Reflection of National and European Identity in the New Millennium

FACTSHEET NO. 4

DISCUSSING EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY AND TRANSNATIONAL WAY AND CREATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

1 Project and Objectives

The project brings together partners from Germany, the Czech and the Slovak Republic to compare their experience with education in the realm of European and National identity and to learn about the state-of-art development which can be used by university teachers and teachers at secondary schools. The long-term aim is the participation of young people in active EU citizenship. The particular aim is to teach the above-named topics at university level in a highly innovative way with the use of information and communication technology (ICT). For instance, the various perspectives on national and European identity are brought together in learning opportunities on the virtual 3D-platform 'Kitely'.

The last factsheet of the project focuses on the results that emerged during the mobility month (see below) (28.02.2022 to 25.03.2022). The following elaborations, therefore, focus on statements and results of students that were expressed in discussions and the processing of work assignments or in other exchange and communication formats that mapped the project results. These students' perspectives represent only a sample of the many topics and questions on which the students exchanged views. They were captured at the end of the project. The aim was to hear what perspectives young adults have on questions of European identity and its relation to national identity. As this is an analysis of qualitative data (free text answers), no distinction is made between students from the four partner universities or the three countries. More than at other times, the students' statements are probably influenced by the Russian attack on Ukraine, which had begun only a few days before the start of mobility month.

2 Project Progression and Mobility Month

NAETINEM started in October 2019 and aimed to address questions of national and European identity from different subject and country perspectives. In addition, it was planned to translate the results of the work into teaching offers for pupils. Among other things, the virtual world Kitely was to be used for the implementation. Special attention was also given to the use of Kitely by persons with special needs.

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There were three target groups for the project results:

(1) Within the framework of internal project events (transnational meetings and mobility month), students were involved in the production of content as well as given a multi-perspective view on national and European identity through presentations by project members.

(2) Teachers were reached through multiplier events, during which workshops were held in the partner countries in the respective national language.

(3) Learning opportunities were targeted directly at pupils (e.g., teaching concepts, information on the European integration process or learning units in the virtual 3D world Kitely).

These project outputs were created in the course of the entire project and are suitable for taking a multi-perspective national and European look at European identity. The mobility month took on a special significance within the project. Students from the four partner universities worked together from 28th February 2022 to 25th march 2022 as the last major project event in which all the results were compiled, and an intensive exchange took place once again. The first three weeks of mobility month were designed as a virtual exchange, with daily lectures and workshops organised by the partner universities. The last week was spent together in Olomouc, where personal exchanges were intensified.

Despite the great commitment of all project participants, almost all project meetings had to be held virtually due to travel restrictions during the pandemic. This made it much easier to arrange appointments, but also made it more difficult to exchange information. Against this

backdrop, mobility month can be considered a great success, in which the cooperation was put on a different footing, and, above all, the students were able to engage in a close personal and professional exchange.

3 The Beginnings of the European Unification Process and Its Relevance Regarding Current Challenges

A **central question of European identity** is that of the usefulness of and the congruence of goals with the European unification process. In the first three weeks of mobility month, the students were provided online offers and given tasks ('tasks of the day') to complete. In the following, the focus is on the students' answers to these tasks. In the tasks of the day 13 and 14, the students were asked to position themselves on the beginnings of the European unification process and the significance of the original ideas for the current situation. The first sub-task of task of the day 14[1] was related to the *Schumann Declaration*[2]. To answer this task, many students worked out the contents of the *Schumann Declaration* precisely from materials and referred to the relevance of securing peace, maintaining and improving the standard of living and standardising the living conditions of the industrial workforce. Others already drew parallels to current challenges facing the Union in their elaboration, e.g.: "If we look at today's situation, the EU uses its own ways to maintain peace and prevent war by several sanctions and it also has many programs which are supposed to make the EU a better place for its members. So I think this document may have helped the way the EU is these days" (student, mobility month task 14.1; quoted from Moodle).

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[1] Task of the day 14, sub-task 1: "Find the key ideas of the Declaration [*Schumann Declaration*] that you think could have led to the EU as we know it today and write them here in response to today's task."

[2] The *Schumann Declaration* is a speech by the then French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann on 9 May 1950 in which he proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The members of this community were to pool their coal and steel production. With the later establishment of the ECSC, the first supranational European institution was born, from which the European Union eventually developed. (European Union n.y.)

There were also statements that pointed out that the idea of a politically united Europe had already been born through the *Schumann Declaration.* For example, one student described the *Schumann Declaration* as "the birth of Europe as a political entity" (student, mobility month task 14.1; quoted from Moodle). Especially the connection between peacekeeping and development/prosperity was emphasised by the students: "I think these ideas [of peace and development] have made the EU what it is today – when I think of the creative ways that the EU utilizes to maintain peace and prevent war (the Ukraine war, for example), and also the variety of its programs and plans to make the EU a better place, it makes me think that this document definitely helped and contributed to how we do things" (student, mobility month task 14.1; quoted from Moodle).

