

MULTILEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Abstract: The present report aims at presenting the multilevel environmental financing on the different levels within the European Union – supranational, national, transnational and cross-border as well as on regional/local level. The report discusses in short the nature of multi-level governance in the context of EU. The analysis includes the supranational level through descriptive and graphic presentation of the appropriations, programmes and bodies that allocate money and investments in the field of environment and climate change. The report further details the national financing using available data from Eurostat. The multilevelness of the environmental financing is illustrated by the figures on the Cohesion Policy funding within the fields in question as well as the regional and local levels in all 28 Member States of the EU.

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union has a unique type of governance, a combination between federal and unitary principles. This type of governance is a relatively recent trend in the scientific literature. Many researchers are exploring the so-called multi-level governance (MLG), a term used especially by Gary Marks and Lisbet Hooghe, the two main researchers in this particular field.

In its essence, MLG allows multiple actors from different levels of government to participate in the governance process, raise issues of importance to them, and take legislative initiative. Researchers have given several different definitions of MLG, but they mainly circulate around the fact that the means of decision-making and exercising control over these decisions can be found at all levels of public life in one country [1,2]. Certain traits of decentralization appear in some areas of decision-making and responsibility is shared between national, regional and local authorities.

For the purposes of this report, another definition is more relevant because it covers the full diversity of actors in the contemporary political process, the emergence of which was possible as early as the beginning of the 1990s due to the transition to a multipolar world and the new realities of policy-making. This definition was quoted by Assoc. Prof. Mimi Kornazheva and states that multilevel governance is a decision-making device that engages a multitude of politically independent but interdependent actors, from the public, private and civil sectors, belonging to different territorial levels, who are more or less engaged in constant negotiations about the decisions to be made and their application [3]. What is important here is that MLG actually covers private and civil-society actors in addition to the public ones who also exercise some influence in the decision-making process.

Regarding multilevel financing in the EU, this is even more important. The present report aims to show what is the involvement of different actors at different levels and with different responsibilities in the environmental financing within the EU.

The report will look into the different levels and participants in the environmental financing, its multi-levelness and the interaction between all these.

MAIN PART

The environmental policy is perhaps the most multifaceted among the other Union policies. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced even deeper division of competences within the EU, with the environment falling within the area of shared competences (Article 4 TFEU) [4], i.e. the environment is not an absolute prerogative of the EU, and Member States can decide and legislate according to the conditions and needs of the country concerned. On the other hand, there are Member States such as Germany, Austria and Belgium (federal type of government) and Italy, Portugal, Spain, Finland and United Kingdom (unitary type of government), which have granted legislative rights to their regional structures, including in the policy area of environmental protection [5]. The existence of regional and local, transnational and cross-border programs, a priority in most of which is the environment, places Europe's regions on the map of decision-making, even if they are not settled in basic EU or national legislation.

If the environmental decision-making setting is so diverse, the financing setting is even more interesting. To illustrate it, we can present the following pyramid of environmental financing and its multi-level nature.



Figure 1 – Multilevel Environmental Financing in the EU

1. European budget (European Commission)

The first level of financing comes from the European budget, from where most of the second- and fourth-level programs receive funding. The institution responsible for allocating the budget according to budget lines is the European Commission (EC).

Environmental spending started as early as 1972, initially being only in the area of research [6]. The environment has long been part of other budget lines such as consumer policy, for example (1981-1989) [7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15]. It obtained independence briefly, in the period 1990-1991 [16,17], and from 1992 to 2003 was part of the pen "Energy, Euratom and the Environment"

[18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29]. It has got complete independence since 2004 [30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42,43,44]

Climate change, both as a policy and as funding, is relatively new to the budget, gaining independence only in 2013 [39] after a short period of three years as part of the “Environment” budget line [36,37,38].

As this brief retrospective of the European budget and its environment and climate change entries show, they have been allocated annually for more than 45 years now. Another fact is that, in recent years, most EU policies have also allocated funds to various environmental programs. Environmental budget jumped from 3% in 1975 to 43% in 2018 (Figure 2). The highest percentage was in 2009 - 44% of the total budget the EC allocates. Despite the decline that can be observed in individual years, the “Environment” line has been steadily increasing along with the increasing awareness of nature conservation and climate change. If in the beginning of the 1970s, the budget covered projects mainly in the field of research (1972-1977) [6,45,46,47], the end of the decade saw a sharp increase in the allocation of funds. They included different types of pollution (air, water, noise), chemical substances and the dangers they imposed on human health and the environment, etc. In 1983, the implementation of the Community’s environmental policy also became part of the budget [9]. Today, the “Environment” chapter encompasses approximately 40 sub-chapters in different policy areas, administrative and operational costs, projects for direct financing, etc. [43].

