

EUth for Democracy
French Country Team

EDDY

Accelerator

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Identity and
democracy
BUDAPEST
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Problem Outline

As a European team representing France on the occasion of the EUth for Democracy project, we initiated our brainstorming process to identify the problem we would like to tackle, and it soon became apparent that we had to account for a number of clichés in terms of democratic practices. Whilst seeking to formulate our problem, we agreed that in a broader sense, the European Union (EU) is facing a collection of democratic deficits, which could mean that the issue of democracy in the EU could be approached from multiple layers, and that we needed to identify the trigger of such deficits in order to address it.

We therefore structured our initial discussions around the deconstruction/demystification of clichés regarding democratic deficits in the EU and identified two areas from which the problem could emerge, namely communication and education. Due to fake news abundance and miscommunication at local, national and EU levels (institutionally), it seems that messages are distorted and the credibility of EU actors is undermined. Ultimately, citizens in EU countries find it difficult to feel they form an active part of the EU, which results in lack of involvement, criticism and propensity to cede to populist and/or anti-EU discourses.

Through enhanced discussions and exchanges, we concluded that the major problem we see regarding democracy in the EU revolves around **European education** and misinformation. Our reasoning was informed by the different EU countries we have lived in, and the observation of a select group of citizens who usually tend to partake in EU-related discussions, events or actions, as they share, more often than not, a similar educational background and interests.

This led us to question ourselves about the reasons beyond such participatory shortage which fuels democratic deficits, and an explanation might well be the **insufficient knowledge** (or its absence) of key aspects regarding the EU. In fact, there needs to be a clear, accessible manner to inform citizens at all ages about the EU (mission, raison d'être, vision, agenda and relevancy, today and tomorrow). In other words, we need to educate people and nurture their interest in what sometimes comes across as an old-fashioned structure that struggles to convey a shared identity and to foster a sense of belonging for European citizens.

How we got to the solution

The major differences in education practices across Member States drew our attention as we started to think about the solution we could develop to address the lack of European education that fuels mistrust and a certain feeling of disappointment or lack of interest in the EU. Since the EU has a complementary competence in the field of education, it would be difficult to approach the problem from the perspective of a European education curriculum, and it would be unrealistic to assume that Member States would agree on a shared agenda in this respect. Consequently, we opted for a different route, one that would require focus on education pre-University students across the EU in an unconventional manner that would not require treaty changes or Member States' alignment on a shared European Education policy to be implemented in countries.

Our first approach was to realize a survey aimed at both students (and parents of primary school pupils) and teachers to map perceptions regarding their knowledge about democracy and the EU.

Survey Findings

The survey was conducted among pupils and teachers from different Member States during the 18th March and the 7th of April 2021; 117 pupils and 96 teachers from Albania, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain and Switzerland participated. Given the limitation of time and resources, we recommend setting up a second survey for a deeper understanding.

The **pupils** survey highlighted two matters of concern: on the one hand, gaps in knowledge of the EU and democratic processes; on the other hand, increasing deficits in smaller cities. For the former, it should be stressed that only pupils who believe they have a good knowledge about the EU want to participate in activities that allow them to deepen and broaden their knowledge. For the latter, it emerged that there is a direct proportional relationship between the size of the city and the perception of democracy as a fundamental value:

the bigger the city, the more democracy is perceived as important and there is a willingness to take part in activities of promotion and encouragement of it. Therefore we concluded that there are in fact areas of marginalisation that need to be addressed by providing educational and training tools that encourage participation.

The **teachers** survey revealed that it is of primary importance to foster knowledge about the EU and democratic processes. In fact, it emerged that a majority of teachers with specific democracy competences would use some of their time to share them with pupils (89,83%). The majority of these teachers believe that it is extremely important that at least one day per year is dedicated to activities on democracy and another day is dedicated to activities about the EU. On the other hand, once again a correlation has emerged between the city size and the degree of participation in European and democratic activities. Even in this case, the bigger the city, the more likely teachers have been involved in a European project. Moreover, in the biggest cities there are more teachers with specific competences to teach pupils about democracy and its meaning.

These **results** allowed us to deduce that there are disadvantages mainly localized in small environments, so there is the need to take initiatives to promote the sense of belonging to the EU by encouraging the knowledge of the democratic processes on which the EU is based.

EDDY Accelerator

The European Parliament has made access to digital education a priority in the attempt to bridge the education gap within Member States and across the EU (European Commission 2020). Based on the vision for the European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan announced by the European Commission in 2020 (European Parliament 2020), our proposal comes as an addition by accounting for the pre-university population.

