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**Dual quality products and dual Europe: an analysis of rhetoric among the
public surrounding the dual-quality practice**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Summary:

This research focuses, in broad terms, on assessing the relations between the Eastern and Western Europe. This is done by analysing the dual-quality product practice in the European states - the identically packaged products that are nonetheless different in their composition, therefore the quality, are sold in different countries. As this and other researches and experiments have shown, the dual-quality practice is widely used by the manufacturers and it is not unusual for a Czech to be offered a product that is visually the same to the one offered across the border in German shops. It is also significant in the way the consumers react to the practice. With the analysis of the existing data and a survey conducted for this research, it is illustrated that the consumers – especially those who receive the product that is made out of cheaper and/or less ingredients – are mostly negative. Particular attention is paid to the rhetoric of the survey participants in order to explore how divisive dual quality issue is.

Confirmation

I confirm that I am the author of submitted master thesis: *Dual quality products and dual Europe: an analysis of dual quality product fallout through the lens of Otherness*, which has been prepared independently and has never been presented for any other course or used in another educational institution, neither in Lithuania, or abroad. I also provide a full bibliographical list which indicates all the sources that were used to prepare this assignment and contains no un-used sources.

Name, Surname

Signature

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Introduction

The division between Western and Eastern Europe still remains firm. While the physical barriers once so symbolic as Iron Curtain are no more, the barriers in the heads of the populations in the East and the West are much more difficult to remove. For one thing, while the Eastern European countries have travelled a long road from the command economy imposed on them by the Soviet Union to a market economy – and nearly catching up the West at that – they are still in a lot of contexts thought of as a lesser, less developed and backward societies. One way to learn that is by examining the perceptions about the Eastern Europe anywhere west of Berlin: it is difficult to say that the Eastern European people are being seen as equal. For example, according to the European Democracy Consulting report entitled ‘Geographical representation in EU leadership observatory 2021’, the number people from central and eastern Europe (CEE) appointed to EU leadership positions has increased very slightly, from -5 % in 2004 to 7-8 % in 2016. Given, that around 40 percent of the Central and Eastern European states are members of the EU and around 20 percent of EU population lives in these CEE countries, the numbers above seem to be rather disproportionate, indicating a certain stigma and an imbalance within the European Community at the expense of Central/Eastern Europeans.¹

The relations between Western and Eastern Europe have been a point of studies for several decades, including the post-Second World War division of Europe into the communist East and the Allied West. The issues that the countries trying solve to once again come together after the collapse of the Soviet Union were facing have also been talked extensively in the academia, namely, the issue of perceptions and trying to overcome these perceptions. However, this proved easier said than done, as the legacy of being divided for nearly 50 years did take a toll on the minds of Europeans. The experience of Germany before and after the unification illustrates quite well, how the process of unification is not really something that comes overnight, but takes years and decades to build. The growth of economy, the relative economic strength (lower in the Eastern part of Germany by as much as a third that that of Germany as a whole, and the incomes are around 10 percent lower) and, more

¹ Drounau Luis, “The Geographical Representation in EU Leadership Observatory 2021” for European Democracy Consulting, 24 January 2021, p. 3

recently, the voting patterns have all differed comparing the former West and East Germany.² What is more, the cultural perceptions of one another have not faded away after the unification either.

Speaking more generally about the region as a whole, one issue that catches the eye is the popular perception of the Eastern Europe. During the early 2000s, several movies have been produced and depicting Eastern Europe as backward, even primitive. Eurotrip is one of the more extreme examples on the subject, on one hand depicting the towns of the ‘Old Europe’ in all of their beauty, sharply contrasting the underdeveloped, ugly, and even deserted areas of the Eastern Europe. In other popular Western shows Eastern European countries have been described as ‘sore spots’ (reference to Lithuania as an unattractive travel destination in *The Simpsons* Season 30, Episode 12), have their male populations attributed to be criminals and mobsters (visible through the entirety of *The Sopranos*) and other degrading definitions proved to be prominent in a variety of TV shows, series, movies and books. Considering the audiences the mentioned shows have, it is evident that these perceptions are then projected to the viewers as well.

But cultural perceptions are just one part of the issue at hand. More recently, there has been a backlash on the major food brands exporting lower quality products to Eastern Europe, and yet, selling them at a higher price. To put it shortly, there still exists the perception of Eastern Europe as something lower, underdeveloped and has manifested itself in the shelves of the shops as well. In the past decade, there have been numerous researches that have determined that the buyers from Eastern European countries are offered the products sold in their home countries that were different in their contents, but not necessarily their price, compared to those sold in the neighboring Western/Central European countries.^{3 4 5}

I have decided to focus on this dual quality phenomenon and to research what impact does it play in continuing at least the perceived divisions between Eastern and Western Europe. One reason for this is that while the dual quality scandals have led to greater research, especially by the European

² Ulrich Eith. “New Patterns in the East? Differences in Voting Behavior and Consequences for Party Politics in Germany” in *German Politics & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (56), 2000, pp. 119-136.

³ European Commission - Press release. Dual Food Quality: Commission releases study assessing differences in the composition of EU food products, 24 June 2019, available from: <file:///C:/Users/zilys/Dropbox/My%20PC%20(LAPTOP-KT2MBFFO)/Downloads/Dual_Food_Quality___Commission_releases_study_assessing_differences_in_the_composition_of_EU_food_products__Updated_on_25_06_2019_at_13_25_CEST_%20(1).pdf>

⁴ Sehnalová, Olga, *Dvoji kvalita jako symbol dvojího metru*, July 2017, available at <https://www.cssd.cz/aktualne/blogy/dvoji-kvalita-jako-symbol-dvojeho-metru/>.

⁵ Veselovská, Lenka, “Dual quality of products in Europe: a serious problem or a marketing opportunity?” in *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, June 2021, 33 (9), pp. 1146-1163

institutions themselves who have responded to the growing anxieties, although one may argue they did not do so urgently, which has determined that indeed there is no single quality for the entire Europe – by analyzing a variety of products, these researches have established the problem and the steps required to solve that problem. However, none of these researches have explored the political implications dual quality standards have on the relations between the European states, in this case, between the Western and Eastern Europe, which is what I will be seeking to assess in this study. Nor has research been quick to acknowledge the possible social impact issues like these could have. Since dual-quality practice can be experienced by anyone and everyone, regardless of whether they are politically active/conscious or not, this issue could just as easily be exploited by the governments, particularly those, that have adopted a more critical stance on the EU. (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland being the most notorious examples). By focusing on the popular sentiment and rhetoric surrounding the dual-quality practice, I will look to provide a different angle – the one that comes from the Eastern European consumers.

Furthermore, I will be contributing to the existing literature by overviewing what is dual quality in the European context, why is it significant and what has been done to address the worries of the states that seem to be getting the worse products than those sold, for example, in France and Germany.

Finally, this study will be concluded with the analysis of the survey conducted in Lithuania on the issue of dual-quality products, the reactions of the respondents to the practice, and the application of the results to the wider context. In this research, close attention will be paid on the emotional aspect of the problem, which could later prove crucial to the further integration of Europe. The main emphasis will be placed on the analysis of the rhetoric adopted by the respondents of the survey – that is, by analyzing every response one-by-one, and exploring the trends in the phrases used in these responses. The analysis of the rhetoric will allow to answer the two main questions of this research – first, what are the perceptions of the dual quality standards among Lithuanian consumers. Second, do these perceptions indicate of a perceived Otherness by Lithuanians in the light of the practice.

This research does not aim, however, to explain the economic impacts of the practice. Those have already been done in some of the other researches, for example, in the analysis of the economic problems of dual quality in everyday consumer goods. Nor will I be looking into this issue purely in political terms, trying, perhaps to connect the issue to certain voting patterns in the Eastern European

countries. I will adopt a more society-oriented approach here, leaving the others for future researchers on the issue.

The following sections goes deeper in explaining more on the theoretical approach to be used in this research. Furthermore, an introduction to the issue will be provided, with the review of the existing European legislature provided.

Dual-quality practice in Europe – overview

A long-standing claim and source of frustration among Central and Eastern European countries, including the Visegrad Group, concerns the dual (understand, lower) quality of products found in their grocery stores in comparison with those customers can buy in Western Europe's supermarkets.

This matter, that came into the spotlight a few years ago, left consumers, politicians and business retailers in the region under the impression that they were being mistreated by Western corporations and, ultimately, by the EU that failed to act on it. This alone further strengthened the widespread idea within many Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians – among others from the latest EU expansion wave – that they were being treated as “second-class citizens” compared to older member states. And thus, effectively added grist to the mill of those pointing to an ever-lasting and growing “East-West divide”. The issue indeed led to several researches in different Eastern European countries, and an increasing anxiety in the EU itself. This led to the EU itself taking initiative and exploring the issue (European Commission's Joint Research Centre 2019).

The report on the dual quality of products in the single market, concluded and presented on 19 July 2018, presents a comprehensive overview of the dual quality issue in Europe, outlines, with reference to the already existing and adopted resolutions and their principles, evaluates the possible impacts of dual quality and proposes the next steps of action. It was adopted as part of the resolution on 13 September 2018 on dual quality products in the single market.⁶

But first it is necessary working out the definition and the aspects of the dual quality. The issue of dual quality in different Member States or in different regional and local markets may be, according to a legal study conducted by the experts of the Faculty of Law of University Palackého Olomouc, seen in following activities:

- manufacturer places products on the market with varying flavors and compositions (i.e. different main ingredient) but with the identical or similar packaging appearance, thus making it difficult for the customer to tell the difference between the products;

⁶ European Parliament, *Report on on dual quality of products in the single market (2018/2008(INI))*, 19 July 2018, available from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0267_EN.html

- manufacturer places products of differing qualities on the market but with the identical or similar packaging appearance, thus making it difficult for the customer to tell from the outset that the products are not, in fact, the same;⁷
- manufacturer places products of differing weights on the market but with the same or similar packaging appearance, thus making it difficult for the customer to tell the difference between the products;⁸
- when launching a new product on a particular market, manufacturer uses a product with a higher quality composition (e.g., higher meat quantity or better quality of ingredients in the product) in order to attract consumers' attention and to generate the popularity of the product; after a certain period, however, the composition of the product is changed to cheaper substitutes while the packaging stays the same (except for the product composition given in small print on the back of the label).⁹

To put it shortly, the main issue is not that the products of different composition are sold in different countries, but that the manufacturers often fail, either deliberately or not, to emphasize the different components, as well as quantities of the said components.