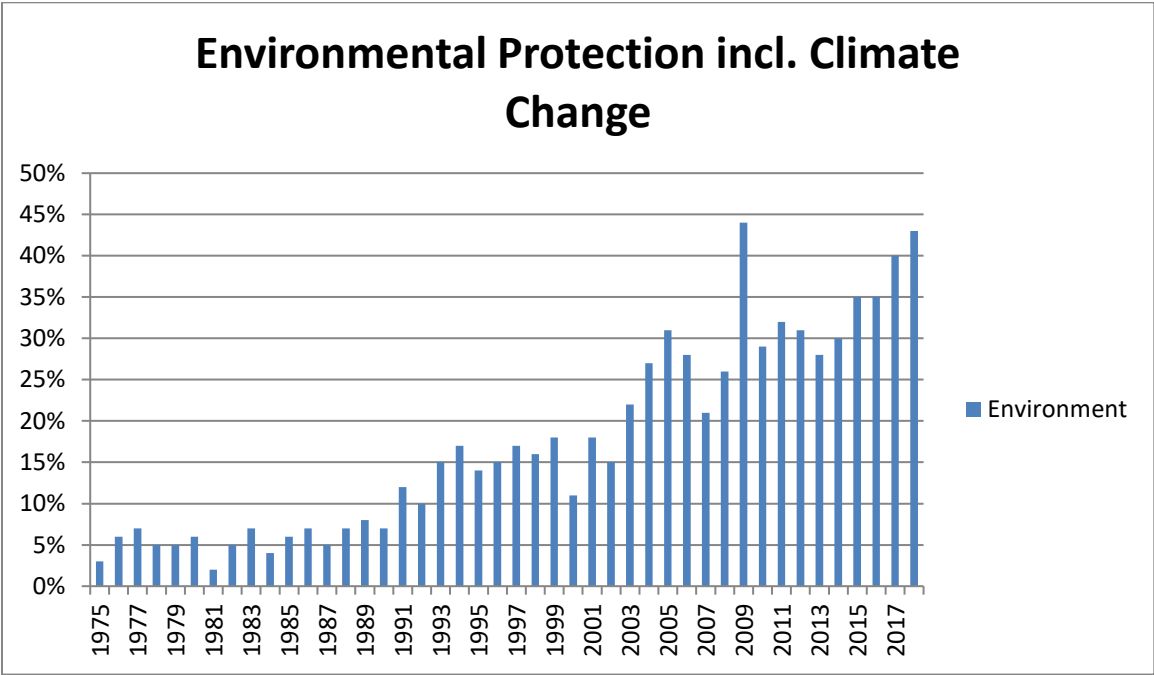


Figure 2 – Budget Line “Environment” (European Commission Appropriations)

2. LIFE; European Investment Bank (EIB)

Funds for the environment come from the budget but are allocated, at least at EU level, in two main ways - through the LIFE instrument and the EU bank – the EIB.

The purpose of LIFE, since it was established in 1992, is to fund projects in the field of environmental protection. During its first years, LIFE funded 731 projects in various fields. The second period covered 1996-1999, and the third lasted until 2006. More than 2,700 projects have been funded in two priority areas – “Nature” and “Environment” with EUR 1.36 billion allocated on different projects, which marked an increase of 1 billion over the period 2007-2013 (2.143 billion) [51,52].

Currently, for the 2014-2020 period, LIFE+ is in operation. It has “Climate change” as a separate priority area with 25% of its budget. The total amount of LIFE+ funding foreseen up to 2020 amounts to approximately € 3.5 billion under two priority areas – “Environment” and “Climate change” [51,52].

LIFE projects are extremely diverse. They are managed by the Member States and the ministries responsible for the environment or other relevant administrative structure. The largest funding was received by Italy and Spain, which, for the period 1992-2017, have received funding for more than 850 projects each. Bulgaria is among the countries with the least number of projects funded (36) for the period since its accession to the EU in 2007 until 2017 (Figure 3) [52,53].

