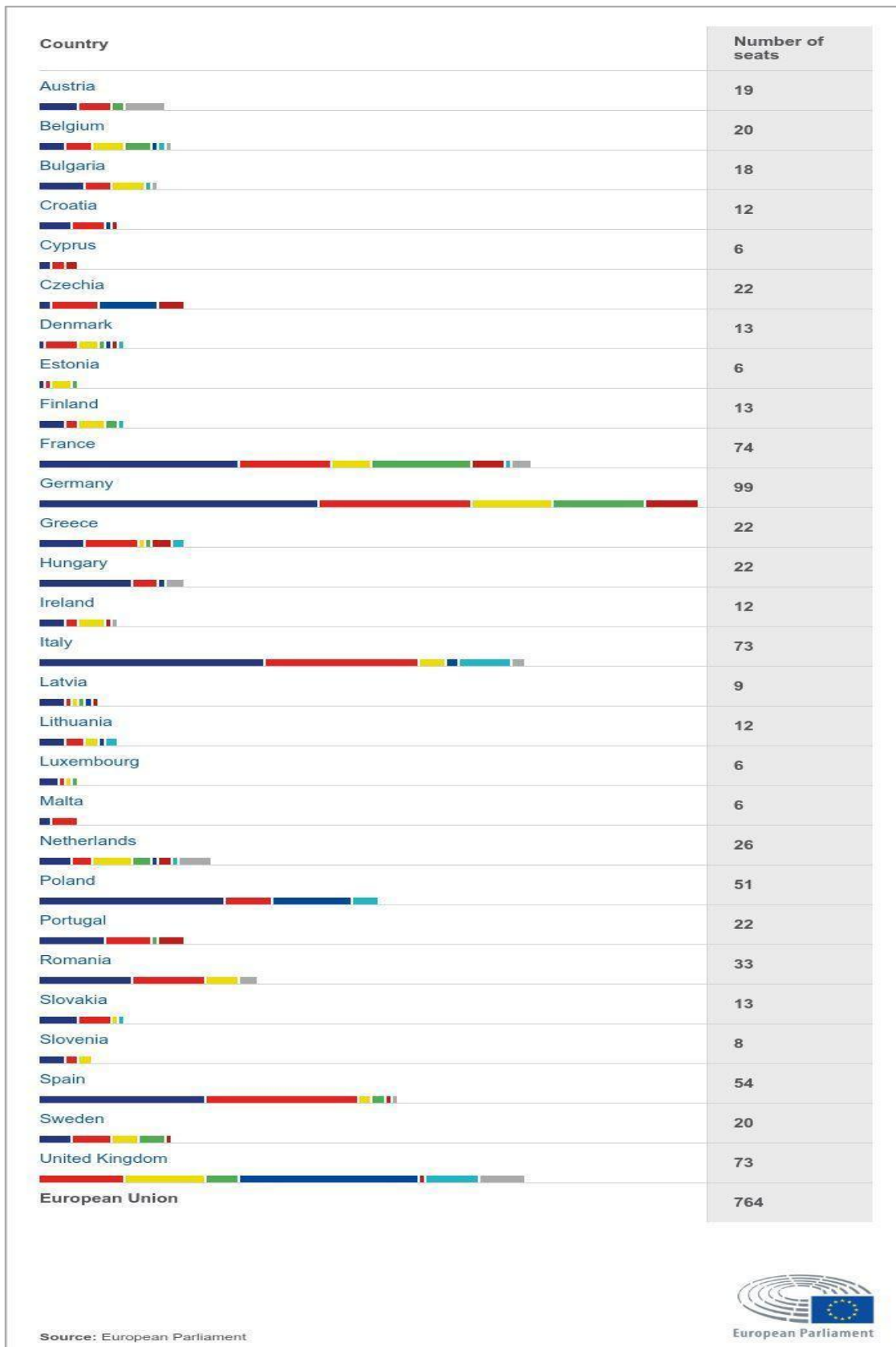
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7. APPENDICES