In September 2017, the Commission issued concrete guidance for enforcement authorities on the application of current EU consumer protection and food legislation to suspected dual quality cases.¹⁰ This was further supplemented by the report on the dual quality of products in the single market concluded and presented on 19 July 2018, presents an overview of the dual quality issue in Europe and outlines, with reference to the already existing and adopted resolutions and their principles, the possible impacts of dual quality and proposes the next steps of action. (A8-0267/2018 Report on dual quality of products in the single market). It was adopted as part of the resolution on 13 September 2018 on dual quality products in the single market. (European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2018 on dual quality of products in the single market (Directive 2018/2008(INI)))

Furthermore, in April 2018, as part of the New Deal for Consumers the Commission proposed to amend the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) to clarify when dual quality of products

⁷ European Parliament, *Report on on dual quality of products in the single market*, p. 7

⁸ European Parliament, *Report on on dual quality of products in the single market*, p. 7

⁹ European Parliament, *Report on on dual quality of products in the single market*, p. 8

¹⁰ European Commission, "Dual quality food products: Commission guides Member States to better tackle unfair practices", 26 September 2017

is a misleading practice.¹¹ The amended Directive has come into effect across the EU as of 28 May 2022.¹²

The amended directive outlines that a commercial practice shall be unfair if: (a) it is contrary to the requirements of professional diligence, and (b) it materially distorts or is likely to materially distort the economic behavior with regard to the product of the average consumer whom it reaches or to whom it is addressed, or of the average member of the group when a commercial practice is directed to a particular group of consumers.¹³

The directive also states that a commercial practice is regarded as misleading if it contains false information and is therefore untruthful or in any way, including overall presentation, deceives or is likely to deceive the average consumer, even if the information is factually correct, in relation to one or more of the following elements, and in either case causes or is likely to cause the consumer to make the transactional decision:

- the existence or nature of the product;
- the main characteristics of the product, such as its availability, benefits, risks, execution, composition, accessories, after-sale customer assistance and complaint handling, method and date of manufacture or provision, delivery, fitness for purpose, usage, quantity, specification, geographical or commercial origin or the results to be expected from its use, or the results and material features of tests or checks carried out on the product;
- the extent of the trader's commitments, the motives for the commercial practice and the nature of the sales process, any statement or symbol in relation to direct or indirect sponsorship or approval of the trader or the product.¹⁴

The amendments also introduce a mechanism for punishing the manufacturers that commit the violations outlined above. Member States shall ensure that when penalties are to be imposed in

¹¹ European Commission “A New Deal for Consumers: Commission strengthens EU consumer rights and Enforcement”, 11 April 2018

¹² Ecommerce Europe, Omnibus Directive enters into application at national level, 31 May 2022, available from: <<https://ecommerce-europe.eu/news-item/omnibus-directive-enters-into-application-at-national-level/>>

¹³ Directive (EU) 2019/2161 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2019 amending Council Directive 93/13/EEC and Directives 98/6/EC, 2005/29/EC and 2011/83/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the better enforcement and modernization of Union consumer protection rules (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 328, 18.12.2019, p. 7–28 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, GA, HR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)

¹⁴ Directive (EU) 2019/2161, November 2019, p.16

accordance with Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2017/2394, they include the possibility either to impose fines through administrative procedures or to initiate legal proceedings for the imposition of fines, or both, the maximum amount of such fines being at least 4 % of the trader's annual turnover in the Member State or Member States concerned.¹⁵ Without prejudice to that Regulation, Member States may, for national constitutional reasons, restrict the imposition of fines to: (a) infringements of Articles 6, 7, 8, 9 and of Annex I to this Directive; and (b) a trader's continued use of a commercial practice that has been found to be unfair by the competent national authority or court, when that commercial practice is not an infringement referred to in point (a).¹⁶

The directive obliges the Member States to ensure that adequate and effective means exist to combat misleading advertising in order to enforce compliance with the provisions on comparative advertising in the interest of traders and competitors. Such means shall include legal provisions under which persons or organizations regarded under national law as having a legitimate interest in combating misleading advertising or regulating comparative advertising may: (a) take legal action against such advertising; or (b) bring such advertising before an administrative authority competent either to decide on complaints or to initiate appropriate legal proceedings.¹⁷ It is left to the responsibility of each Member State to decide which of these facilities should be available and whether to enable the courts or administrative authorities to require prior recourse to other established means of dealing with complaints.¹⁸

In addition, with the new directive coming into effect, national enforcement authorities will have stronger powers to stop misleading marketing of goods that have significantly different composition or characteristics but are presented as being identical. This being said, the Directive acknowledges that differences can be justified by objective factors, such as national rules on product composition, use of local or seasonal ingredients or trader's voluntary commitment to promote healthier food.¹⁹

The adoption of New Deal appears to have the potential to be seen as a step towards harmonization of commercial as well as a revised security measure for the consumers across all of the

¹⁵ Directive (EU) 2019/2161, November 2019, p. 17

¹⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/2161, November 2019, p. 22

¹⁷ Council Directive 84/450/EEC of 10 September 1984 relating to the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning misleading advertising

¹⁸ Directive 2006/114/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 12 December 2006 concerning misleading and comparative advertising

¹⁹ Directive (EU) 2019/2161, November 2019, p. 25

member states, regardless of their geographical location. However, since it has only come into effect as of 28 May 2022, it is too early to tell of the impact it has had yet.

Furthermore, what will be important to monitor is how and if the New Deal will deal with the motivations of producers/manufacturers in practice. As mentioned above, the manufacturers are usually motivated to adopt certain practice, and the dual-quality product practice is not different. While, as outlined in the UCPD, the differences can be justified by several objective factors. To assess as to why the manufacturers are adopting the dual-quality standards for products sold in different markets, another theoretical approach is needed, this time focused extensively on the market forces and economy, in the sense as to what are the motivations of the manufacturers to produce products of varying quality to different European states.

While the EU Omnibus Directive has only come into effect in May 2022 and its' effectiveness will have to be assessed later, it has already been celebrated as a step in the right direction for Eastern European countries. "There will be no double standards in Europe's single market," said Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. "With the new laws penalizing the dual quality and strengthening the hands of the consumer authorities, we have the tools at hand to put an end to this practice. European consumers will be able to do their shopping in full trust that they buy what they see."²⁰ Agriculture Minister Miroslav Toman (ČSSD) also welcomed the new law, noting that "Czechs will not be second-choice consumers."²¹

There are reasons, however, why the dual quality practice has been apparent in the first place – the manufacturers may find it more beneficial. To begin with, adapting products and services to different markets is a standard procedure for companies. The companies need to decide in which countries to offer their products and services, and then, since consumers in various countries are very different, 'must usually respond to these differences by adapting their product offerings'.²² In addition, big companies increasingly consider market localization to be desirable on a sub-national

²⁰ European Commission. *Dual Food Quality: Commission releases study assessing differences in the composition of EU food products*, Press Release, 24 June 2019, available from:

<https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_3332>

²¹ Pisani, B. "Czech Rep. To Enforce EU Rules Banning Dual Quality Food Products" in *BRNO Daily*, 22 April 2022, available from: <<https://brnodaily.com/2021/04/22/news/czech-rep-to-enforce-eu-rules-banning-dual-quality-food-products/>>

²² Quelch, J.& Hoff, E.J. "Customizing Global Marketing" in *Harvard Business Review*, May 1986. Available from: <https://hbr.org/1986/05/customizing-global-marketing>

level as well.²³ It is therefore, nothing unusual to see the companies adjust their products according to the market. It is also fair to question, however, whether it is always ethical to do so.

The DC-SIP (Differences in the Composition of Seemingly Identical branded food Products) practice is more likely to occur when national markets are separated (for instance due to territorial supply constraints). In this case, the rationale of firms for using DC-SIP practices is expected to be a result of their optimal strategy to maximize profits.²⁴ A firm will adapt (or not adapt) the composition of the product, and offer (or not offer) country-specific versions depending on market conditions (supply and demand), and on the ability of a firm to exploit differences, and the separation in national markets. The greater the difference in market conditions between Member States, the greater the gain that companies can make from DC-SIP, and therefore the higher the likelihood that the versions will differ between the Member States.²⁵

Furthermore, the difference in GDP per capita is considered to account for potential differences in willingness to pay for products between Member States. The estimated results show that a greater difference in income level between two Member States increases the probability that the two Member States will have different versions of seemingly identical branded food products. If two Member States have identical or similar income levels, the probability that the product versions offered in these two countries are different is 39%, as the manufacturers do not consider it important to adjust the composition of the products accordingly to the differences in the income levels whereas the income gap increases, the probability of the occurrence of DC-SIP between the country-pairs increases as well.²⁶ To use an example, for the country-pair with the greatest income difference, which is Denmark and Bulgaria, the predicted probability of a product being different is 52%, so it is a relatively high chance that the consumers in Bulgaria will receive a different product than those in Denmark, even if visually it may look identical.²⁷

²³ Global Business Policy Council (GBPC). Competing in an Age of Multi-Localism, 4 September 2018, available from: <<https://www.kearney.com/web/global-business-policy-council/article/-/insights/competing-in-an-age-of-multi-localism>>

²⁴ Ciaian, P., F. Di Marcantonio, L. Colen, K. Nes, J. Barreiro-Hurle, F.J. Dessart, L. Menapace, C. Russo, A. Colamatteo, N. Fathinejad, M.A. Pagnanelli, M. Sansone, E.K. Twum, G. Chrysochoidis, Economic analyses of differences in composition of seemingly identical branded food products in the Single Market, EUR 30178 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, pp. 2-7, available from: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC120297/dc-sip_summary_report_1.pdf

²⁵ Ciaian et al., 2020, p. 5

²⁶ Ciaian et al., 2020, p. 5

²⁷ Ciaian et al., 2020, p. 6

Theory shows that the perceived quality and preferences determine how a consumer values a product.²⁸ The formation of consumers' perception of quality is a complex process, as consumers take into consideration different intrinsic (e.g., composition) and extrinsic signals (e.g., brand, geographical origin, and packaging). Often, the role of extrinsic quality signals predominates.²⁹ DC-SIP might go unnoticed, or not be taken in consideration when making purchasing decisions, because consumers often use extrinsic signals to infer quality of products, rather than intrinsic signals (i.e., composition). Consumers are also likely to be affected by DC-SIP only when differences in composition are perceived as significant between different versions, while the differences in the price between different versions may offset consumers' valuation differences between these versions. For example, even if the composition is significantly different between versions, and the versions are valued differently by consumers, consumers may still prefer the perceived lower quality version if it is significantly cheaper than the perceived higher quality version. Furthermore, the mere existence of DC-SIP may generate consumers' response and it may lead to consumers' perceiving both deception and unfairness.³⁰ As a result, the impact of DC-SIP on consumer choices could be nil, positive, or negative, and could vary across consumers and products, both across and within Member States.³¹

In June 2019, the Joint Research Centre published the first part of today's EU wide comparison of quality related characteristics of food products, which showed that some products are identically or similarly branded while composed differently. The study was conducted as a pilot project, testing 20 products that had shown compositional differences in the first part of the study. Samples of each product were purchased in 5-10 different Member States.³² As the testers were specifically trained for such tests, it is likely that the average consumer may not necessarily sense the same differences. Whether or not differences could be detected by the experts, depended not only on whether the compositional differences were large or small but also on the kinds of ingredients used: a difference between various synthetic sweeteners in orangeade could be detected, whereas different natural sweeteners in carbonated soft drinks were not. At the same time, it should be noted that

²⁸ Zeithaml, Valarie. "Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Evidence" in *Journal of Marketing*, July 1988, 52, pp. 2 - 22

²⁹ Zeithaml, 1988, p. 10.

³⁰ Colen et al, 2020, p. 20.

³¹ Ciaian et al, 2020, pp. 4-7.

³² Colen, L., Chryssochoidis, G., Ciaian, P., Di Marcantonio, F. "Differences in composition of seemingly identical branded food products: Impact on consumer purchasing decisions and welfare" EUR 30026, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p.9

consumers do not base their decision to buy a product exclusively on the sensory experience but may also be influenced by other elements, such as costs.

Furthermore, JRC behavioral experiments tested consumers' preferences in six Member States for the actual versions of six branded food products, for which DC-SIP were detected in the JRC 2018/2019 EU-wide testing campaign. These behavioral experiments show that if consumers were not informed about which country each version of the product is “made for”, in the majority of cases they were indifferent between the different versions of the tested products. For the minority of cases, where some preference for one version became apparent, there were no evident geographical patterns for the difference in preferences for DC-SIP products. These results indicate that the DC-SIP practice does not impact consumer choices when they are not expressly informed about the differences.³³

On the other hand, when the existence of DC-SIP was made salient, by informing consumers that the product is “made for” a specific country, in the majority of cases, they preferred one of the versions.³⁴ There was no clear preference for domestic or non-domestic versions in the online experiment, whereas there was more preference for domestic versions in the lab experiment. These results suggest that it is the provision of explicit information, regarding which country the product version is “made for”, which generates the preference for one of the versions, although there might be no clear pattern of preference for either the domestic or non-domestic version.³⁵

The public reaction to the phenomenon has been mostly negative, and, while the problem has been acknowledged by the European institutions, it has led to public outrage in some of the countries, where the researches had been undertaken, especially more so since quite a lot of the buyers living near to the border of another country where they have the means to compare between the products, and thus can shop for cheaper or better-quality products.³⁶ With this in mind, the research done confirms that there is in fact a dual quality issue and that some countries are getting the better part of it, and some countries are getting the products that cost less to make.