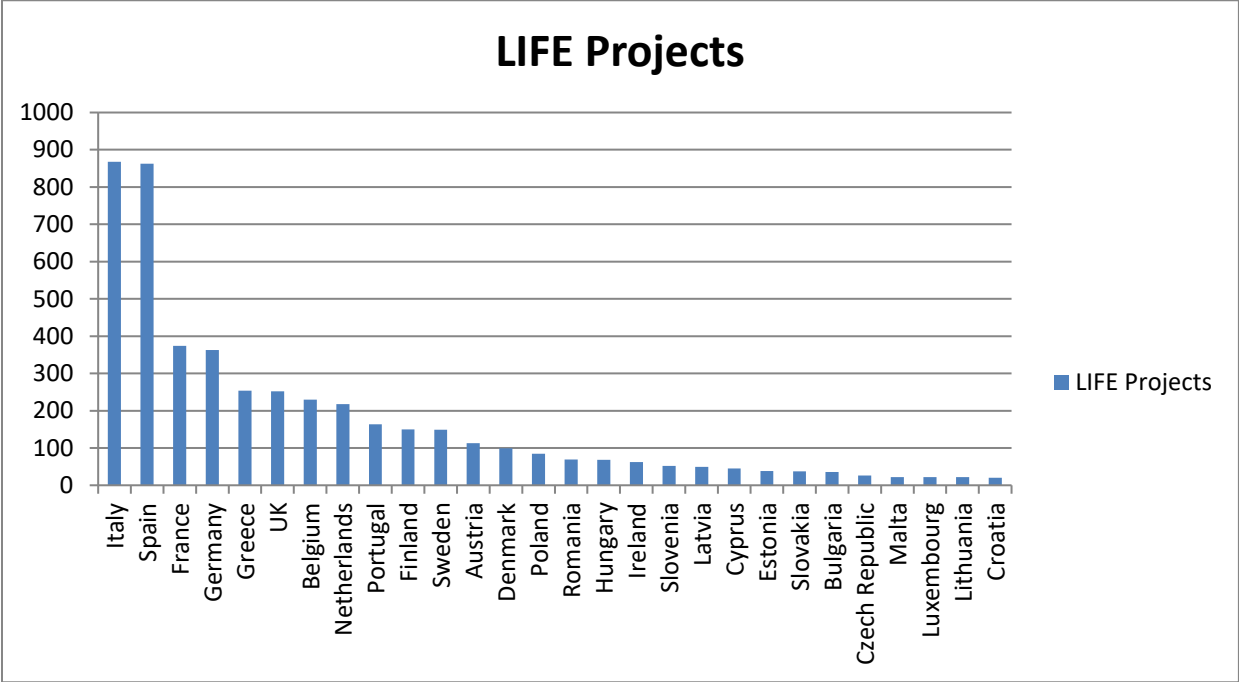


Figure 3 – Number of Projects Financed under LIFE according to Member-State

In fact, LIFE program can be seen as the first example of MLG in EU environmental financing. The funds are allocated from the Union budget but are spent and managed by the relevant structures in the Member States under the supervision of the Commission.

The EU Bank, the EIB, is perhaps the single largest investor in the environment, not only in Europe but also in the world. Not only does it annually allocate enormous amounts of funds for environmental protection and climate change, but it also attracts private investors to increase investment through various intermediaries - private banks and investment funds in the countries concerned. The direct financing of projects in the fields of environment and climate change is implemented through two financial instruments in cooperation with the LIFE program. The first, PF4EE or Private Finance for Energy Efficiency, was created because of the existing limited access to adequate financing and investment in energy efficiency. The instrument operates through a signed agreement between the country concerned and the EIB. Bulgaria does not currently have one signed but several other European countries do, namely the Czech Republic, Spain, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus. This instrument also does not provide for direct financing but uses financial intermediaries in the country concerned [54].

The other instrument managed by the EIB is the NCFE or the Natural Capital Financing Facility. It supports projects in the field of biodiversity and adaptation to climate change. One can apply for direct

financing under this instrument without intermediaries or at least in the pilot phase that ends in 2019 [55].

The EIB uses multi-level financial governance to finance the environment. While the LIFE program works through institutions in the Member State concerned, the EU Bank also includes private banks, public and private investment funds to allocate funds locally and regionally to the needs and requirements of the environment (Figure 4) [56,57,58,59,60,61,62,63,64].