The second sub-question of task of the day 14[3] went beyond the reproduction of contents and referred to the relevance of the motives of the *Schumann Declaration* today. Many students placed this question in the context of the Russian attack on Ukraine as well. When asked whether the motives of the *Schumann Declaration* were still relevant today, 29 of the 31 students who worked on the task answered that the objectives were still significant. To illustrate, here are some student contributions: "Preventing war in Europe is still relevant today. Countries that are closely allied do not make war against each other. There has always been war in Europe. Only since many countries joined together to form the EU, has war been prevented for a long time" (student, mobility month task 14.2; quoted from Moodle). "And even on the outside, a united Europe is more stable and resistant than individual countries. If Ukraine was part of the EU, Russia might not have dared to attack it" (student, mobility month task 14.2; quoted from Moodle). "Yes, these motives are still relevant today. I think that the Schuman Declaration is timeless and very progressive, especially at the time" (student mobility month task 14.2; quoted from Moodle). "I think so, it's important to maintain a global peace to avoid any bigger conflict or even a world war. I think it's good that the EU doesn't follow one strict plan but has many different programs that focus on different areas individually" (student, mobility month task 14.2; quoted from Moodle). Some students expressed the opinion that the EU is not doing everything right, but almost all of them still want to stick to the goals of the *Schumann Declaration* and consider them right and important.

Task of the day 13[4] dealt with today's relevance of the **motives for founding the EU**. When asked whether the motives for European unification at that time are still relevant today, the students' opinions were again quite clear. With very few exceptions (2 out of 31 students), they believe that the motives that led to the European integration process are still relevant today. For example, some students emphasised the common value base: "Respecting

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[3] Task of the day 14, sub-task 2: "In your opinion, are these motives for the creation of the EU still relevant today?"
[4] Task of the day 13, sub-task 2: "Are the motives for founding the EU still relevant today? Write a short personal statement."

common values such as the protection of human rights, principles of liberty, democracy and fundamental freedoms are also crucial nowadays as there tends to be a lot of hate towards various minorities found in every society" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle). Others aimed at solidarity and cohesion through economic and financial support: "I consider the large European single market with the common European currency of the euro zone as valid motives, too. Financial support for weaker EU states and regions may be tempting as well" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle). Some students also addressed different fields of benefits through the European Union: "Yes, I think these motives are still relevant. For example, thanks to the EU, my country has better economic conditions, more imports and exports, better trade, and more care for the environment. You do not need a passport in EU countries, and they should protect you and provide you with a lawyer if they accuse you of something, etc. Better relations with other EU countries, subsidies, protection and assistance from other EU countries" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle). The specific life situation of young adults was also instanced by students: "I think that the EU motives are still alive and very important in every day live. As I mentioned before, the EU firstly has made peace from WW2 till today. All countries are helping each other economically or with giving advice and their know-how. The EU makes many opportunities for young people to realize in their strong abilities. I, as a young person, can travel easily and get to know new places and cultures. This is the way to cooperate and make the world a better place" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle). Not surprisingly, the importance of peacekeeping in the face of the Ukraine war was also pointed out in this context: "In particular, the motive of securing peace, which was the main basis for European unification, has receded somewhat into the background, since peace within the European community of states has long been taken for granted by many. Even though Ukraine is not part of the European Union, the current situation clearly shows that it cannot be taken for granted" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle).

Apart from their approval of the goals and European integration, however, some students also pointed out problems that the EU has yet to solve. Almost all of the stated problems concerned climate protection. Here is an example of a statement: "It is true, in my view, that many of the problems can no longer be solved at national level. However, the question is whether the EU can deal with problems like climate change. So far, it has not been possible to agree on a uniform and effective climate policy within the EU. In this respect, the motivation is still relevant, but it still cannot be solved so far. For this, the EU lacks sanctioning possibilities against the countries" (student, mobility month task 13.2; quoted from Moodle).

4 European Citizenship: Necessary, Useful or Superfluous

The introduction of **European citizenship** in 1992 was an important milestone in the process of European integration. A 2020 survey found that around two thirds of EU citizens are both aware of the concept of European citizenship as well as very well informed about their rights (European Union 2020). These surveys always cover respondents of all ages. For the project partners, it was interesting to see what the students, most of whom were between 20 and 22 years old, thought about European citizenship. Task of the day 8[5] was therefore dedicated to European citizenship. When asked whether European citizenship is useful or necessary in addition to citizenship, 38 out of 40 students answered that they consider EU citizenship useful overall. Thus, a very high level of agreement was found.