The **EDDY Accelerator** targets EU pupils aged 6-18 (primary school to high-school) with the aim to provide training and a hands-on experience of democracy as a founding pillar of the EU. Launched by the *European Agency for Education* (to be created under the leadership of the EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth), the EDDY Accelerator will take place yearly and facilitate the experience of democracy, how it is relevant to an EU citizen, and how it is expressed structurally and functionally from the perspective of EU processes, institutions and dynamics with Member States. It will be a free programme with 2 major components: a European Day of Democracy for Youth (to be created) and a European Democracy Driver for Youth - a tournament organised every school year via one digital platform accessible within EU countries.

European Day of Democracy for Youth - EDDY

Democracy is the basis for life as a citizen in the EU. To highlight this value and the participation it implies to young people, we would like to introduce the **European Day of Democracy for Youth (EDDY)**, aimed at all pupils aged 6 to 18 and their teachers living within the EU. It is a voluntary program. To boost the motivation of its participants, different types of inducements will be thoroughly implemented.

We are targeting pupils because we are convinced that this is the best way to reach a diverse and socially heterogeneous audience. We want to give everyone the chance to learn about democracy and their rights, regardless of their social and family background. As EDDY is also the kick-off event of the yearly program (see following section), it takes place in early October. The aim is to hold the day on the same date in all European countries to promote a sense of European cohesion.

The purpose of this day is to teach pupils about participatory democracy. Thus, simulations are carried out in small groups where pupils experience what it means to live democracy, benefit from freedom of expression and learn how to negotiate and compromise.

In order to address pupils in an age-appropriate way, we distinguish three groups:

- **Ages 6-10** - We propose discussions with the teachers about topics close to everyday life, such as classroom rules. Due to the young age of this group, most of the time will be spent on playful activities such as games, team-building and creative activities related to democracy.
- **Ages 11-14** - We suggest discussions and debates about relevant topics on a local level, e.g. town issues or changes students would like to see in their community. Teachers can help moderate the discussion.
- **Ages 15-18** - This age group will simulate democracy more in-depth and explore more complex subjects, e.g. rule of law. Also, students will have digital exchanges with same-age pupils coming from other EU countries, to foster discussion, cultural diversity, curiosity and EU identity.

In order to actively involve teachers in the program and to simplify the organisation as much as possible, detailed pedagogical materials and videos will be provided by the *European Agency for Education*, and external mediators could be associated as well.

European Democracy Driver for Youth - EDDY Tournament

The **European Democracy Driver for Youth (EDDY Tournament)** will promote EU democracy-related values (topic announced by the *European Agency for Education*) in an innovative manner. It will involve an interactive platform and educational content that uses gamification to stimulate and incentivise participation, and will be open for individual pupils and/or school enrolment, respecting the same calendar. The EDDY Tournament will follow the model of a EU sports championship leveraging youngsters' propensity to partake in initiatives where they can compete, form teams, meet peers to develop team-driven behaviour patterns.

The **educational content** will be provided and adapted for each age group by EU experts every year. The platform and the educational content will be available in all EU languages and optimised for mobile experience following a **three-track structure**:

Learn Track: gamified content designed to provide basic information regarding democratic values associated with the EU. Badges will be collected throughout the **Learn** track and points will be considered for the **Engage** track in order to form teams that bring together students with diverse profiles.

- **Ages 6-10 | 1.5 month (October-November)**
Modules on familiarisation with community and citizenship, geographical settings and functioning of communities (simulate simple scenarios in which decisions are made), and introduction of the concept of democracy.
- **Ages 11-14 | 2 months (October-November)**
Modules on community traits (values, traditions), diversity within regions, countries and at EU level, decision-making within different community types, democratic approaches to decision-making, basic legal frameworks (local/national/EU).
- **Ages 15-18 | 3 months (October-December)**
Modules on EU & Member States (institutions, roles, treaties, cooperation), how member states cooperate in a democratic manner, how democracy governs activity, democracy at play (when democracy succeeded in the EU and when it failed).

Engage Track: a case study announced by the *European Agency for Education* to tackle one issue. Participants from different backgrounds will be mixed to learn about working on democratic participation. Team members will work individually via the platform to prepare for interactive group sessions moderated by trainers in the local language (exception for ages 15-18). Students will be grouped randomly to form:

- **Ages 6-10 - School/City teams | 1 month (January-February) | 3-5 participants / group | 2 sessions**
- **Ages 11-14 - City/Region/Country teams | 1.5 months (January-February) | 4-6 participants / group | 2 sessions**

Case-studies will be accessible on the platform, whilst moderators will guide participants. Pedagogical Officers will be in charge of the administrative procedures and maintain contact with pupils and parents.