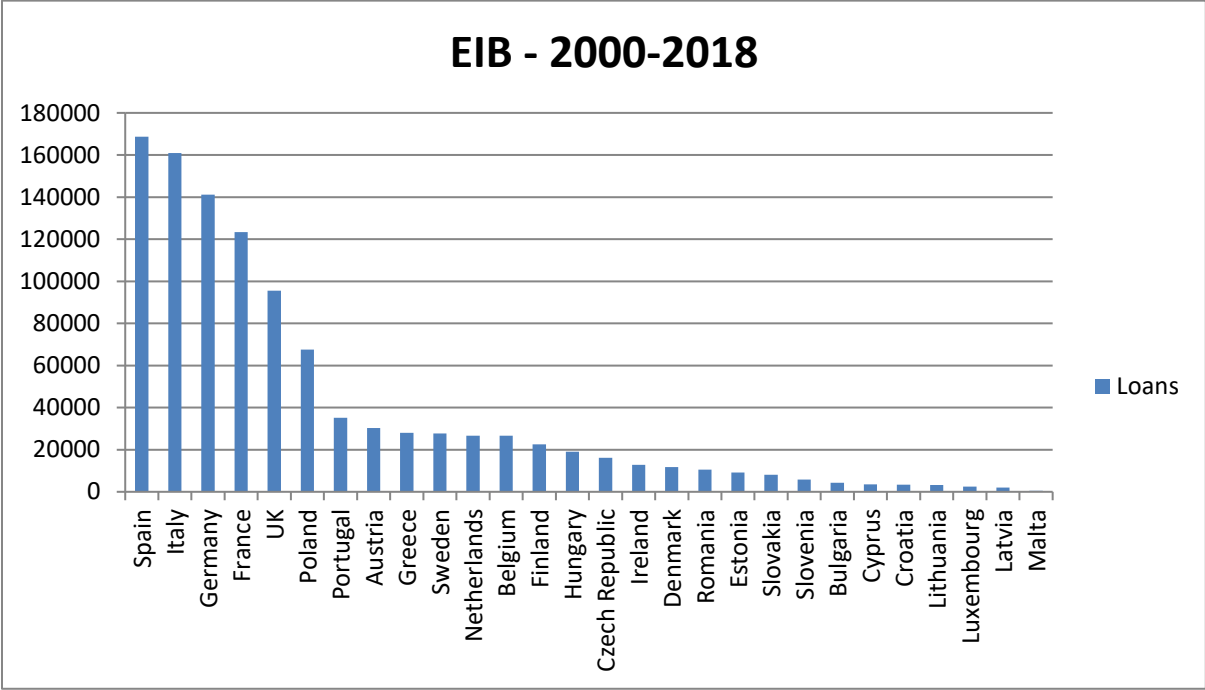


Figure 4 – Loans 2000-2018 (goals under titles “Environment” and “Climate Change”)

3. National budgets

The third level of funding is from the national budgets. The beginning of environmental financing in different countries dates back to different time periods. Each country has also different ratios depending on the priorities in their national policies. These priorities are largely determined by the Union's environmental priorities, but also include local characteristics and areas of concern. The priority areas for the last reporting period at EU level are divided into three, and they also assess what has been done in the individual Member States - 1) making the EU economy a circular, green and competitive low carbon economy; 2) protection, conservation and enhancement of natural capital; and 3) protecting citizens' health and quality of life [65]. Indeed, these goals and priorities reflect the EU's overall sustainable development policy, which integrates not only environmental and climate change issues, but also their incorporation into every area of citizens' lives and the relevant policies and legislation that govern them.

According to the European Commission, which conducts an annual assessment of the state of the environment and the actions taken by individual countries with respect to its conservation, the main priorities in the various Member States are the protection of nature, water and waste management and the water and air quality. The Nordic countries Finland and Sweden, for example, have as a priority to protect the marine environment, whereas countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland and others work to improve urban waste water treatment [65].

At a member-state level, funding and investment in environmental projects is implemented at several levels or funds come from several different sources - the EU through programs approved by the

EC or through the various Structural Funds, under the LIFE program or with EIB support and the respective intermediaries as well as directly from the Member State's budget.

For the period 1995-2017, since Eurostat started to collect data, the percentage of national budgets spent on the environment has not changed dramatically. Countries allocate between 0.3 to 3% of the state budget on environment. At the same time, if we look at the change in the percentage of environmental funds, we will see that they increased between 15% (Greece) and 2635% (Malta) over the same period. Only Romania recorded a negative percentage - 38% less for the environment (Figure 5 and Figure 6). The funds are allocated to different items defined by the priorities mentioned above [67].