The tests on branded food in three “new” (having joined the EU in 2004 and after) EU Member States have shown that the taste and composition of these products, sold under the same

³³ Colen et al, 2020, p. 9

³⁴ Colen et al, 2020, pp. 5-10

³⁵ Colen et al, 2020, p. 18

³⁶ Boffey, D. "Europe's 'food apartheid': are brands in the east lower quality than in the west?" in *The Guardian*, 16 September 2017. Available from: < <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/15/europes-food-apartheid-are-brands-in-the-east-lower-quality-than-in-the-west> >

name and in the same packaging, sometimes differ from the “same“ products sold in neighboring “old“ Member States. Tests on food in Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic have shown that a number of products sold there differ from products sold under the same brand and in similar packaging in Germany, Austria or Italy.³⁷ The products, while found to be safe for consumption and properly labelled, in some cases ingredients used in the “new“ EU Member States were deemed to be less healthy and of compromised quality with the products being occasionally sold at higher prices. This has prompted accusations of discrimination against the consumers in Eastern EU countries by the multinational companies.³⁸

Hungarian food safety authority, NEBIH, tested 24 products bought in Hungary and Austria in 2014, following a report published in 2013 that horsemeat was used in food products that were sold in Hungary, but was labelled as beef.³⁹ The study compared the sensory properties of the products, as well as the composition and truthfulness of the information listed on packages.⁴⁰ Half of the products were different in the two countries – in Austria, for instance, the wafers were crunchier, a spread was more easily spreadable, and one instant soup had almost twice as many meatballs as in Hungary.⁴¹

It has also been reported that bought abroad under the same brand in the same or very similar packaging, has a different consistency, the intensity of the scent that will last longer. Similar experiences have been reported with washing powders. When comparing two products of the same brand, one purchased in Slovakia and the other abroad (especially Germany, Austria, Switzerland), they had at first sight different numbers of "colored", i.e., active substances.⁴² There were many more of them in abroad and, based on experience, it was enough to add less powder to the wash to achieve the same effect as with the Slovak product. Henkel, the manufacturer of the Persil washing powder, has acknowledged the different composition of the brand's products for the EU's western and eastern countries. They defended this with different types of stains and different washing habits in

³⁷ Šajn, N, “Dual quality of branded food products: addressing a possible east-west divide”, EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2017, p. 2, available from:

<[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/607265/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)607265_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/607265/EPRS_BRI(2017)607265_EN.pdf)>

³⁸ Šajn, 2017, p. 2

³⁹ Reuters.com. “Horse meat sold in beef products in Hungary – watchdog”, 26 February 2013. Available from: <<https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-horsemeat-idINL6N0BQ81K20130226>>

⁴⁰ The entire study is published and can be accessed in Hungarian in the following link -

https://portal.nebih.gov.hu/documents/10182/323140/03.29_Terme%cc%81k-o%cc%88sszehasonli%cc%81ta%cc%81s_kiadv%c3%a1ny.pdf/2cd70738-db21-4fad-8af0-2c53290935a9.

⁴¹ Šajn, 2020

⁴² Šramková, Marianna & Sirotiaková, Mária. (2021). Consumer Behaviour of Generation Z in the Context of Dual Quality of Daily Consumption Products on EU market. SHS Web of Conferences. 92. 06038. 10.1051/shsconf/20219206038.

different countries.⁴³ In this case, the practice was also confirmed and acknowledged by the manufacturers of non-food goods.

Other cases concerned fabric softeners - those from abroad were denser, smelled more intensely, it was enough to add a smaller amount to the laundry, and yet they smelled the laundry longer after washing. Another test of washing powders was the test of the Czech magazine dTest, which in 2017 tested washing powders and gels that were visually as similar as possible.⁴⁴ According to the test, washing powders purchased in both countries had approximately the same washing effect, but differences in composition were nonetheless found. German washing powders contained more phosphorus and fewer perfumes - which are potential allergens. Differences in quality were found even when comparing the toilet paper sold in these countries. The toilet paper sold in Czech Republic had two layers, whereas the paper manufactured by the same company and packaged identically, which was bought in Austria had three layers.⁴⁵ The Czech paper received a better evaluation in the testing of strength and absorbency, but in the tests of solubility and practical tests, in which the softness, pleasantness to the touch and tearing off of the first piece were evaluated, the Austrian version was again better.⁴⁶

⁴³ Šramková & Sirotiakova, 2021, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁴ Dtest. (2018, November 14). Dětské jednorázové pleny Pampers. dTest. Available in Czech from: <<https://www.dtest.cz/clanek-7054/detske-jednorazove-pleny-pampers-dtest-11-2018>>

⁴⁵ Dtest, 2018

⁴⁶ Dtest, 2018

Theoretical considerations: Otherness

The findings outlined in the previous section, in turn, have led to public outrage in the countries, where the researches had been undertaken, especially more so since quite a lot of the buyers living near to the border of another country where they have the means to compare between the products, and thus can shop for cheaper or better-quality products. With this in mind, the research done confirms that there is in fact a dual quality issue and that some countries are getting the better part of it, and some countries are getting the products that cost less to make.

To explain this phenomenon further, I will use the theory of otherness. Otherness, to adopt a very short definition, is a characteristic of the other. It is widely discussed in the academia.

Although first coined as a systematic theoretical conception by Spivak in 1985, the notion of othering draws on several philosophical and theoretical traditions. Significantly, the concept draws on an understanding of self which is a generalization of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as developed in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, which tells the story of two independent "self-consciousnesses" who encounter one another, seeing each other as a threat and therefore engaging in a life-or-death struggle as a result. Hegel is often read as a theory of self and other in which the juxtaposition towards the other constitutes the self.⁴⁷

Early postcolonial writing is another theoretical reference point for otherness). Edward Said writes of an imagined geography, which constructs the Orient as other in a reductionist terms.⁴⁸ At the same time as being exoticized, the Orient is placed in a fixed position, as the function of orientalism is 'at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, managers and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe'.⁴⁹ In other terms, Said's theory puts the Orient inferior and subordinate to the West.

In broad terms, Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("Them," "Other") by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.⁵⁰ The difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness belongs to the realm of

⁴⁷ Paipais, Vassillios, "Self and other in critical international theory: assimilation, incommensurability and the paradox of critique" in *Review of International Studies*, 37 (1), 2011, pp. 121-140

⁴⁸ Said E. W.. *Orientalism* (First Ed.), 1978, Pantheon Books

⁴⁹ Said, 1978, pp. 7-12.

⁵⁰ Staszak, JF, "Other/otherness" in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2008, Elsevier, pp. 3-18.

discourse. Thus, biological sex is difference, whereas gender is otherness. The creation of otherness (also called othering) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us.⁵¹ The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and its lack of identity. This lack is based upon stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing and obviously simplistic and often primitive. The ingroup constructs one or more others, setting itself apart and giving itself an identity. Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa.

Otherness itself is less due to the difference of the Other than to the point of view and the discourse of the person who perceives the Other as such. Opposing Us, the Self, and Them, the Other, is to choose a criterion that allows humanity to be divided into two groups: one that embodies the norm and whose identity is valued and another that is defined by its faults, devalued and susceptible to discrimination.⁵² Only dominant groups (such as Westerners in the time of colonization) are in a position to impose their categories in the matter. By stigmatizing them as Others, Barbarians, Savages or People of Color, they relegate the peoples that they could dominate or exterminate to the margin of humanity.⁵³ The otherness of these peoples has notably been based on their supposed spatial marginality. In addition, certain types of spatial organization, like segregation or territorial constructions, allow the opposition between the Self and the Other to be maintained or accentuated. Although it seems that the Other is sometimes valued, as with exoticism, it is done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves to comfort the Self in its feeling of superiority.⁵⁴

Otherness in the 21st century may not be always as explicit, but it still does exist and is perceived. To use an example, Ingrid Hudabiunigg's research on Otherness in Eastern Europe used an extensive corpus of texts from the German media and existing studies of German perspectives on Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia in order to demonstrate that there are two idealized culture cognitive models (ICCMs) that function as overarching categories for Europe: the ICCM west (the members of the European Union (EU) until 2004) and the ICCM east (the central and east European countries) as opposing constructions.⁵⁵ Carme Colomina & Héctor Sánchez Margalef have also analyzed the narratives of othering and belonging in the crisis, which, although focusing more on

⁵¹ Staszak, JF, "Other/otherness" in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2008, Elsevier, p.3

⁵² Anderson, B. "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. ", 1983, New York: Verso.

⁵³ de Beauvoir, Simone & Parshley, H. M. *The Second Sex.*, 1952, Random House

⁵⁴ Staszak, 2008, p. 5

⁵⁵ Hudabiunigg, Ingrid, "The Otherness of Eastern Europe", in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25(5:6), 2004, pp. 369-388.

the North-South divide, rather than the East-West, provides an insight on how processes of “othering” and “belonging” are at work during the times of increased vulnerability.⁵⁶

Otherness remains relevant today for multiple reasons. First, it can help explaining why the reunification of Europe, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the former Soviet satellite countries now finding themselves in the European Union, however, they often feel seen as not equals, and it is unclear whether these perceptions will change anytime soon, has not so far been achieved. Second of all, it helps to dig deeper into how Eastern Europe is seen from the perspective of the businesses themselves, i.e., perhaps it is a ground for exploitation, or a market where the products can be made out of cheaper alternatives and be sold just as well as they are in other countries.

The Eastern European countries feel that they are seen as other and different for multiple reasons, therefore, putting it simply down to the fact that these countries are exporting the products that are made out of cheaper components or other substitutes is only a part of the problem, and not the entire problem. However, it is important to examine this phenomenon as it does touch upon the dynamics between the East and West Europe, namely, the businesses and producers exporting the products to Eastern Europe, the customers that the said products are offered to and who are impacted by the practice of dual-quality products and may form positive, negative or neutral opinions about it, as well as the institutions who work on the legislation addressing the issue.

With the rhetoric being the main focus in this research, Otherness in this has potential in helping to explain the backlash that has followed dual quality standards. The language adopted by Eastern European countries in reaction to the dual quality scandal included terms such as “second class citizens”, “Europe’s garbage can” and seeing themselves as having been “exploited by the Western corporations” since the early 1990s, thus creating or enforcing a divide between the West and the other East.^{57 58} In this case, the otherness is not necessarily something that exists (as coming from the large corporations and institutions), but rather is perceived to exist by the Eastern Europeans in their opinions and experiences.

⁵⁶ Colomina, C. & Margalef, H.S. “Othering and Belonging in a Europe in crisis: narratives, identities, and the New-Old divide” in Democracy & Belonging Forum at UC Berkeley, July 2022, available from: <<https://www.democracyandbelongingforum.org/paper-series/othering-and-belonging-in-a-europe-in-crisis>>

⁵⁷ Cieśla, W and Melchior, S. “What you see isn’t always what you get: dual food quality in Europe” in *Investigate Europe*, April 2021. Available from: <https://www.investigate-europe.eu/en/2021/dual-quality-food-europe/>

⁵⁸ Boffey, D. "Europe's 'food apartheid': are brands in the east lower quality than in the west?" in *The Guardian*, 16 September 2017. Available from: <["Europe's 'food apartheid': are brands in the east lower quality than in the west?"](#)>

While it does not necessarily mean that the Eastern European countries are indeed seen as inferior from the perspective of the Westerners and there are rational reasons for dual product practice – the popular sentiments and rhetoric that will be explored and analyzed in later sections of this research, could also reinforce the notion that the Eastern Europeans feel perceived as ‘others’ from the Western European standpoint, the one which includes states, corporations, and, to some extent might include the institutions as well.

With regards to dual-quality products, otherness could manifest itself in different ways:

1. *Perceived deception*: Awareness of DC-SIP may disconfirm consumers’ expectations associated with particular brands (e.g., their belief that they are identical across countries, their feeling of belonging to a larger community, their belief that the branded product guarantees a minimum or high level of quality, status associated with brands). This disconfirmation of expectations may lead consumers to feel deceived or misled, and, with the possibility of buying a similarly labelled product that is better in quality just across the border, may lead to the feelings of being singled out and discriminated against.⁵⁹
2. *Perceived unfairness*: The fact that product versions are not equal across countries may generate a feeling of unfair treatment. Unfairness perception occurs particularly when consumers perceive that they are treated unequally compared to other consumers in other countries or perceive the practice of dual quality as illegitimate, deceptive, and unethical as well as generating disproportionate profits to brand owners^{60 61 62} Perceived unfairness might also encourage feelings of lack of justice and discrimination, since the consumers are not all treated equally.