- **Ages 15-18 - Country/European teams | 2 months (January-February) | 5-7 participants / group | 3 sessions**

If participants are grouped together from the same country, the working language will be the country one. If participants are grouped from different countries in the EU to access an European track, each student will have the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue and simultaneous translation will be ensured by the organisers as done in EU institutions in the local language, either for participants within the same city/region or at country-level.

Act Track: team-work on the issue to propose a solution. The objective is to provide hands-on experience regarding the application of democratic principles in EU matters, and participants will capitalise on the **Learn** and **Engage** tracks. Guided by the trainer, pupils will develop their solution in sessions delivered via the platform.

- **Ages 6-10 | 1 month (March-April) | 2 sessions**

Ages 11-14 | 1.5 months (March-April) | 2 sessions

The solution will be recorded by the trainer based on the participants' contribution during the 3 sessions and introduced into a digital catalogue available on the platform and crediting all participants for their input. Teams will be considered for a set of Prizes (top 3/city or region // top 10/country) awarded for: Relevancy, Innovation, Feasibility, EU-scalability (how the solution can be rolled out/replicated in other EU countries), Sustainability. Solutions will be translated in all the EU languages and the digital catalogue will be published on the European Day of Democracy for Youth.

- **Ages 15-18 | 2 months (March-April) | 3 sessions**

Each team will have a trainer to provide guidance, nevertheless the team will be responsible to organise the 4 virtual sessions. Team members need to appoint a team leader who will be accountable for ensuring the fair and equitable participation of the team members. The **Act** track will include **one plenary conference** of the EDDY Tournament, with speakers specialised in the topic that pupils are working on. At the end, teams will submit their solutions and they will be analysed by a panel of high-level EU experts, following the same criteria outlined for the other two age groups. The top 3 teams will be invited to present their solutions within a plenary session of the European Parliament in June, involving a 3 day-trip, all-expenses funded for each team member and their adult companion. The trainers guiding students during the **Engage & Act** tracks will be selected by launching calls for teachers in the EU who will be trained to develop their digital pedagogical know-how.

Cooperations, communication and partnerships

In order to successfully implement and roll out the EDDY Accelerator,, the most important concern is to cooperate with as many schools as possible. Therefore the *European Agency for Education* will send the programme and materials in advance to schools all over the EU. In addition, participating schools will be awarded a certificate and pupils will receive a digital EDDY-pass, with a badge for each participation. If a school is not yet participating in the EDDY programme, students can take the initiative and contact the *European Agency for Education* to initiate the programme in their region. All pupils can attend the EDDY Accelerator regardless of their school's participation.

In addition to the cooperation with the schools, it is fundamental to build a long-term communication strategy and establish media partnerships. For communication, print advertising, and a targeted, group-specific digital communication via social media will be carried out.

Potential media partnerships could be established with ARTE, Euronews and Politico Europe. Other partnerships could be established over time to promote the programme, keeping in mind the age and interests of the target group, while choosing partners.

Conclusions

We believe that our project fits the 3 requested criteria:

Relevance:

- the EDDY Accelerator aims to provide tomorrow's citizens with a solid knowledge of Democracy in the EU and launch a common European education initiative - within the limits of institutional competence;
- this solution bridges gaps in national education systems by simulating democratic processes and discussions and a program that progressively leads pupils to act within democratic environments.

Innovativeness:

- the EDDY Accelerator uses innovative pedagogical digital participative methods to introduce pupils within all schools to EU democracy by spreading accessible knowledge and opportunities related to these themes;
- the EDDY Accelerator aims to complement the EU Agenda for Education with a project focusing on reinvigorating democracy as a cornerstone of the EU via education, at a time when disinformation, fake-news and socio-economic divide – Euroscepticism included - are rising among youth (The European Economic and Social Committee 2019);
- both the competitive nature of the EDDY Tournament, and the creation of a unique European Day of Democracy for Youth, are keystones to the project's success.

Feasibility:

- the EDDY Accelerator would be developed by the *European Agency for Education*, which would be established beforehand (this could be challenging) and would be responsible for the technical support, data security and overall content management on the platform;
- it requires minimal resources (internet connection) for its participants and is accessible via any mobile/desktop device from everywhere;
- the training for teaching staff can be financed via the Digital Education Action Plan and will contribute to achieving the agenda set for the European Education Area by 2025;.
- the EDDY Accelerator is independent of any kind of regulatory or legislative decisions from the Members State.

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