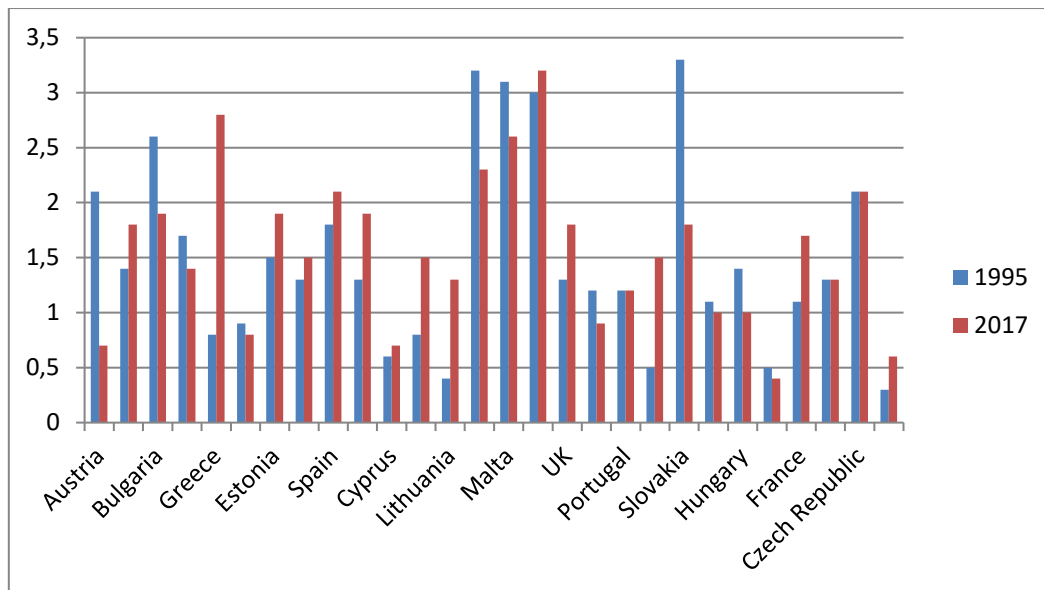


Figure 5 – Environmental financing as a % of the total national budget (difference between 1995 and 2017)

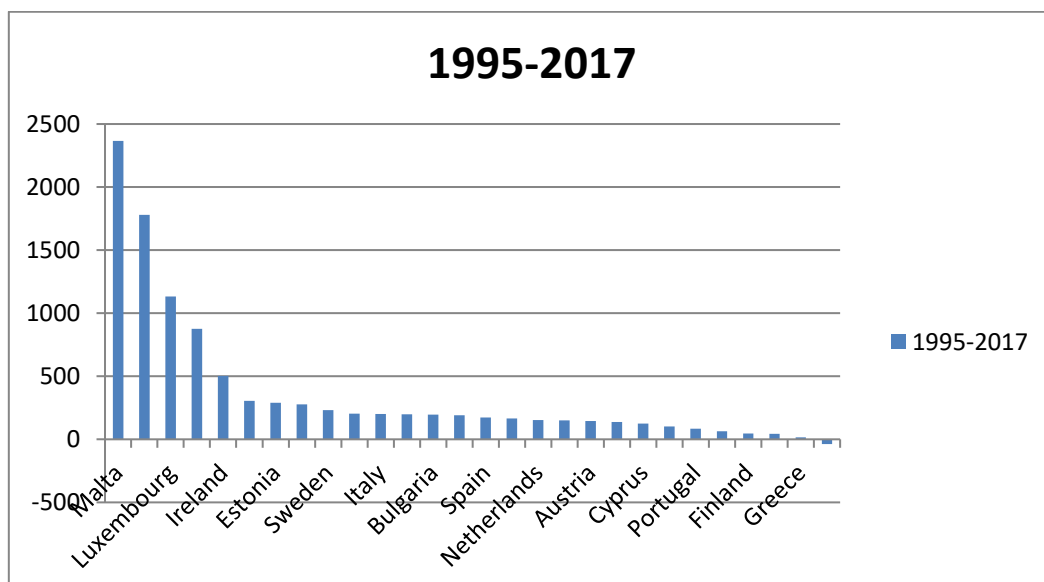


Figure 6 – Environmental financing in national budgets (% ratio 1995-2017)

4. Transnational / cross-border level

The next level of environmental financing in the EU is the transnational or transboundary one, implemented through regional and cohesion policies. They are targeted at both the country- and the regional level, and often cover cross-border ones.

In the period 1975-1984 a total of 214 projects were financed in the field of environmental protection as part of the European Fund for Regional Development (established in 1975) [68].

Over the next decade, projects became larger and began to cover more and more areas, but by 1999 the environment still did not exist on its own as a separate chapter in regional and cohesion policies and the individual funds that governed them. It could be seen in projects such as those for rural development, agriculture and fisheries. Since 2001, with the start of the new programming period, the environment was given a separate chapter.

The 2014-2020 programming period, had three environmental priorities, namely 1) environmental protection and resource efficiency with a total budget of over € 87 billion (Area 1); 2) a low carbon economy with a budget of over € 63 billion (Region 2); and 3) climate change adaptation and risk prevention with a budget of over € 42 billion (Area 3). Funding is mainly obtained from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Cohesion Fund [72].

During this period, and under the three priorities mentioned above most resources were allocated to the Czech Republic, Greece, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, etc. (Figure 7). The programs are divided into national (approximately 300), regional (over 300), cross-border (56), transnational (16) and interregional (4) and in most of these programs priority areas are environmental protection and climate change [72].

