

The project “Counter Euroscepticism with you Vote” was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"

Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.2 "Networks of Towns"

Measure 2.3 "Civil Society Projects"

Strand 1 – "European Remembrance"

Preparatory activities (if applicable): the activities involved 25 participants.

Location / Dates:

19.3.2020 online partners meeting, with 21 participants;
19.10.2020 and 26.10.2020 in Novo Mesto (Slovenia), with 13 and 16 participants;
6.3.2021 meeting in Maribor (Slovenia) with 10 participants;
13.3.2021 meeting in Ljubljana (Slovenia) with 16 participants;
2.6.2021 partial online meeting in (Czech Republic) with 14 participants;
17.6.2021 and 18.6.2021 in Mórahalom (Hungary) with 25 participants;
21.10.2021 online partners meeting, with 7 participants;
18.1.2022 online partners meeting, with 9 participants.

Short description:

Above are listed some of the meetings that partners organized in the preparation of the events. The preparatory activities of the project that were implemented were designed to ensure the successful implementation of the small and big events, the preparatory meeting included discussions of the included topics and speakers. Promotion of the events and the implementation was an important theme because the events were organized in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. We organized meetings also in regards to the development of the materials for the online platform and the development of the research report. For the development of the materials and the research report we consulted experts in the field of social studies which were focused on the voting process in the EU, the state of Euroscepticism and civic activities. Based on the meeting conclusions we designed the questionnaire and the final research report, which showed that there is a very big difference in regards of Euroscepticism, voting turnout and rule of law in EU countries.

Events:

9 events have been carried out within this project:

Event 1

Participation: The event involved 41 citizens, including 38 participants from the city of Maribor, Ljubljana, Novo Mesto and Litija (**Slovenia**) and 3 participants from Zagreb (**Croatia**).

Location / Dates: The event took place in **Novo Mesto, Slovenia**, from 07/10/2020 to 08/10/2020

Short description: The aim of the event was to increase the development of Active Citizenship and Youth Activism in Slovenia. The second aim was to increase the knowledge of the EU values and EU policy.

Presentation of Active Citizenship and EU future:

- Presentation of Active Citizenship; what it is; who can be described as an Active Citizen; how to become an Active Citizen, what are typical mechanisms of Active Citizenship; Dismissal of myths about Active Citizenship
- Promotion of next EU elections, importance of EU elections
- Presentation of Best practice to increase Active Citizenship for Youth in Slovenia
- EU future and challenges; Next challenges for the EU; Migration crisis and EU policies; inclusion of migrants in local communities in Novo mesto, Slovenia.

Active Citizenship and Youth Activism – discussion with participants:

- How to increase Active Citizenship
- Volunteering options
- Effects of Active Citizenship on the city Maribor and Novo mesto in Slovenia

EU values and EU policy for inclusive society

- Presentation of EU values
- Importance of EU values and their basis for further EU policies
- EU values regarding the migrant crisis and challenges of EU

Examples and best practices for migrant inclusion in local communities

Event 2

Participation: The event involved 31 citizens, including 31 participants from the city of Zagreb and Slavonski Brod (Croatia)

Location / Dates: The event took place in **Slavonski Brod, Croatia**, from 19/02/2021 to 19/02/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was the development of Active Citizenship and Youth Croatia. The event presented different experts that presented active citizenship, different best practices that are being implemented in Croatia and EU. Some of the event topics that were concluded with a discussion were:

- New Push for European Democracy
- System of civil protection in crisis situations
- Human rights and crisis situations
- Humanity and solidarity in action
- Young people's right to information in crisis situations
- Youth Power, Connectivity, Go Pro
- Active EU – workshop

Event 3

Participation: The event involved 48 citizens, including 19 participants from the city of Maribor, Ljubljana, Novo Mesto and Litija (**Slovenia**), 3 participants the city of Bratislava (**Slovakia**), 6 participants from the city of Prague (**Czech Republic**), 6 participants from the city of Zagreb and Slavonski Brod (**Croatia**), 10 participants from the city of Sopronkövesd (**Hungary**), and 4 participants from the city Graz (**Austria**)

Location / Dates: The event took place online from **Maribor, Slovenia**, from 23/03/2021 to 24/03/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was to address the state of Democracy in EU, particularly in the partner countries. Many different measurements for the state of democracy in Europe and around the world as Democracy Index (compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit) and Global State of Democracy Indices (compiled by the International IDEA), show that democracy in Europe is declining and its promise needs revival. Indeed, the value, viability and future of democracy are more contested now than ever before in modern history, or at least since the 1930s. While the past four decades have seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout all regions of the world, recent years have been marked by declines in the fabric of both older and younger democracies. While the idea of democracy continues to mobilize people around the world, the practice of existing democracies has disappointed and disillusioned many citizens and democracy advocates.