⁵⁹ Colen et al, 2020, p. 31

⁶⁰ Xia, L., K. B. Monroe and J. L. Cox, “The price is unfair! A conceptual framework of price fairness perceptions” in *Journal of Marketing*, 2004, 68(4), pp. 1-15.

⁶¹ Smith, N. C., G. Palazzo and C. B. Bhattacharya, “Marketing’s Consequences: Stakeholder Marketing and Supply Chain Corporate Social Responsibility Issues” in *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 2010, 20(4), pp. 617-641

⁶² Kahneman, D., J. L. Knetsch and R. Thaler, “Fairness as a constraint on profit seeking: Entitlements in the market” in *The American Economic Review*, 1986, pp. 728-741

Case studies

A few notes must be made regarding the methodology of this research. For the sake of being able to provide a more complete picture, a mixed approach was used. For the first part of this research, a qualitative method was adopted. To be more exact, this was done in order to provide the overview on the subject by using already existing literature as well as to establish the theoretical framework to work with. These include:

1. EU legal documents, outlining the dual quality standards as they are, the existing legislature, and updates over time. These include directives such as Directive (EU) 2019/2161, Directive (EU) 2016/2161, Council Directive 84/450/EEC, Directive 2006/114/EC)
2. Existing researches and tests already performed in numerous European countries, testing several groups of products sold in different countries to determine if there is a difference in quality and contents (European Commission's Joint Research Centre 2019, Sehnalová's research in 2017, Veselovská's in 2021, Hungarian NEBIH (food authority's) research done in 2013, among other;
3. The experiments and researches by the European institutions themselves, as well as their proceeding recommendations (Report on on dual quality of products in the single market (2018/2008(INI), Economic analyses of differences in composition of seemingly identical branded food products in the Single Market released in 2020 among others)
4. Existing literature on the theory of Otherness.

In addition to the qualitative part of this work, a quantitative method was also used. That includes the conduct of an online survey, which was posted by the author on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Discord) with a variety of questions outlined in detail in the later sections of this work, that presented the dataset for this work. However, some of the data, although only a minor part of it, was gathered not by the online survey, but by casual person-to-person conversations as well, which were later transcribed and added into the data. The data and responses were then processed, and, for the ease of analysis, categorized into several categories. As the goal of this work was to study and analyze the rhetoric surrounding the dual quality standards, these categories were then made into a point of analysis, from which the conclusions were drawn. Important to note, there was no focus on particular groups of society for this research – rather, the goal was to make the reach broader and, in the majority of the cases, the respondents were random.

In terms of the structure of the research, the first part is largely qualitative, with the quantitative data only being introduced in the later stages. The focus was mainly put on the rhetoric segment of the data as per the topic of the research. The transcribed responses (put into different categories according to the tone of the opinion that they carry) are added in Appendix 1.

Analysis

This section is to explore the feelings regarding the dual quality scandal in Europe and whether there is a weak or strong feeling of otherness in the Eastern European states. This is to be done by analyzing the existing materials as well as conducting a survey to gather the data from Lithuania to create another case study to support this research.

In order to examine the case studies, some key notes on how the dual-quality is observed and evaluated are provided in the following lines. The process of food quality perception formation has vertical and horizontal dimensions.⁶³ The vertical dimension of food quality perception refers to the use of intrinsic or extrinsic cues to infer the food quality of a product. Intrinsic cues refer to the physical properties of the product, such as ingredients, which cannot be changed without also altering the physical properties of the product. Extrinsic cues refer to everything else, such as price, brand name, packaging, store image, and advertising, which is not part of the physical product.⁶⁴ The extent to which cues are used to infer product quality vary by product and by consumer.⁶⁵ Consumers use only those cues that (i) they believe to be predictive of the quality they want to evaluate; and (ii) they feel confident in using.⁶⁶

The importance of these researches and more so their findings is that they confirm that there is an issue with identically packaged products that are different in their compositions and quality being sold in different parts of Europe. As the cases in the sections above illustrate, this is seemingly easy to compare in the border regions of the countries, where the residents have the choice of doing their shopping in their local shops or making a trip to the nearest town across the border and buying the groceries there, often to find out that seemingly identical products available at home and abroad are different in their composition, quality, taste, pleasantness and so on. However, little research has been done on the reactions of the customer upon finding out the differences between the products available, although a few articles have been publishing showcasing the frustrations of the local

⁶³ Grunert, K.G. "Food quality and safety: Consumer perception and demand" in *European Review of Agricultural Economics*, 2005, 32, pp. 369-391

⁶⁴ Olson, J. & Jacoby, J. "Cue Utilization in the Quality Perception Process", in *SV - Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference of the Association for Consumer Research*, eds. M. Venkatesan, 1972, Chicago, IL : Association for Consumer Research, pp. 167-179.

⁶⁵ Steenkamp, Jan-Benedict E. M., "Conceptual model of the quality perception process", in *Journal of Business Research*, 21, 1990, issue 4, p. 309-333

⁶⁶ Cox, D. "The Sorting Rule Model of the Consumer Product Evaluation Process," in *Risk Taking and Information Handling in Consumer Behavior*, D.F. Cox, ed. , 1967

residents who prefer to do their shopping abroad than at home – if there is a possibility and the border is within a reasonable distance – due to the differences in the quality, composition and often the price as well.

Furthermore, the issue has resulted in an outburst of strong negative rhetoric from some Eastern European decision makers. For instance, Czech agriculture minister Marian Jurečka has said that the East was tired of being “Europe’s garbage can”, while Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov accused the EU of “food apartheid”.^{67 68} One of the EU’s most persistent critics, the Hungarian populist government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has also accused the EU of double standards over food quality claiming that people who live (in Eastern Europe) believe that not only their wallets have been cheated, but also their sense of justice.⁶⁹ The battle over dual quality products is essentially a “war horse” for populist governments wanting “to prove that the European Union is incapable of guaranteeing the equal treatment of its citizens”, according to analyst Antony Galabov of the New Bulgarian University.⁷⁰

The issue seems to have further enforced the notions of ‘Eastern anxiety’, which refers to the Eastern European fears of being perceived and/or becoming second class citizens.⁷¹ This issue has also struck a nerve in a region which has had historical experience of Western food products – or any products, for that matter, being a luxury that could only be bought with foreign currency in special shops. And it has further fed into fears, as Ivan Krastev wrote in an article to New York times in 2017, over an “emerging two-tier Europe” in which the big nations like Germany push for more integration, while the Eastern European countries find themselves at odds and demand more sovereignty – as well as recognition as equals.⁷²

And while the statesmen of Eastern European countries might have their own agenda in confronting the EU over dual quality products, the residents of these countries have spoken out about

⁶⁷ Muller, Robert. “Czechs, tired of being 'Europe's garbage can', will push for better food” in *Reuters*, 21 February 2017, available from: < <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-czech-food-idUKKBN1600XA>>

⁶⁸ Boffey, Daniel. “Multinationals fobbing us off with inferior food, says Bulgarian minister” in *The Guardian*, 29 May 2017.

⁶⁹ Cabinet Office of the Hungarian Prime Minister. “Trust is the bonding material of European economy”, 13 October 2017, available from: < <https://miniszterelnok.hu/trust-is-the-bonding-material-of-european-economy/>>

⁷⁰ Dw.com. “Inferior food for eastern Europe?”, 19 July 2017, available from: < <https://www.dw.com/en/is-eastern-european-nutella-worse/a-39748826>>

⁷¹ Khan, Mehreen, “EU to address ‘dual food’ quality to bridge east-west divide” in *Financial Times*, 11 September 2017, available from: < <https://www.ft.com/content/7ea1327c-96e3-11e7-a652-cde3f882dd7b>>

⁷² Kravtsev, Ivan. “Central Europe’s Tough Choice: Macron or Orban?” in *The New York Times*, 22 June 2017, available from: < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/22/opinion/macron-merkel-orban-european-union.html>>

the issue. “I don’t see how substituting good chocolate for the cheapest local one will adapt better to my taste?” fumed Bulgarian mother-of-two Yana Mihailova. Adding that she always stuffs her luggage with jars of chocolate spread whenever she travels abroad, adding that while the price is higher, it is totally worth it as there is much more cocoa in the chocolate spread sold abroad.⁷³ In another case, a Czech family, the Zedineks, describe their findings and experiences shopping in shops located in Czech Republic and in Germany as a “pretty sad state of affairs” and express the feeling of being “a kind of garbage can for the producers.”⁷⁴

It is one of the examples, how the dual quality products appear in real life conditions and what implications they have. In this case, the Zedineks are living in a town situated near the German border, and have a choice of either doing their weekly shopping in their hometown on the Czech side of the border, or to make their way to the other side to do their weekly. The choice favors the shops on the German side since the Zedineks, upon shopping both in Czech and German shops, have determined that while the products may be packaged identically, the contents are far from same – better quality products are sold in Germany, in this case. This case, in particular, is significant, because it explains the mechanics of dual product practice from the consumer side – the consumers upon their own experiences choose to make the trips abroad to purchase what they know and feel will be the better product, although the packaging is the same to the product that is sold in their home country. Thus, it is likely to impact the survival of local businesses, especially when the customers prefer to do their shopping abroad, for the reasons relating to the differences in prices and quality of the products sold. At the same time, there is an emotional dimension to this, as the consumers feel neglected and looked down by the manufacturers, who seem to only be offering a watered-down version of a product that is available in a better quality just across the border.

In short, by analyzing the popular feelings that circulate in the media, dual-quality practice seems to have an emotional effect in Eastern Europe. On one hand, it is the decision-makers that adopt the harsh rhetoric in highlighting the issue and holding the European institutions accountable, if not attempting to prove the inability of the said institutions to protect and guarantee the equal treatment of its’ citizens. On the other hand, there are citizens, who feel like they are getting the worse end of a deal and feel conspired against by the producers and institutions in the West.

⁷³ Euractiv.com. “Eastern Europeans bite back over ‘food apartheid’”, 3 July 2017, available from: <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/eastern-europeans-bite-back-over-food-apartheid/>>

⁷⁴ Cameron, Rob, “Ex-communist states complain of rip-off food in EU”, Altenberg, Germany, 2017, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39900362>>

For the first part of the research, with no particular focus on rhetoric, a survey was conducted in order to gauge a general feeling about the issue in Lithuania. The data was collected mostly online, with some face-to-face conversations taking place as well. The participants were, on average, middle class citizens, with age ranging between 18 and 66 years. The online survey consisted of 6 questions, aimed to firstly distinguish between the participants which do have the means to purchase products in different countries and thus for whom the issue of dual quality products might be known and relevant and those who do not travel abroad and so are unable to compare the products sold in Lithuania and elsewhere. By shopping abroad, the participants were clarified, meant that the shopping was done not in Lithuania, and not in other Eastern European states. This was done in order to enforce the boundaries between Eastern and Western Europe, upon which this research is based, and while traveling abroad (Poland, Latvia) to do shopping is a popular practice in Lithuania, the experiences of such travels would not be relevant to this research in particular.