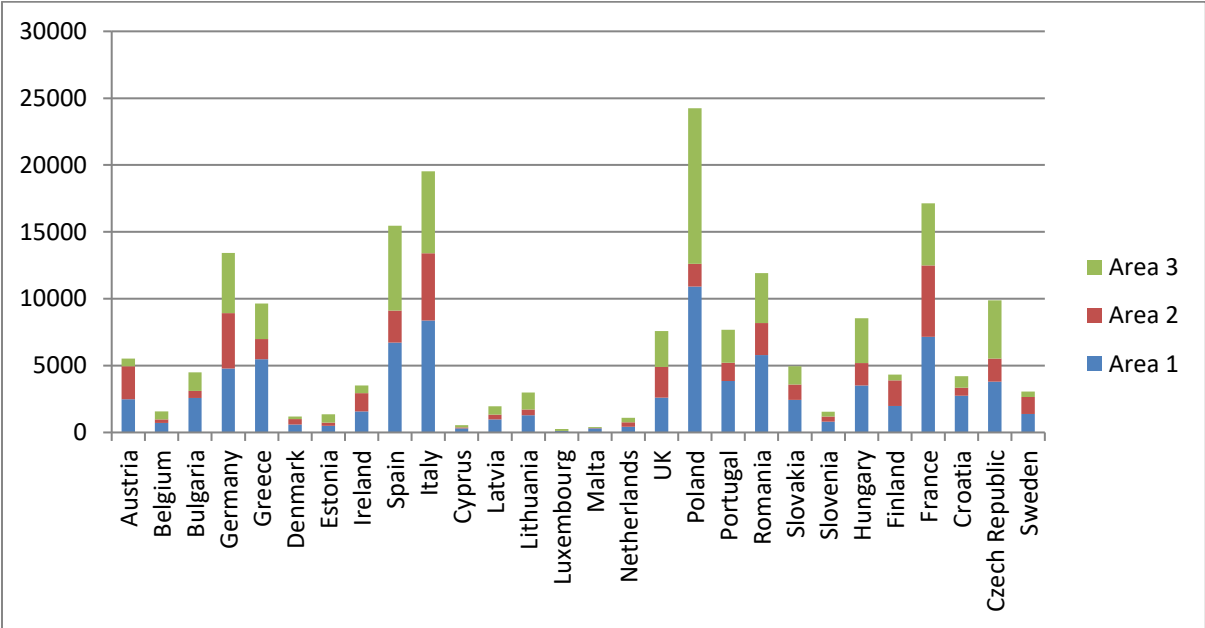


Figure 7 – Cohesion Policy – Programme Financing according to area and country (2014-2020)

5. Regional budgets

The lowest level of environmental financing is the regional, local level. It is implemented both under the various EU programs and the national budget, as well as from the budgets of the local and regional structures themselves. It is interesting to note that while at the national level the environment represents up to 3% of the overall state budget, at lower administrative levels it ranges from 0.3% in Finland to 27% in Malta according to 2017 figures (Figure 8) [67].

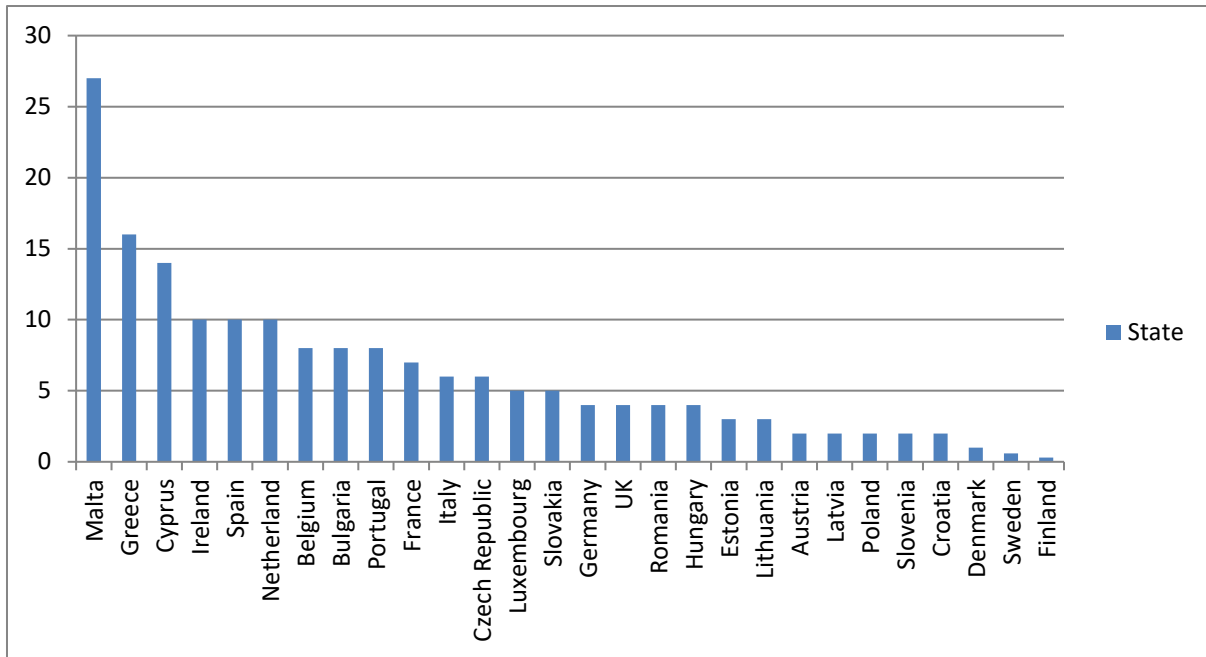


Figure 8 – Environmental financing in regional budgets (average % in 2017)