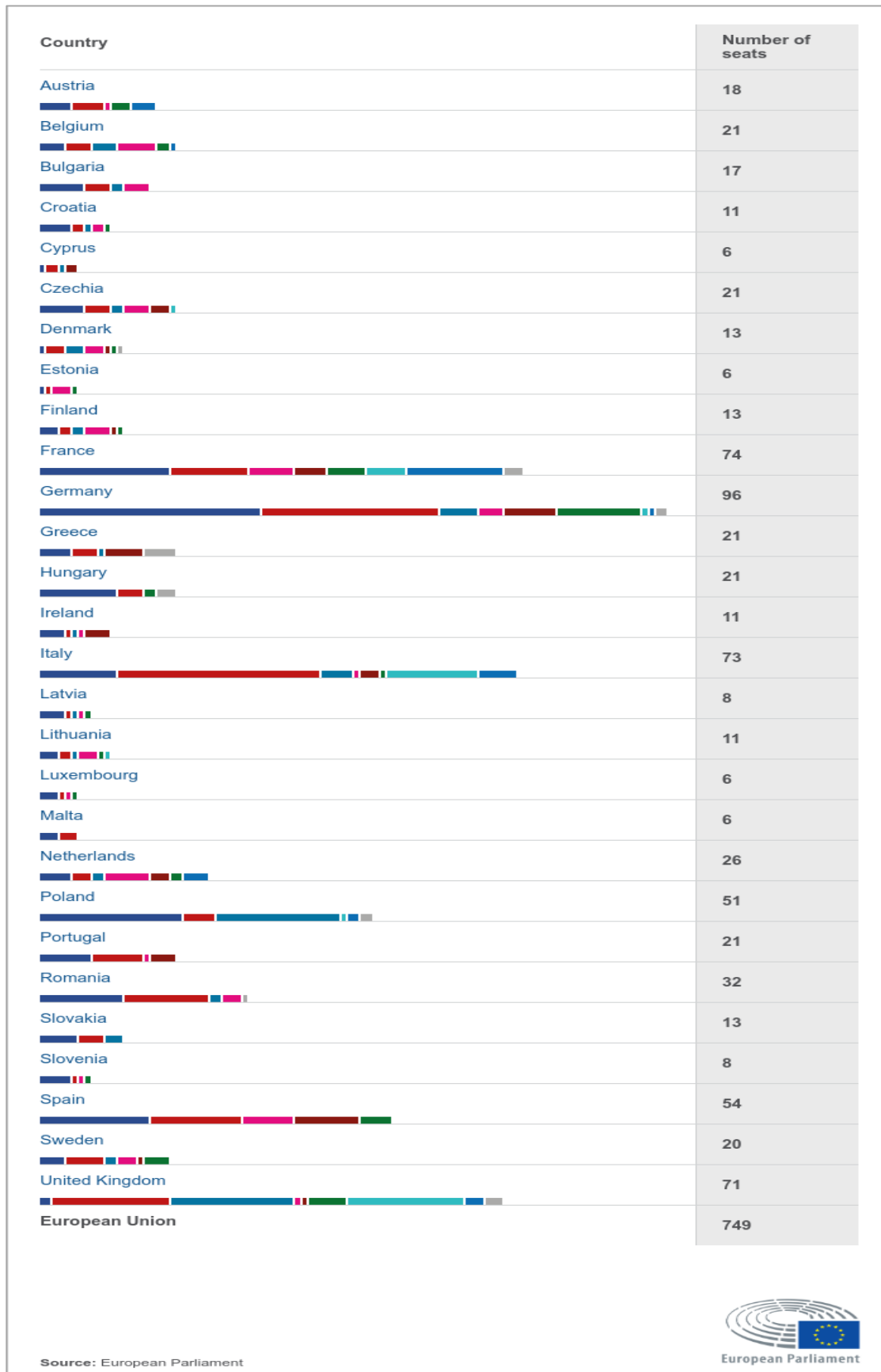
Appendix A: EC Officials Geographical Distribution 2024