The questions that the survey participants were asked are outlined below:

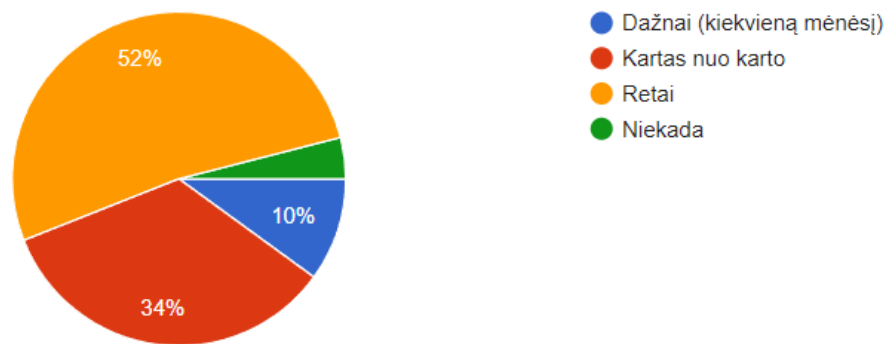
1. How often do the respondents do their grocery shopping abroad;
2. Have the respondents ever noticed a difference in the quality of the products sold at home and abroad;
3. If the difference was noticed by the respondents, what kind of products were they? (i.e. food products, electronics, cleaning materials, cosmetics, etc);
4. If the difference was noticed, do the respondents think whether the customer is given enough information on the composition/contents of the product in question (labels) to make a decision whether they will buy this product or not;
5. What is the respondents' general opinion about the dual-quality products sold in different regions of Europe;
6. Should the same standards for all products sold across all of Europe be applied (alternatively, should the European leaders focus on eliminating or at least reducing the practice of dual-quality products).

The results of the survey are summarized in the graphs below (in Lithuanian). To put it shortly, the results show that dual-quality product phenomena is also relevant in Lithuania. As the first graph shows, of all the people that took part in the survey, most of them had shopped abroad before, although most of them had done so rarely or from time to time, thus being able to compare between the products sold abroad and in Lithuania.

1. How often do the respondents do their grocery shopping abroad;

Answer options:

- often (blue);
- from time to time (marron);
- rarely (orange);
- never (green)

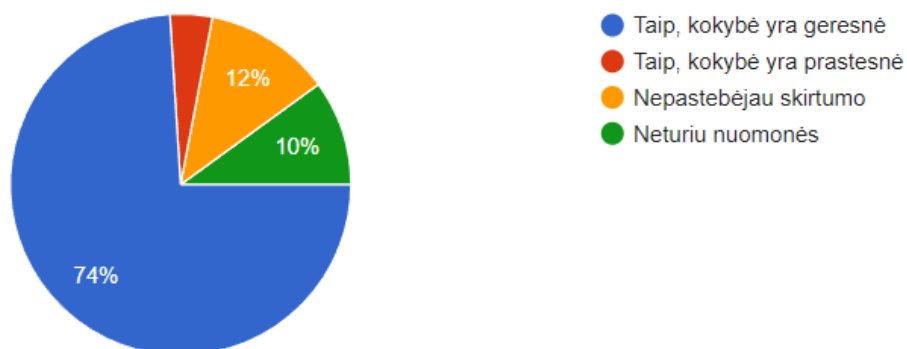


As the second and third graphs below show, there is also a considerable difference observed as to the perceived quality and prices of the products. The majority of the participants said that the quality of the products sold abroad was better than those sold in Lithuania, and yet, at the same time the prices for the said products are comparatively lower abroad, too. This, of course, enacts the motion of perceived unfairness/deception as Lithuanians perceive that they are paying more for a product that is lower in quality. Further, it confirms that the dual quality phenomena is quite easy to notice, as only a few respondents had either no opinion on the matter or did not notice any differences.

2. Have the respondents ever noticed a difference in the quality of the products sold at home and abroad;

Answer options:

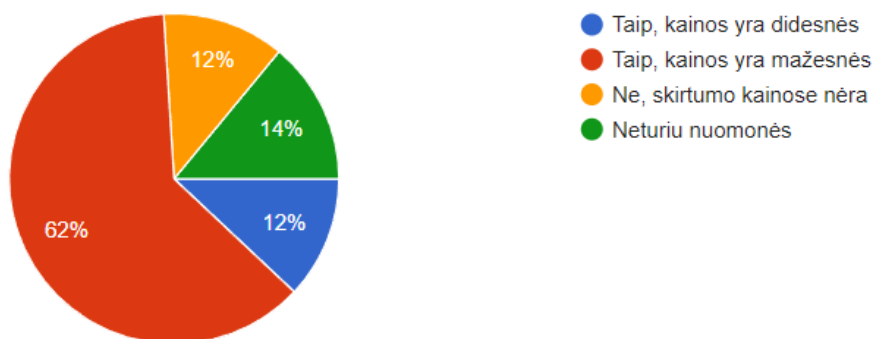
- Yes, the quality is better (blue);
- Yes, the quality is worse (marron);
- Did not notice any differences (orange);
- No opinion (green).



3. Have the respondents ever noticed a difference in the price of the products sold at home and abroad:

Answer options:

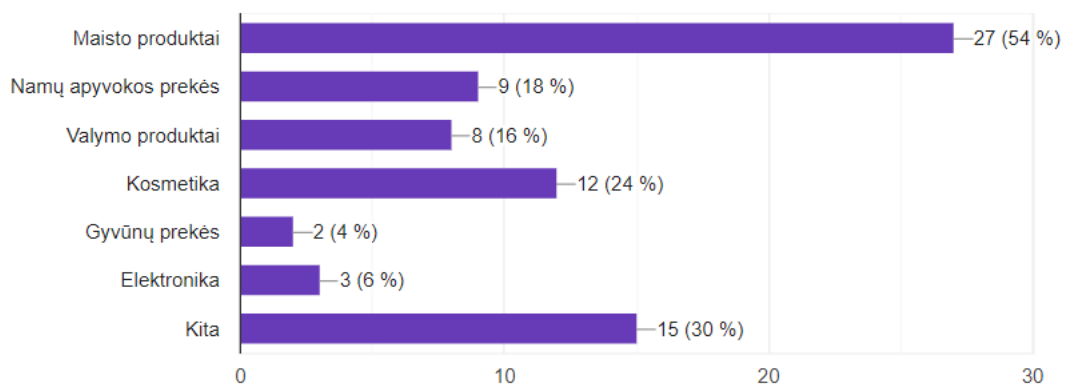
- Yes, the prices are higher (blue);
- Yes, the prices are lower (marron);
- No, there are no differences in the prices (orange);
- No opinion (green).



Concerning the products themselves, the findings are consistent with other researches done in other European countries. In majority of the cases, it was the food products that the respondents have found to be of different quality and content, compared to those sold at home in Lithuania. Cosmetics were also high on the list, which had not actually been looked into in other researches. Some respondents also noticed the quality and price differences in the household items as well as the cleaning products, with very few respondents (1-2) choosing electronics and pet products. In short, it was the food products that were most often found to be sold in different quality/different price compared to those seemingly identical that were sold abroad.

1. If the difference was noticed by the respondents, what kind of products were they? (i.e. food products, electronics, cleaning materials, cosmetics, etc);

From top to bottom: food items; household items; cleaning products; cosmetics; pet items; electronics; other

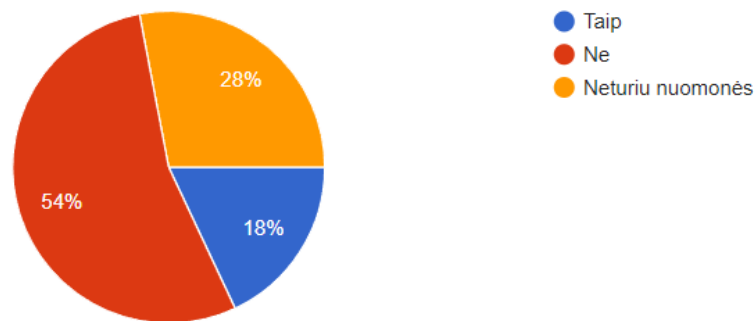


The next question was intended to gather information on whether the respondents feel like they have enough information on the contents of the product (i.e., labelling) so that they are able to make an informed decision on whether they should buy the product in question. As per the graph below, most respondents (54%) feel that it is not the case, in most of the cases, the respondents have said that the contents of the products were not labelled properly, although some have also said that the contents of products were written in very small letters, thus making it more difficult to read it, especially for elderly customers. In general, only 18% felt that they have enough information provided by labels in order to make a decision on whether to buy a particular product or not. Another 28% responded that they had no opinion on the matter, with some specifying that they do not actually read the labels at all and instead try to buy the products that they have already tried and liked before.

4. If the difference was noticed, do the respondents think whether the customer is given enough information on the composition/contents of the product in question (labels) to make a decision whether they will buy this product or not;

Answer options:

- Yes (blue);
- No (marron);
- No opinion (orange).



The final two questions were asked in order to find out how the respondents feel on the issue. The majority of the respondents – 56% had negative feelings on it. When asked to specify, the respondents said that they felt offended and looked down upon as a ‘low quality Europe’ since they were sold products made from cheaper materials, less ingredients and yet priced the same or, in some cases, even higher, compared to the products sold in the other countries. A few of the respondents later added that they would have no problem buying the products sold here in Lithuania, even if their composition was different and they were made from cheaper materials, as long as the selling prices were adjusted accordingly. Further 30% of the respondents maintained a neutral stance on the issue, with majority of them shopping mostly in Lithuania, hence being unable to compare the quality/price of the products sold here and abroad, with a few again admitting that they usually do not really look into the labels and purchase the products on the basis of past experience with them. The smallest number of respondents had a positive attitude regarding the issue, with one of them maintaining that the manufacturers of these products had full right to adjust their composition accordingly to the market they would be sold in, and that, in his experience, the prices are usually adjusted too. The respondent added that, in his opinion, it made no sense for the manufacturers to sell the products with

identical composition across every country, mainly due to the differences in the markets themselves, as well as the preferences of the customers that could be very different across borders.

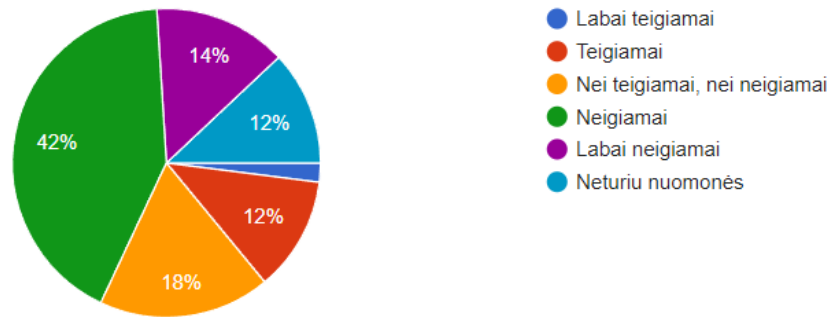
This, however, was not a common sentiment among other respondents. In fact, overwhelming 88% of the respondents supported the idea that the standards of the quality should be made uniform across all EU states. The main argument for this among the respondents were that under dual-quality phenomena, some customers are receiving preferential treatment in the form of products that are better in quality, have more ingredients and are more tasty/easier to use/more effective. The customers on the other end of the stick, that is, in the markets in which the products are made from cheaper materials and lack the ingredients that are otherwise available EU itself, which cause uneasy feelings of being different – or being the cheaper Other. This can also be observed in other countries, particularly in analysing the rhetoric adopted by some of the statesmen regarding the issue - for example, Czech agriculture minister Marian Jurečka has said that the East was tired of being “Europe’s garbage can”, while Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov accused the EU of “food apartheid”.⁷⁵

5. What is the respondents’ general opinion about the dual-quality products sold in different regions of Europe;

Answer options:

- Really positive (blue);
- Positive (marron);
- Neither positive, nor negative (orange);
- Negative (green);
- Really negative (purple);
- No opinion (light blue).

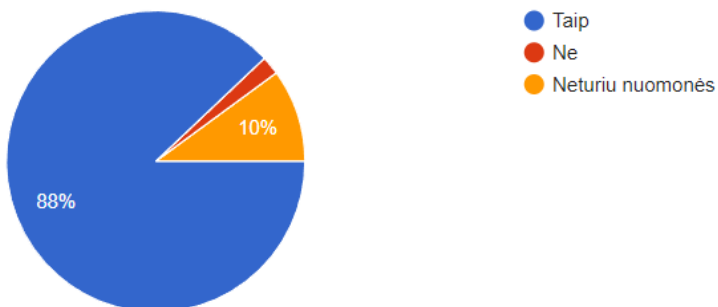
⁷⁵ Muller, Robert. “Czechs, tired of being 'Europe's garbage can', will push for better food” in *Reuters* 21 February 2017, available from: < <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-czech-food-idUKKBN1600XA>>



6. Should the same standards for all products sold across all of Europe be applied (alternatively, should the European leaders focus on eliminating or at least reducing the practice of dual-quality products).