At the same time, however, there is a decline in the allocation of funds in many countries compared to the other base year - 1995. Negative values are recorded in 15 of the present 28 Member States (Figure 9) [67].

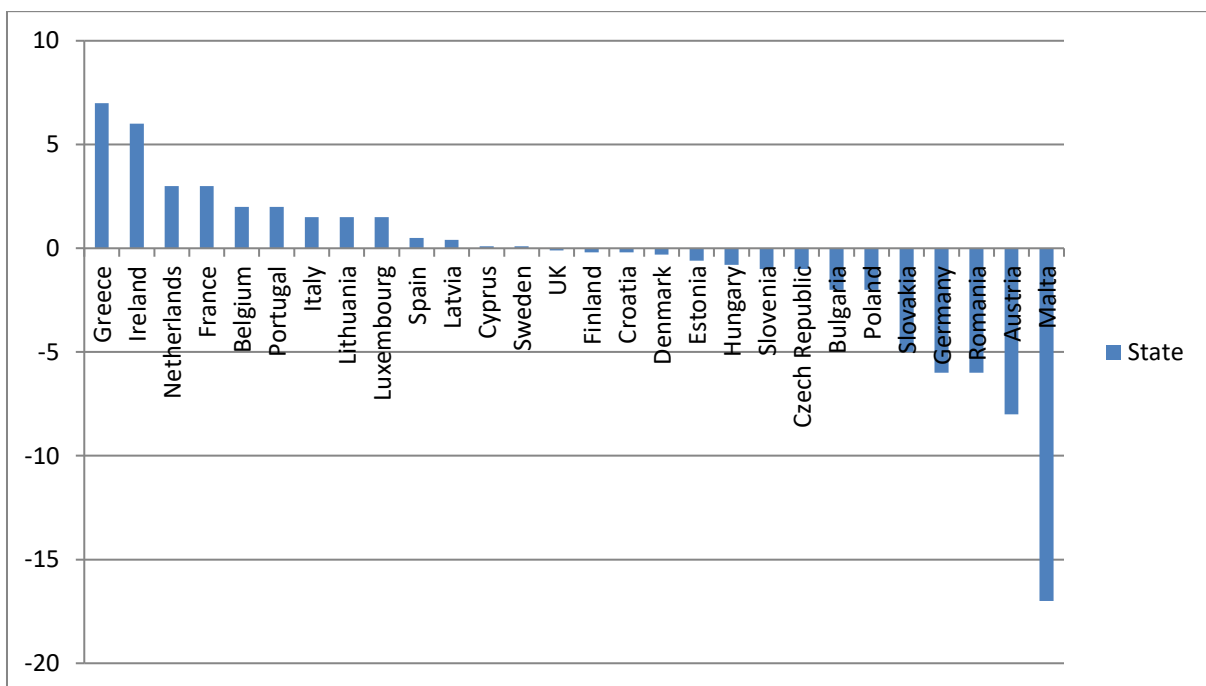


Figure 9 – Environmental financing in regional budget (% difference 1995 and 2017)

As with the state budgets discussed above, there is a significant increase in the amounts allocated to local budgets for environmental protection for the period 1995-2017. The increase reported falls within 40 to 50% margin for countries such as Denmark, Croatia, Hungary, Malta, Slovenia and Finland up to 1358% for Lithuania, the most significant reported increase as budget allocation by the state to

local structures under environment. In some countries, local environmental allocations are decreasing, such as Germany (-34%) and Austria (-67%) (Figure 10) [67].