Speakers contributed to the main theme of the event by presenting best practices, research, analysis of positive/negative trends regarding the state of the democracy from their countries and spread their knowledge to all partner countries.

Event 4

Participation: The event involved 45 citizens, including 45 participants from the city of Bratislava and other cities in Slovakia (**Slovakia**)

Location / Dates: The event took place online from **Bratislava, Slovakia**, from 31/03/2021 to 31/03/2021

Short description: The event was dedicated to three separate sessions of lecture and discussions, which were set-up and led by the lecturer and supervised by the event admin.

1st session of topics: personal session dedicated to attitudes and relationship with the EU. Within this session, the lecturer discussed how a positive relationship is formed with political institutions. The group discussed what are the main questions and values that are individually pondered and how EU can tap into this with its own communication. The participants were requested to think about their own understanding of personal benefits of the EU and how they can communicate them. Final part of this section was dedicated to discussing the benefits of the EU vis-à-vis our own construction of positive future.

2nd session of topics – interactive work with online tools on efficient communication. The lecturer first discussed how “framing” of particular topics affects our understanding and emotional setup when reading/hearing news. This session was also dedicated to questions of how to efficiently communicate in the online environment of information chaos. The group discussed the possibilities of storytelling and visual language when framing messages about the EU politics and policies.

3rd session of topics – discussion on communication as a value-ridden process. This session was dedicated to discussion of public space polarisation, use of disinformation and hoaxes. The questions were raised on how to communicate without sacrificing one's values of freedom of speech and democratic plurality, and how to communicate in a way that we build solidarities and the of liberal democracy.

Event 5

Participation: The event involved 29 citizens, including 28 participants from the city of Hradec, Prague and Ostrava (**Czech Republic**), 1 participants from the city of Bratislava (**Slovakia**)

Location / Dates: The event took place in **Hradec, Czech Republic**, from 24/05/2021 and 26/05/2021 and 31/05/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was to encourage young people to take active citizenship. Teach participants about active citizenship in their respected community and countries. It was a wide range of participants with training topics focused mainly on; "How can adults improve their active citizenship?" The meeting focused on the importance of voting and participating in EU elections, a topic that is usually ignored. Participants were motivated to participate in the EU elections by providing evidence. Participants discussed how active voting can change citizens' daily lives. It was discussed why it is important to be more interested in what the EU does. When the next European Parliament elections were repeated with examples of how citizens can vote. We showed the participants how to vote not only in the EU elections, but also in the Czech elections to the Senate, the parliament and how to elect the elected president. We called on participants to become more involved in democratic life, not only in their local community, but also at EU level, which is currently underestimated under the age of 30. We have shown them the benefits of the Czech Republic being part of the EU by introducing policies that affect Czech citizens and also showing them how EU funding is maintained. We used the participatory method Oxford Debate. Participants acquired competencies for personal and professional development. They also gained knowledge and specific know-how. They experimented and developed new learning methods and training methods. They established new contacts and expanded their professional network.

Event 6

Participation: The event involved 26 citizens, including 26 participants from the city of Graz and Vienna (**Austria**)

Location / Dates: The event took place in **Graz, Austria**, from 11/07/2021 to 11/07/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was improve the state of active citizenship in Austria, with special focus on younger people and those who have recently moved to Austria. The event was called "Our Europe – our history – our future". We have decided to include the external partners to reach a stronger multiplier effect. As Europe and active citizenship is an important topic also for our target group – young refugees, who have been living in Austria long enough to already obtain the Austrian citizenship, we have also involved them in the event. The programme was based on non-formal education methods such as group work, brainstorming and discussion. In this way participants were not only learning about the European Union and active citizenship, but also improving their communication skills and cooperation as well as decision-making skills (group work), they were enhancing creativity (brainstorming) and learning how to analyse information and think critically (discussion). Moreover, we have included an informational video about the European Union, World Café and examples of good practices. Discussing EU values and how these are being implemented in real life was an important part especially for involved third country nationals. Debates, discussions and group work lead to positive results in terms of personal decisions regarding their future citizen participation

Event 7

Participation: The event involved 53 citizens, including 53 participants from the city of Sopronkövesd and Budapest (**Hungary**)

Location / Dates: The event took place in **Sopronkövesd, Hungary**, from 19/11/2021 to 19/11/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was addressing the growing Euroscepticism and national governments mistrust and active citizenship in Hungary. Nowadays, the growing Euroscepticism and national governments mistrust has a fundamentally demoralizing effect on citizens' electoral habits: in many countries, the participation rate in the European Union Parliamentary elections is only around 30%. In order to understand these processes, 6 countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary) organized events within the framework of this project:

- to encourage citizens and civilians to participate in elections;
- addressing young people and encouraging their active involvement.