Answer options:

- Yes (blue);
- No (marron);
- No opinion (orange).



The questions and answers above provide some important conclusions. In most cases, when the respondents have the opportunity to do so, they are able to differentiate between the quality of seemingly identic products sold in different countries. Furthermore, the practice is viewed negatively in Lithuania, although the difference to be far from a landslide (56 percent against 44 percent), however, overwhelming majority of respondents think that the same standards of quality should apply for the products sold across the Union. On their own, these answers seemingly provide backing to two of the hypotheses established in the earlier sections of this work:

1. the practice is indeed observed and taking place in both eastern and western European countries;
2. more often than not, the practice is viewed in negative terms in the country that receives the compromised product.

However, these closed questions are still not enough if the goal is to go even deeper in analyzing the public mood, or, in this case, to test the case of otherness against the backdrop of dual quality standards. It is likely only possible, in this case, to confirm the perceived otherness by embarking on an dangerous assumption that if the respondent views the dual quality standards negatively, then he must be feeling ‘othered’ and discriminated against just because of the existence of this practice.

Therefore, the deeper analysis into the rhetoric and expressions used in their answers by some of the respondents for this survey was undertaken, in order to determine how far this issue connects with the thesis of otherness mainly in how the respondents feel about the issue and, in wider sense, where does, in its’ opinion, Eastern Europe stand vis-a-vis Western Europe. For this, I have asked the respondents an open question on what their opinion on dual-quality practice is, and have looked for the clues and then categorized the answers into 3 different categories (see appendix 1). In total, there were 139 answers, out of which 79 were put into the red category (negative opinions), 50 into the blue (neutral or no opinions) and 10 into the yellow (positive opinions). Of the red category (negative answers) the most commonly used words to describe the practice have been unfair (13 answers), negative (7 answers), malpractice (2 answers), discriminatory (2 answers). A significant portion of the responses also expressed the sentiment that the practice should not be legal and should be outlawed (11 responses), while the end goal should be equal quality standards for all of the products sold across EU member states (8 responses).

There was also a fairly large share of respondents, who have expressed their feelings regarding the practice in more negative and emotional terms, often raising questions, for example, “Why are we being given leftovers?”, “Why do the manufacturers think that we will buy anything and everything?”, “Why can’t we we have it here?”, etc. Furthermore, several respondents have expressed that this practice makes them feel like “second-class citizens”, “garbage can of Europe”, “a dump” and essentially “looked down by the corporations”, who are ready to offer “trash for the Eastern European countries”. In total, 25 responses came in this category, with most adopting bold rhetoric, not dissimilar to that already used by some of the statesmen publicly. This group has also

focused more on outlining the perceived deception, as they feel to be completely wronged by manufacturers as well as the European institutions.

One of the most dominating patterns among the responses has been the link between the quality of the products and the manufacturer motivations. For example, 12 responses had implicated the manufacturers as being the beneficiaries of these practice, with 6 of these responses saying that, in turn, that it had come at the cost of the consumers. 3 respondents have expressed the desire to see the relevant mechanisms working, so that the manufacturers are no longer able to “abuse” the practice, while another three had doubts about the effectiveness of the said mechanisms.

Another visible pattern among the responses is acknowledging the institutional efforts to address the issue. 5 respondents have said that it is “good/great” that the European institutions are working to address the issue, while another three have agreed that it does look like a step on the right path, however, they expressed doubt in terms of how effective these steps will be.

Another large portion of the respondents – 44 of them, to be exact – have responded as being neutral on the issue. Most of these responses came down to the respondents admitting that they do not pay much attention to the differences in products here and abroad, that they do not travel that often to really notice the difference, or that they simply do not care all that much. This indicates of the problems - that the interest in the issue – and the experience of it in practical terms will be limited due to significant amount of the population simply not being familiar enough with the issue or not be bothered by it enough to notice.

Ten of the respondents have also expressed the sentiment that the practice was not as big of an issue as indicated, or not really an issue at all. Most of these responses point out that the practice is as prevalent as it is, because it is beneficial for the manufacturers, as it allows them to minimize costs and maximize profits – which is, according to some responders, the goal pretty much everywhere, and should not, therefore, be a point of contention the way it is. This group responses seems to go in line with the economic motivations by the corporations to use the different ingredients – market localization and different trends and preferences of the consumers.

In short, several conclusions can be drawn from the results of the survey and the following analysis of it. First of all, the most of respondents – 79 of them – had expressed negative feelings about the practice. These can be split into three parts – these responses, that perceived the practice as unfair by institutional standards but did not necessarily perceive it as discriminatory and otherwise

politically problematic, the second part that did see it as a potentially big political and social issue, dominated by loud rhetoric related to perceived discrimination, malpractice, and even implying the existence of “two Europes” as a result of the practice, and the third part, which agreed that the practice was unfair, but was relatively doubtful if things would change anytime soon. The dominating pattern in the responses of this particular group was its’ lack of belief in the European decision-making and bureaucracy. Between these groups, the number of respondents was almost equal, which does tell us that the majority of the respondent does think that the practice is unfair, but they express the perceived unfairness in different rhetoric and point to different factors. For instance, the first and the third groups see the unfairness in terms of EU regulations, while the second group sees it more as a social issue, as well as an issue of discrimination.

Applying these results to the ideas of otherness, we can conclude that the responses from the group above (red category) indicate the clearest sentiment of otherness out of the rest of the respondents, made clear by the repeated use of phrases such as “second class citizens”, “trash”, “garbage can of Europe”. By being offered products that are worse in quality they feel to be discriminated by the dominant in-group (the manufacturers, Westerners, EU institutions) and thus find themselves to be stuck in the dominated out-group. Furthermore, some of the rhetoric in the responses were similar to that already expressed by some of the European statesmen – namely, those being more critical of the EU, which could also a point of interest for further researches dealing with voting patterns/ This group takes both the perceived deception and unfairness strongly – the dominating feelings are those of frustration and anger. In these responses there are some indications of otherness and of Orientalism –rhetoric implies existence of feeling and being looked at as other in a reductionist, distancing and pathologizing way – not unlike the Orient in Said’s Orientalism. There is another nuance of otherness apparent within this group – their perceived spatial marginality with multiple references to Eastern Europe as well as coming from the former territories of Soviet Union and thus feeling discriminated because of it. It is manifested in the sentiments that the residents are expected to buy anything and appreciate it, notwithstanding that the quality standards may be compromised. There are no indications of a Hegelian otherness among this group of responses, in which the self and the other are inevitably engaged in a zero-sum struggle, however, the feelings of frustration, anger, and being left out are prevalent.

However, the postulates of otherness seem mostly relevant in only one part of the respondents. Another significant portion perceives the dual quality standards as an unfair practice, but do not express that unfairness in otherness rhetoric. The leading sentiment within this group of

respondents is that the practice is unfair and that all residents of the EU countries should be able to purchase products at their highest quality, as well as some doubts whether the changes on the institutional level will have significant – or any – impact in the quality standardization in the future. There is no perceived feeling in this group, however, that this practice is a proof of discrimination and ‘othering’ by the manufacturers and institutions, in contrast to the first group. In fact, several responses expressed the opinion that the practice is used for rational reason, i.e. cost management and local marketisation. Out of those, a few expressed a relatively positive opinion of the dual quality standards in that it allows for more flexibility for the manufacturers.

In addition, the number of respondents that remain neutral or do not know anything about the issue is significant. The responses of this group in particular indicates only rare experience of dual quality standards. This indicates that this is an issue that one really has to notice for it to become a problem, and experiences abroad are also needed in order to compare – the products sold in Lithuania might be considered ‘normal’ by a fairly large share of the population, even if they are made out of cheaper materials and ingredients than in some other European countries. A possible cause of concern in this case is that most of the respondents of the blue group confessed to not informing themselves on the materials of the products that they are purchasing, making them more liable to making uniformed transactional decisions.

To conclude, the survey has showed that dual-quality products are observable in Lithuania also, as in other countries of the region outlined in the earlier section. It is perceived, in majority of the cases, negatively by the population. As the customers are offered a product that is not as good in quality as it could be – and is elsewhere – at least a part of them feels deceived by the manufacturers, as well as by the institutions that allow for these practices to persist. Some participants in this survey also raised some concerns that people in the region are still viewed as different and other.

The survey also that the notions related to the otherness discussed earlier are relevant, at least to a degree. First of all, a considerable portion of the respondents have agreed that it is just unjust and unfair. Some of the respondents adopted much louder rhetoric that spoke of the discrimination and second-class citizenship. As the past examples show, such issues and public perception of them can be exploited by the political parties. For instance, in the Czech Republic, the issue of dual quality food is so prevalent in the region – and of course popular for electoral purposes – that it was used as a talking point by all the parties in the Czech Republic in the run-up to the European Parliament

elections in 2019.⁷⁶ During the V4 Consumer Summit in Bratislava in 2017, then Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo made a statement titled “Against the discrimination of consumers by Western corporations” in which she explicitly stated that dual quality products are especially a problem in Central Europe and “undermines the citizens’ fundamental rights”.⁷⁷ Hungary’s Viktor Orban noted that dual quality food could lead to a de-facto two-speed, or multi-speed Europe.⁷⁸ In other words, politicians jumped on the topic and turned it into a ‘West’ vs ‘East’ topic instead of a wider EU problem.

That is, however, not enough to claim the dual-quality practice as a primarily social issue. The concerns are there and they are valid, because the dual-quality practice has threatened to undermine the principles of equality, however, there is still not enough evidence to make this an issue of European identities, especially, since it has by and large been exploited by the marginal parties. It seems that some sort of element of ‘east vs. west’ will still be there for years to come. And while the dual-quality practice could be considered to be a manifestation of the difference between the east and the west, it hardly reinforces it. The results here do tell, however, that the pressure is there to combat the issue and that the consumers are by large not content with the existence of such practice.

⁷⁶ <https://tn.nova.cz/zpravodajstvi/clanek/391382-cesko-popelnici-eu-dvoji-kvalitu-potravin-resi-vsechny-strany>

⁷⁷ Prime Ministers of the V4 against the discrimination of consumers by western corporations < <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/v4Komunikat.xsp?documentId=95583FC2294BEB2BC12581C4003BBAB0&lang=EN>>

⁷⁸ Kafkadesk.org. Multi-speed Europe, or the Visegrad Group’s key conundrum < <https://kafkadesk.org/2019/04/15/multi-speed-europe-and-the-visegrad-groups-existential-conundrum/>

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to look into and evaluate the significance of dual quality products in the European Union, precisely, the seemingly identical products that are made of materials that differ in their quality, composition and price. The areas that this research has focused on included the emotional dimension of the phenomena – namely, how the practice is perceived in Eastern Europe and how the Easterners perceive themselves in the European context in light of this practice. The phenomena is quite widely spread as over other various researches it was revealed that indeed various food products, cleaning materials and other shopping items, while most of the time being packaged identically across the markets they are sold in, often differ in their composition, texture, taste, quality, in other words, there are often different version for the same products across different countries. While there are economic motives for this practice – as it would make sense for the manufacturers to adjust to composition or price of the product according to the market the said product is to be sold in. After all, **adapting products and services to different markets is a standard procedure for companies** and is often desired to have such differentiation on a sub-national level as well. Furthermore, the difference in GDP per capita is considered to account for potential differences in willingness to pay for products between Member States. In other words, the manufacturers will be more likely to sell a cheaper alternative of the same product in the market where the customers have less purchasing power and thus are expected to choose the cheaper option available.