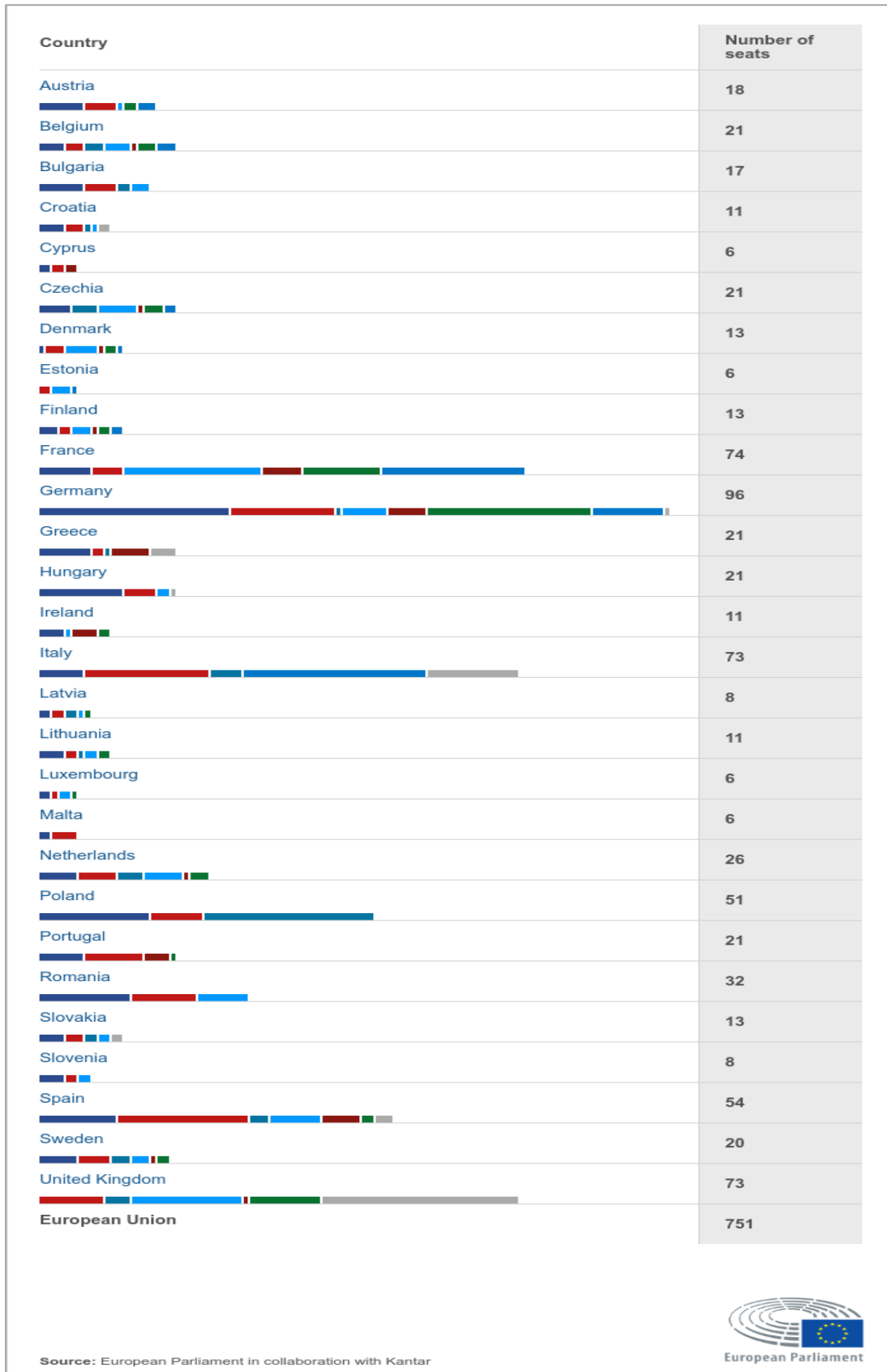
Appendix B: Seats By Political Group and Country 2009-2014



Appendix C: Seats By Political Group and Country 2014-2019



Appendix D: Seats By Political Group and Country 2019-2024





580 000
employees
in member companies



17
regional
organizations



19
trade
organizations



ZPP

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20 000
times quoted in media
annually



200 000
followers – profiles on
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130 000
fans on Facebook



740 000
minimal monthly reach
on Facebook



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UNION OF ENTREPRENEURS AND EMPLOYERS