However, there were clear differences in the content of the texts produced by the students – especially regarding the differentiation of whether EU citizenship is only "useful" or also "necessary". To illustrate this, some statements from students are cited here. First, statements that find EU citizenship useful but not necessary: "It is certainly important, but not necessary" (student, mobility month task 8.1; quoted from Moodle). Another person wrote: "I don´t think it is necessary, but it might be useful in some cases, e.g. when a foreigner comes to a country, but it would be too complicated for them to obtain national citizenship, they can get the European one" (student, mobility month task 8.1; quoted from Moodle). About half of the students were very positive, almost enthusiastic, about the opportunities offered by European citizenship. Here are some examples: "Yes. The EU as an idea is defined by certain values. So, it must also be guaranteed that these values are respected by all member states. EU citizenship grants EU citizens, among other things, the right to claim it. Citizenship means equal rights for all and that supports a sense of community" (student, mobility month task 8.1; quoted from Moodle). "In my opinion, European citizenship is in our current globalized world a must. While national citizenship gives you guarantees in your state and supports your national identity, the European citizenship makes moving across countries, studying in different countries, travelling, business export and many other related things much easier. For me it's an equivalent of freedom" (student, mobility month task 8.1; quoted from Moodle). This question was again partly seen by the students through the lens of the current war: "Yes, I think it is very important because it is a path to develop a European identity. Therefore, that Europe can come together as one to tackle economic and military threats from other nations. An unified Europe strengthens us as a whole, especially in our current situation with expansionistic Russia, it's urgent Europe reacts as one and overcomes problems like this as a true union" (student, mobility month task 8.1; quoted from Moodle).

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[5] Task of the day 8, sub-task 1: "Do you think European citizenship is useful or necessary in addition to national citizenship?"

In addition to the question of whether European citizenship is useful or necessary, in the second sub-task of task of the day 8[6] we asked the students whether they thought there were citizenship rights that were better addressed by the European Union than by the **nation state**. Students were generally ambivalent about the question; around half wrote that they were not sure ("I am not sure" (student, mobility month task 8.2; quoted from Moodle)). Some students, on the other hand, mentioned specific fields where they thought the EU had or should have more possibilities. Here are two examples: "Definitely yes, for example, equal pay conditions for women, environmental conditions, food and product quality, better care for prisoners, etc." (student, mobility month task 8.2; quoted from Moodle). "Yes, I think there are. EU is much more supportive of minorities than my nation state" (student, mobility month task 8.2; quoted from Moodle).

When talking about the European integration process, another question that arises is that of democratic legitimacy within the multi-level system of the EU. In the third sub-task of task of the day 8[7] the students were therefore asked whether the **EU Parliament should have even more rights**.

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[6] Task of the day 8, sub-task 2: "Are there citizenship rights that are better adressed by the European Union than by the nation state?"
[7] Task of the day 8, sub-task 3: "Do you think the European Parliament should have more power to frame politics for European citizens?"

The students' opinions on this question were very mixed. Some were firmly opposed ("NO, they should have less power, we are an independent state, not a colony of the EU" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle)), while others agreed with the current balance of power ("No, I think the actual amount is fine" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle)). On the other hand, many students answered this question quite enthusiastically with a wish for an expansion of the European Parliament's influence. Here are a few examples: "I think yes, because it represents the citizens of the European Union and should therefore take priority in them" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle). "Yes, I do! […] I think it's critical for the protection of our rights and democracy that the EU takes a step towards unifying all EU countries" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle). Some students also mentioned specific areas where they would like to see more influence of the European Parliament, including climate change and legislation: "In the globalised world we live in, we need to stand united as Europe to be noticed. Individual European countries have little influence on big powers like the US, China and Russia. In addition, global solutions are needed for challenges such as climate change. Individual nation states cannot stop the climate crisis alone. That is why I believe that the European Parliament should have more power" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle). "Members of the European Parliament, together with the Council of Ministers, are responsible for legislation in the Union. But only the EU Commission can submit legislative proposals. Therefore, a democratic deficit is criticized. The Parliament should instead be strengthened and given more power. Because, unfortunately, the real power in the EU does not lie with the Parliament" (student, mobility month task 8.3; quoted from Moodle).

5 Conclusion

During mobility month, many of the project's goals in terms of content were achieved in joint work. This applies above all to an intensive, discursive engagement with questions of European and national identity as well as European citizenship. During the entire project period, learning opportunities for schools were developed and presented to teachers in multiplier events. The possibilities of the virtual world of Kitely for the development of digital learning offers were explored and analysed, especially regarding possible barriers of users with special needs, and corresponding offers were implemented.

References

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2) European Union. o. J. "Schumann-Erklärung von Mai 1950." *Homepage of the European Union.* https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950_de (zuletzt aufgerufen am 22.09.2022).