Yet the researches and public reactions have shown that while it makes sense for the manufacturers to offer different quality products to different makers, it is not always going to go easy with the actual customers. While, for some, it offers another chance to attack the European institutions and accuse of not holding everyone to the same standard and discriminating against some of the countries, the findings show that the customers also remain critical of the practice and express the opinion that they should not be offered a product that is not as tasty, not as easy to spread, made out of cheaper materials and so on, compared to the same product offered across the border.

The rhetoric surrounding the dual quality products is, in majority of cases, negative. As the alternatives materials used for a product that is to be sold in Eastern Europe, the quality is often compromised while the prices – according to the customers themselves – are not that much different as opposed to the products sold in Western European countries. This, as illustrated by the results of the survey done for this research, leads the customers in the Eastern European countries feel deceived, as they perceive that they are not receiving a product that is as good as it could be – and is elsewhere. Overall, some have said that this practice only reinforces the otherness of Eastern Europe – poorer, less

developed, ready to take in a product that is worse in quality compared to Western Europe. While this issue on itself might be perceived as not that big of a deal, it does not help the relations between the eastern and western countries, given the recent misunderstandings and disagreements. In other words, there is still a lot to be done for both of the sides to become one. And moving forwards, both the manufacturers and the institutions should cooperate so that all of Europeans – whether they are living in Latvia or in France – should be able to purchase products that are identical not only in packaging, but in quality as well.

Henceforth, in a wider sense, the differences between the Western and Eastern Europe are apparent. While this, per se, might not be a significant factor for the division between the two, the fact that there are significant disagreements between Eastern and Western Europe puts a strain in the relationship between the two. While the Eastern Europe has since the early 1990s reformed itself dramatically to catch up with the Western Europe, the differences have remained and manifested themselves in rising populism in countries such as Hungary and Poland, although, of course, populism is not only reserved to these countries – or Eastern European countries as a whole. Current issues underpinning the relationship between the East and West Europe will also take a while to play out.

These have been further influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been going on for over two years at the time of the writing. Coronavirus crisis has also reopened in a lot of the countries the foundational controversy over ‘who owes what to whom’ when member states are hit by severe adversities, a controversy already experienced in the manifold crises of the 2010s, following the impacts of the Great Recession, increasing the concerns of disruptive rifts on the European public sphere and even of a possible break-up of the Union.

Although the physical borders are now long gone, it still feels as if we are quite far from the European unity. The questions of whether we will reach it – or, indeed, if it is at all possible – remain to be answered in future discussions, researches and will, of course, continue to depend on global developments.

This research has mainly focused on the social implications of the issue. For further analysis, links between the issue and the voting patterns in the national and European elections still need examination, as do the economic impacts of the practice. Also important to study will be the impacts of the New Deal on consumer protection. What this research has helped uncover, is the persistent uneasiness in the minds of a lot of Eastern Europeans, uneasiness about being perceived as ‘others’ – and could serve as one of the measures to measure the public mood in Eastern European states. If the perceived

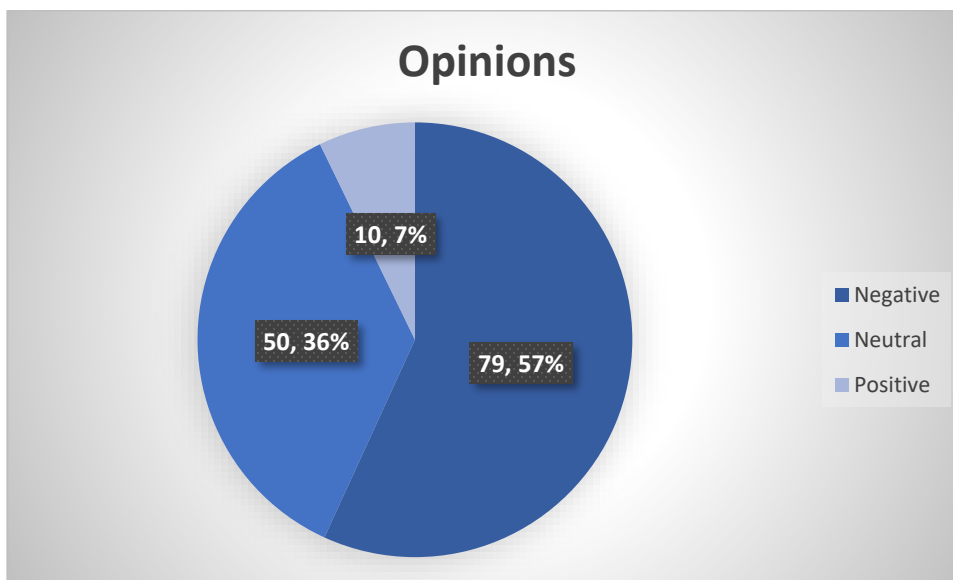
'otherness' continues to persist and grow, this might lead to some uncomfortable election results in the future.

Appendix 1

This includes the responses of the participants when asked to comment on their opinion about the dual quality practice. The opinions were then put into separate categories according to the colors:

In this analysis, the responses were coded by colors to categorize them more easily. Negative opinions are marked in red, positive – in yellow, and neutral – in blue.

Opinions	Responses
Negative	79
Neutral	50
Positive	10
Total	139



I think <...> it is a damaging practice, as it causes rifts between the states, the manufacturers and probably the institutions as well.

I do not have an opinion regarding this issue.

I do believe that every European has a right to be offered the same product everywhere, that is not made out of cheaper material thus compromising its' quality. I personally want to buy a Snickers that's as tasty in Poland, as it is in, let's say, France.

I think, while it may reinforce inequality instead of combating it, this is a standard procedure to manufacturers in order to adjust their production costs in countries, where the consumers have less

purchasing power, and so it is more likely to bring less profit. I view it as a negative practice, however, I think for the manufacturers it does make sense.

Personally, I do not pay attention to the possible differences in composition of the products. I have not personally been affected by this practice, and I do not really see it as an issue.

I think it is a bit degrading to be offered a product that is worse in quality than in some other countries. It does feel like some consumers are valued more than the others.

I have noticed the difference between some of the products that I usually purchase here and abroad. I don't understand why the quality and composition is different, while the prices are not. Why are we being given leftovers?

It feels that with this practice we're essentially made out to be the poor, stupid ones, who will buy any product, no matter how bad/garbage/ineffective it could be.

I do not travel often, so I can't really answer this question.

When I travel, I don't usually pay attention to the compositions of products, as it takes a lot of time and I'm not really interested – instead, I try to purchase more of local production to get to know the country I'm travelling in more. I do not have any particular opinions on this practice.

I do agree with that politician who said that their country feels like it's being looked upon as a garbage can of Europe – I think everyone should be getting a product that is as good as it can possibly be. The different versions sold in different countries is just another case of discrimination.

I do not particularly care about the issue.

I have no knowledge of the issue, therefore my opinion is neutral.

I do feel like we're getting the worse end of a deal with the products we're getting here. For instance, the Coca Cola which I bought when I was in France tasted much better than the one sold here in Lithuania.

I view the practice in negative terms.

I would understand, perhaps, if the prices were adjusted accordingly to the cheaper materials used in making the product, however, I feel that more often not, that's not the case. And thus, it just feels like another form of groups of consumers being cheated by the manufacturers

I'm surprised this issue has not been raised further. I personally think it's a very shady practice. We're in the EU for nearly 20 years, it's surprising that manufacturers still think they can get away with using cheap substitutes, then charging higher prices in some countries.

I hate being sold a worse product that I could possibly get; it's an unfair practice.

I do not have an opinion on this matter.

I haven't really paid attention – I don't really buy the same products in the different countries either.

I don't really mind the practice – as long, of course, as the prices are not higher than they should be for the products that are worse in quality.

It does feel like some of the Eastern European are being dumped whatever, and they are supposed to like it and buy it.

I don't like it, but what are we going to do. You buy what you can buy.

The quality standards should be the same for every country, at least here in Europe – of course, we could perhaps have alternative, cheaper versions available, but in essence, everyone should be able to purchase a product that is available in the best quality possible.

No opinion.

Yes, I'm aware of the possible differences in the qualities of products sold in different markets even though visually you could not tell them apart – in my opinion, it's beneficial for the manufacturers, but at the disadvantage of a relatively large groups of customers – which makes it unfair.

I think it's just unfair.

I honestly do not pay much attention to the composition of products I buy, more often I choose by price or I buy something that I had positive experience with before

This practice should not be legal in my opinion

Nothing unusual. We should not be surprised this is used, we cannot expect to have the same product that would cost more to produce, while our own purchasing power is not equal to that of some other countries in Western Europe

I do not particularly care

It feels like we're sort of second-class consumers by that logic.

I'm waiting to see how this New Deal will impact this practice. But I think that the manufacturers will find ways to bypass it somehow. So, in my opinion, it will likely continue.

I do not know anything about it.

This practice should be outlawed or, at least, something should be done to make it not beneficial to use for manufacturers.

Feels like after all these Soviet years, Western manufacturers still think that we will buy anything with their logo on it. It's a disgusting attitude, really.

Some things never change – what's best for West, trash for the East.

I do not have any strong opinions or experiences on this.

I honestly don't think the differences are that big – obviously, it would probably take a massive analysis to determine the differences between the products sold here and elsewhere – but in my experience, it is not really noticeable. And I think it's obvious that the manufacturers would try to cut the costs as much as possible.

Everyone within the EU at the very least should be offered a product without having to worry that it could be worse in quality, less tasty, less effective (in the case of cleaning materials, etc.)

I don't know.

I'm all for equal standards of quality, but I'm not sure if the manufacturers would comply with that, as long as they could possibly lose money over this. And there's really no point in having something that is not going to work.

Great to hear that the institutions are doing something about this on European level. It always frustrates me thinking "why can't we have this in Lithuania?" or "this is so much better than what we have"

I have no opinion

I think it's a very negative practice, and will have implications for the integrity of the EU

I do not know much about it, or have a lot of personal experience, but it does not sound very fair

It's only good for the manufacturers, because they get to keep the costs of production down. But we, the consumers, should not accept the quality being compromised, just because it might be a few cents cheaper

I don't know anything about it.

I don't view this as a fair practice; it should not be allowed.

So, are we just supposed to take the leftovers of what the westerners are having? This is embarrassing!

Unfair practice.

It kind of feels like two Europes indeed – and we're, of course, in the cheaper one.

I think this is a perfect case to see the irony between the rhetoric of the European institutions and statesmen – and then the practice, which is far from the principles of equality.

Simply put – unfair practice that the businesses have been allowed to get away with for too long.

I don't really think it is that bad of a practice – I think it's rational that the manufacturers will use cheaper materials where they find it acceptable, and not along some lines of East-West, North-South or whatever. And if the consumers find it to be unfair, they should be avoiding buying these products altogether, but I don't think this has and will happen.

No opinion.

Disgraceful practice.

I do not know anything about, and haven't really encountered it.

Good news on more regulation, but I'm still not sure if it will have the wanted effect. Maybe the manufacturers will find different ways how to bypass it.

No opinion

I view it negatively.

I do feel like we are getting slimmed down products – and to add to that, we are not getting some of those that other countries are getting. It's annoying at best.

Negatively.

Haven't really encountered it, but I might start at least paying attention to the product descriptions.

Do not really care about it that much.

Should be the same quality standards applicable everywhere, why should I be getting a product that is worse than that my German friend gets?

Nothing unusual, just cost management.

Doesn't seem fair in my opinion

Well, good that the institutions are doing something about it, but it is taking a while. And I would like to know more how exactly they are going to control it, in other words, how will they prevent any sort of bypasses of the manufacturers?

I have no opinion on this subject.

Unlawful, isn't it?

Really tells what they think of the more recent EU members – and that's trash

No opinion

Terrible practice. I hope it goes away soon.

Maybe it's just rational thinking, however, since we're in the EU, I believe we all should be able to enjoy the same quality standards.

Disappointing, but not surprising. I go abroad quite often, and I've noticed that the products are better and not always are the prices that much higher.

Sad feelings.

It feels like we've been looked at as inferiors, and I'm not sure if that is ever going to change.

I have no opinion about it, haven't really paid any attention.