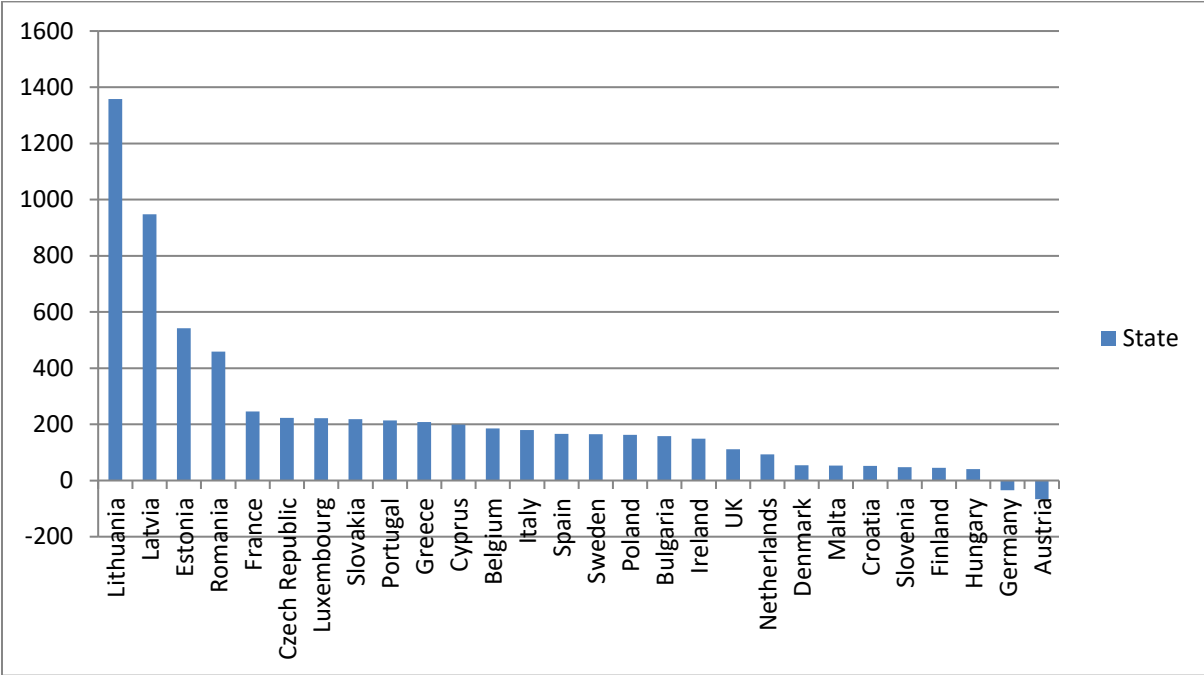


Figure 10 – Increase/Decrease Ratio in Environmental Financing 1995-2017 (%)

CONCLUSION

EU environmental financing can be characterized as multi-level in nature and involves a wide range of actors from both the public and private sectors. They are extremely closely interconnected and depend on one another. This report provides a brief analysis of the existing funding that comes from the EU budget and from state and local budgets, without taking into account the investments and funding provided by individual sectoral industries as well as by the business. Such a study would be the subject of a separate report.

The analysis of the financial framework of the environment for the past years leads to the following conclusions.

The environment, for its brief existence as an EU policy, receives serious attention both from a legislative and financial point of view. Since its inception in 1975 until 2018 the budget increases from 3% to 43% of the total Commission budget appropriations in the environmental field alone, without taking into account projects in key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, transport, etc.

The pyramid of multilevel environmental financing cannot be considered absolute because it does not fully represent the interrelations between the different actors in this field.

The EC allocates funds to the EIB and to the LIFE program. At the same time, the Member States are directly linked to the EIB, as the finance ministers are part of the Governing Council of the Bank and it receives direct financing in the form of individual membership fees. In order to better meet the high demands and goals it has set itself, and with its participation in international capital markets and its relationships with various funds and industries, both in Europe and worldwide, the EU Bank has succeeded to harness huge capital and investment to use in priority projects, such as those for the environment. In addition, through its programs and contracts with private banks and funds in the individual Member States, the EIB finances a number of smaller projects, thus including the private sector in the environmental financing process.

The LIFE program is directly linked to the Member States and the relevant environmental ministries, which manage project grants in one of the program's priority areas.

Regional, cross-border and transnational programs are funded by the EU budget through various Structural Funds, with each country participating in the total allocation with a certain percentage. It is a fact that due to the nature of the programs - regional, cross-border, or covering regions, parts of several countries, their funding directly affects the regional and local administrative structures involved in managing and implementing them, i.e. the influence they have over national structures, could directly affect budgeting for the next programming period.

Member States are also responsible for national and local budgets appropriations under the line "Environment". At the same time, through their participation in EU institutions and forums, they influence the budgetary framework and the definition of the Union's priorities.

The multilevel financing and financial governance of the environment in the EU is a complex participatory system that is administered at multiple levels and takes into account many factors. If we go back to the definition of MLG, given at the beginning of the report, we can conclude that multi-level financial governance of the environment in the EU really engages a number of politically independent but interdependent actors - from the public, private and civil sectors [EC, EIB, state and local public bodies, private sector], belonging to different territorial levels [supranational, national, regional, local and private], which are in a position to be more or less in constant negotiation with each other over these decisions and their application [3] depending on the interests and priorities of the unit participating in this process.

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