The goal was to make the project better known to the participating residents on this day, with local NGOs. Representatives of local institutions were also present they presented the opportunities to access European Union funds and for subsidies, and what developments have/can be realized as a result. In addition, it was possible to listen to an interesting lecture, which is about community and we can get to know one of the good examples of value-based development in Balaton-Felvidék.

Event 8

Participation: The event involved 60 citizens, including 29 participants from the city of Maribor, Ljubljana, Novo Mesto and Litija (**Slovenia**), 3 participants the city of Bratislava (**Slovakia**), 4 participants from the city of Prague (**Czech Republic**), 11 participants from the city of Zagreb and Slavonski Brod (**Croatia**), 4 participants from the city of Sopronkövesd (**Hungary**), and 9 participants from the city Graz (**Austria**)

Location / Dates: The event took place online from **Graz, Austria**, from 26/11/2020 and 29/11/2021

Short description: The aim of the event was to address the state of European Parliament election, particularly in the partner countries. This event focused on the participation in EU elections. On the positive developments in some EU states, but also on the negative ones in other. The last 2019 European elections had a relatively high turnout, which was driven by a surge in participation by young people, according to a Eurobarometer survey commissioned by the European Parliament. The results of the post-electoral Eurobarometer survey, one of the most comprehensive quantitative surveys of the last European elections publicly available, show that the turnout increase was powered mostly by the younger generation across the EU. Specifically, young citizens under 25 years (+14 percentage points) as well as the 25–39 year-olds (+12 percentage points) turned out in greater numbers than before. Overall turnout at European elections was 50.6% - the highest since 1994. 19 Member States registered increases in voter turnout since 2014, especially Poland, Romania, Spain, Austria, Hungary and Germany as well as Slovakia and Czechia, where turnout is traditionally very low. Meanwhile turnout is still very low in many countries especially in some of the project partner countries as Slovakia, Czechia, Slovenia and Croatia. Event theme and their speakers addressed the state of EU elections through the presentation of different studies, research, best practices, methodologies and practical implementation that made changes that increased voter turnout. After which a discussion followed.

Event 9

Participation: The event involved 59 citizens, including 30 participants from the city of Maribor, Ljubljana, Novo Mesto and Litija (**Slovenia**), 7 participants the city of Bratislava (**Slovakia**), 5 participants from the city of Prague (**Czech Republic**), 9 participants from the city of Zagreb and Slavonski Brod (**Croatia**), 4 participants from the city of Sopronkövesd (**Hungary**), and 4 participants from the city Graz (**Austria**)

Location / Dates: The event took place online from **Bratislava, Slovakia**, from 23/05/2022 to 24/05/2022

Short description: The aim of the event was to address the future of EU and the challenges of Euroscepticism, particularly in the partner countries. This event focused on the different types of Euroscepticism which are present in the partner countries and wider EU. The strategies to combat Euroscepticism and the reason for Euroscepticism increases. Addressed was also the future of EU and the challenges which are going to face the state of EU in the next decade.

The EU is largely viewed as a cornerstone of European stability and prosperity. For much of the last decades, however, many EU countries have faced considerable economic difficulties. Despite an improved economic situation in the EU since 2017, economic pressures and societal changes have contributed to the rise of populist and anti-establishment political parties, at least some of which harbour anti-EU or “Eurosceptic” sentiments. Such trends have complicated the EU’s ability to deal with multiple internal and external challenges. Among the most prominent challenges are

- COVID 19 pandemic challenges;
- climate challenge challenges;
- democracy and rule-of-law concerns in some EU members;
- the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU (“Brexit”);
- migration and related societal integration concerns;

Amid these difficult issues, some are questioning the future shape and character of the EU. Supporters of the EU worry that certain aspects of EU integration could be stopped or reversed. Others contend that the multiple crises could produce some beneficial reforms and ultimately transform the EU into a more effective, cohesive entity. One of the biggest challenges, which is facing the future of the EU, is certainly Euroscepticism. In the aftermath of a decade of crisis, the 2019 European Parliament elections confirmed the results of the 2014 elections as voters turned away from the traditional political families to vote for parties with a strong message on Europe, including Eurosceptic parties. It further evidenced the normalization of Euroscepticism, which has become a stable component of European politics.