Maybe slightly off the topic, but I feel that the products sold here in Lithuania have gotten worse over the time. For instance, the yoghurt I buy regularly is nothing like it used to be, say, 3-5 years ago.

I view it negatively, of course. Do the manufacturers really think that we will buy anything?

I mean, I don't feel like enough people pay attention to this here, so that there is a backlash and something changes. Let's be honest, do you always read the packaging of the product when shopping around? No, because that way the shopping would take a lot of time. And regarding the taste and other specifics... It probably depends a lot on a person as well.

I am going abroad in a few weeks, and I will try to see, if I can, if the products look/taste any different than those sold here. It is an interesting and important subject in my opinion.

Negative.

Discriminatory practice.

I don't know.

Not at all surprising. If you really investigate across various groups of products, you could probably find the differences in each and every one of them

I live in Germany, so the products I buy are of better quality than here in Lithuania, but they are in most of the cases more expensive as well. So I'm not sure if that's really unfair.

It's unacceptable

I don't know anything about it, honestly.

Good to hear about it being tackled. Now we hopefully won't have to feel like villagers coming into a shiny shopping centre when we go abroad.

Unfair. Malpractice. That's what I think about it.

It does not really affect me. The products here are fine.

I have no opinion.

It's a messed up situation. Then again, it's capitalism. Whether we like it or not, that is how it operates.

No opinion about that.

I think there is certainly a little bit of overreaction regarding this, judging from some of the public statements of Eastern European politics, it is not that we are the "garbage can of Europe", however, in my opinion, equal quality standards for everyone should be the goal here.

Sounds good that there are actually trying to solve this problem, but I've heard it for years now and I don't feel like anything has changed, quite frankly.

It's infuriating.

Nonsense.

No opinion

Neutral on this issue, don't really feel like it should be a priority right now.

I think it's unfair and discriminatory against the customers in the affected countries.

Seems like a very niche issue.

I understand this practice from the business point of view, they are always looking to optimize the costs. Alas, they will always look to maximize profit by, in this case, using some cheaper substitutes, especially if they are not guaranteed a high profit otherwise in a specific country.

I always felt a bit like a younger brother when I would go abroad – I guess, this is how they see us as well. Or even worse.

I don't have a positive opinion about this, obviously. I think it's unfair at the very least, since we keep seeing ads and promotions everywhere, but when we buy the actual product – it's not worth the hype nor the money.

It's obviously a malpractice.

I'm neutral on the issue.

I don't know how to feel about this.

I haven't really noticed it as I don't go abroad that often.

I hate that it's actually a thing.

Unfair practice that certainly has the potential to escalate to wider issues as well.

I think customer protection - in general sense - has been pretty much neglected so far. It is interesting to see how it goes with these new rules and if the customers will indeed benefit from it in terms of being safe.

Unfair, abusive, discriminating, deceitful.

Stupid practice.

No opinion.

No opinion.

Surely should've been tackled by now, right? We've been in the EU for nearly 20 years now and it's really embarrassing that this issue is still relevant in any way.

Difficult to say, but it does not sound right to me that we should be getting a product that's not as good as in other markets.

That's why I wish I could do my shopping elsewhere regularly.

It doesn't make sense.

Not a good practice. As long as it stays relevant, the Eastern European countries will continue to have their grievances.

I don't think it's actually that bad as I seen it to be made out to be. Surely, there is information about the product, but does everyone really read it all the time?

You just know that this works to the advantage to someone like Orban, who can continue his attacks on European institutions.

I don't really know much about it, and have no opinion.

It's shameful and dishonest.

No opinion.

I don't like this one bit, but then again, what can we do about it?

It's a scandal, alright.

Shrotly speaking, it is an unfair practice, that calls for me into question the principles of EU.

Well, I don't remember this getting a lot of publicity, which is a shame of course, it's really a basic principle and it is being violated.

No strong opinions about it.

I do notice the differences in the products, however, to me, I don't think it's that critical. Within sensible boundaries, I think, this practice is acceptable.

Do I think that this practice is unfair and should be punishable? Yes. Do I really expect this practice to actually discontinue after these supposed changes? I'm not really sure. I do not have trust in European bureaucracy.

Hasn't this has been addressed already a few years back?

I don't think it's all that relevant, actually. I mean, in 2022, there are surely more pressing issues than this?

I don't have any opinion about this sadly.

I think of it as an unfair and deceitful practice, centered at the manufacturers as the beneficiaries, and not the consumers.

Interesting subject.

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Santrauka

Šis tyrimas plačiąja prasme orientuotas į Rytų ir Vakarų Europos santykių vertinimą. Tai daroma analizuojant dvigubos kokybės gaminių praktiką Europos šalyse – skirtingose šalyse parduodami vienodai supakuoti produktai, kurie vis dėlto skiriasi savo sudėtimi, todėl ir kokybe. Kaip parodė šis ir kiti tyrimai bei eksperimentai, dvigubos kokybės praktika plačiai taikoma gamintojų ir nėra neįprasta, kad čekui siūloma prekė, kuri vizualiai yra tokia pati kaip ir už keliolikos ar keliasdešimties kilometrų esančiose Vokietijos parduotuvėse. Tai taip pat turi įtakos vartotojų reakcijai į praktiką. Išanalizavus turimus duomenis ir šiam tyrimui atlikta apklausą, iliustruojama, kad vartotojai – ypač tie, kurie gauna iš pigesnių ir/ar mažiau ingredientų pagamintą produktą – dažniausiai žiūri į tokią strategiją neigiamai. Tada analizuojama apklaustųjų retorika, ji vertinama pasitelkiant kitoniškumo idėjas, o paskutinėse dalyse pateikiamos išvados.

Tikslas: Įvertinti dvigubos kokybės gaminių tinkamumą aiškinant tarpusavio suvokimo skirtumus tarp Rytų ir Vakarų europiečių.

Tyrimo metodai: Tyrimui pasirinktas kiekybinis anketinės apklausos tyrimo metodas. Duomenų analizė atlikta naudojant aprašomosios statistikos metodus. Iš viso respondentų grupei buvo pateikti 7 klausimai, susiję su skirtingos kokybės produktais Europos šalyse. Tada duomenys buvo apibendrinti ir toliau pateikiami šiame darbe. Ypatingas dėmesys buvo skiriamas atsakymų retorikos analizavimui, kuris padeda įvertinti ne tik lietuvių nuomonę apie dvigubos kokybės standartus, bet ir įvertinti kiek svarbi ši problema visuomenėje. Be to, papildant atliktą tyrimą ir vertinant praktiką regione, o ne vienoje šalyje, buvo panaudota kokybinė jau turimos literatūros ir kitų šalių pavyzdžių analizė.

Tyrimo rezultatai: Apklausa atskleidė, kad dvigubos kokybės praktika yra aktuali Europos rinkose ir gamintojų praktikuojama dėl įvairių ekonominių ar socialinių priežasčių. Tačiau ji taip pat atskleidė, kad dalis rytų europiečių jaučiasi kitokie ir netgi diskriminuojami, nes negali įsigyti produktų, pagamintų iš tų pačių ingredientų ir atitinkančių tokius pačius kokybės standartus, kaip ir produktai siūlomi vakarų Europos gyventojams. Visgi, ta dalis nėra pakankamai didelė kad leistų daryti išvadą kad dvigubi kokybės standartai yra socialinė problema. Didesnė dalis apklausos dalyvių, nors ir įžvelgia nesąžiningumą vartotojų atžvilgiu, platesnės ir geografinė padėtimi paremtos diskriminacijos.

Išvados:

1. Dvigubos kokybės gaminiai yra standartinė gamintojų praktika, ypač kai išlieka atotrūkis tarp Rytų ir Vakarų Europos šalių rinkų. Gamintojai yra labiau linkę ir labiau motyvuoti koreguoti

savo gaminius ar su jais susijusias išlaidas, priklausomai nuo rinkos, kurioje jie bus parduodami. Pavyzdžiui, šalyse, kuriose perkamoji galia mažesnė ir kurių pajamos mažesnės, būtų gaminami siūlomi produktai iš pigesnės medžiagos ir nebūtų tokios kokybės, kaip prekės parduodamos turtingesnėse Vakarų šalyse.

2. Ši problema vis labiau suvokiama ir dažnai lydima neigiamų reakcijų, ypač Rytų Europoje. Kai kurių Čekijos ir Vengrijos ministrų retorika Rytų Europą jau palygino su „Europos šiukšliadėže“.
3. Vis dar jaučiamas skirtumas tarpusavio suvokime ir santykiuose tarp Rytų ir Vakarų europiečių, nepaisant sąlyginio suartėjimo po Sovietų Sąjungos žlugimo.
4. Atliktos apklausos duomenimis galima daryti išvadą kad dvigubi kokybės standartai Lietuvoje yra vertinami neigiamai. Dalis apklaustųjų yra linkę tai vertinti kaip socialinę problemą ir netgi kaip tarptautinių kompanijų diskriminacijos Rytų Europos vartotojų atžvilgiu įrodymą, tačiau didesnė apklaustųjų dalis žiūri į dvigubus kokybės standartus kaip į ekonominę, o ne socialinę problemą. Dalis apklaustųjų pripažino nesidomintys, nežinantys, arba neturintys asmeninės patirties su dvigubos kokybės standartais.

Summary

This research focuses, in broad terms, on assessing the relations between the Eastern and Western Europe. This is done by analyzing the dual-quality product practice in the European states - the identically packaged products that are nonetheless different in their composition, therefore the quality, are sold in different countries. As this and other researches and experiments have shown, the dual-quality practice is widely used by the manufacturers and it is not unusual for a Czech to be offered a product that is visually the same to the one offered across the border in German shops. It is also significant in the way the consumers react to the practice. With the analysis of the existing data and a survey conducted for this research, it is illustrated that the consumers – especially those who receive the product that is made out of cheaper and/or less ingredients – are mostly negative. This is then applied in the context of an already strained relations between Eastern and Western Europe and some concluding thoughts on the uneasy differences are offered at the final sections.

Goal: Evaluate the relevance of the dual quality products in explaining the perceived differences between the Eastern and Western Europeans.

Research methods: A quantitative research method of a questionnaire survey was chosen for the research. Data analysis was performed using the methods of descriptive statistics. In total, 7 questions were given to the wide group of respondents – not predetermined. The data was then summarized and concluded further in this paper, with a particular focus on the rhetoric of the respondents, which would allow to not only evaluate the opinion about the dual-quality standards among Lithuanians, but to also determine how controversial this problem is in the society. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis of an already existing literature and case examples in other countries was used to supplement the survey conducted and to evaluate the phenomena in the region, instead of one country.

Research outcomes: The survey revealed that the dual quality practice is relevant in the European markets and is practiced by the manufacturers for various economic or social reasons. It also revealed that at least a part of Lithuanians feels othered and discriminated against by not being able to purchase products that are made of the same ingredients and held to the same standards of quality to those offered to other European countries. However, this part of the respondents is not large enough to allow us to conclude that double quality standards are a social problem. A larger part of the survey participants, although they view the practice as unfair, do not think of it as an example of wider discrimination based on geographical location.

Conclusions:

1. Dual quality products are a standard practice by the manufacturers, especially more so when there remains a gap between the markets of Eastern and Western European countries. The manufacturers are more inclined or motivated to adjust their products, or costs associated with them, depending on the market they are to be sold in. For instance, in countries with a smaller purchasing power and lower levels of income the products offered would be made from cheaper material and would not have the same quality as those sold in the richer countries.
2. There has been a growing awareness about the issue, often followed with negative reactions, particularly in Eastern Europe. The rhetoric of some of the ministers in Czech Republic and Hungary have already compared Eastern Europe to “the garbage can of Europe”.
3. There is still a perceived difference between the Eastern and Western Europeans, despite the progress in unification.
4. According to the data of the conducted survey, it can be concluded that double quality standards are negatively evaluated in Lithuania. Some of the respondents tend to see this as a social problem and even as evidence of discrimination by international companies towards Eastern European consumers, but a larger part of the respondents views double quality standards as an economic rather than a social problem. Some of the respondents admitted that they were not interested, did not know, or had no personal experience with double quality standards.