

Challenges of Education about Europe in Croatia: Research Summary



Mario Bajkuša and Maja Šarić

Summary

As part of the project "MEGA: Make Europe Great Again", a research was conducted with the aim of mapping the position, context, implementation and challenges of education about the European Union in Croatian secondary schools. The results of the research were published in the publication "White Paper on the Challenges of Education about the European Union in Croatia". This summary presents the research methodology, the main findings and recommendations for improving the teaching of EU-related topics in the education system.

INTRODUCTION

This Research Summary is published as one of the results of the project "MEGA – Make Europe Great Again". The MEGA project is an Erasmus+ project, funded by the French National Agency through the Erasmus+ programme and includes partners from France, Croatia, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

The project aims to address the challenges of education about the EU in Europe, as well as to improve learning materials, available resources and understanding on the EU in secondary education.

The respective target groups are teachers in secondary education, pupils aged 13 to 17 in secondary education and policy makers who are involved in the national education framework in Europe.

The expected results of the project include:

- Research was carried out, which became the basis for the drafting of the National White Papers on the challenges of education about the EU across Europe;
- A Resource Library including practical and useful learning resources to be utilised in education about the EU;
- E-learning materials and modules to reinforce teachers' knowledge about Europe and improve their teaching approaches for learning about the EU;
- Pick and Teach: Adaptation of training materials to secondary education specifically to improve usability and effectiveness of teaching and learning resources;

- Policy Paper to directly present the projects findings, results and impact to policy makers and inform them of possible challenges, obstacles and changes needed in the education framework to improve education on the EU.

More information about the project and its results can be found on the Forum for Freedom in Education's website - www.fso.hr.

METHODOLOGY

The research included the gathering and analysis of publicly available databases and reports, interviews with stakeholders of the education system, questionnaires with headmasters, expert staff in schools, teachers and pupils, as well as focus groups with teachers.

Of the six invited stakeholders, five responded and participated. We held interviews from November 2020 to January 2021, virtually with three stakeholders while one stakeholder gave a written answer and another with whom we had a live interview.

Completion of the questionnaire was conducted between February 10th and April 1st, 2021. In total, 62 headmasters and/or expert staff and 313 teachers from 29 schools and 578 pupils from 31 schools responded to questionnaires.

In focus-groups participated 20 female teachers, of which 12 taught in vocational schools and eight teachers from grammar schools.



MAIN FINDINGS

- Majority of teachers and pupils have a positive view of the EU.
- Even some of those teachers with negative or neutral views of the EU see the potential and opportunities the EU offers to the new generations.
- The national curriculum framework has content regarding the EU but it cannot be said that it is a priority. This content is compartmentalized in social, humanistic, and foreign languages subjects with topics about EU languages, geography and history being the most present.
- Topics such as European cultural heritage, EU politics and institutions, social and civil impact of the EU, economic and legal impact of the EU, EU identity and citizenship as well as other non-working languages of the EU are only mentioned in subjects or subjects provide pupils with basic knowledge about these topics.
- In case of schools' curricula, it can be concluded that the status of the education about the EU is undefined and heavily relies on headmasters' openness to this topic as well as teachers' willingness, and motivation to involve in teaching the EU.
- Headmasters, expert staff and teachers express confidence in their knowledge of the EU. However, they feel self-taught and usually they are learning by doing. Teachers express the need for further professional development in more specific, deeper, and complex EU topics.
- Teachers and some stakeholders report that teachers need pre-service training in the topics about the EU and systemic support on all levels. They substitute the lack of support with heavy reliance on a network of peers.
- Compartmentalization of EU related topics could also be seen in schools that have activities related to the EU. Politics and Economics, Ethics, Geography and History are the subjects which can be seen as the focal points of the education about the EU.
- While grammar schools teach pupils about the EU in general, vocational schools, on the other hand, seek to teach by converging knowledge about different European funds, how to use European subsidies and funds e.g. for a family farm or similar. They also encourage pupils to go on internships through Erasmus+ to add value and acquire additional professional skills.
- In general, teachers of Politics and Economics, Ethics, Geography and History point out that they are most successful in permeating EU topics in the curriculum, but very superficially, while foreign language teachers can implement certain topics in more detail and thoroughly due to more teaching hours.
- Both teachers and pupils see experiential learning – mobility, internships, study visits, and excursions – as the best and the most interesting method to teach and learn about the EU.
- Teachers see the following as the most useful resources: EPAS teaching materials, eTwinning as an extremely useful networking tool, participation in Erasmus+ exchanges and projects is a good tool for creating teaching materials, experiential learning and exchange. Teachers also consider projects in which the goal is to create digital content, pedagogical workshops, debate discussions, research work and travel as motivating for working with pupils.
- Teachers also heavily rely on training and materials provided by civil society organisations.
- Pupils' motivation and interest vary significantly. The prevailing teachers' opinion is that pupils are primarily motivated by the possibility of mobility, exchange and travel.
- Majority of 81% pupils expressed interest to learn more about the EU, singling out different languages of the EU as the most interesting topic. Topics that also interest pupils are on how the EU affects Croatia, and about EU member states and their culture. The two topics of the lowest pupils' interest are economic and political impact of the EU and creation and history of the EU.
- In general, the pupils' view of their own knowledge of certain topics related to the EU as well as confidence in their own knowledge can be placed somewhere around the middle. Pupils express that they are familiar with the ways in which the EU affects Croatia, that they are familiar with different cultures in the EU, about what the EU is and what it does. On the other hand, most of the pupils who participated in the survey stated that they were not familiar with the purpose and operation of the European Parliament, the European Commission and



The national curriculum framework has content regarding the EU but it cannot be said that it is a priority. This content is compartmentalized in social, humanistic, and foreign languages subjects with topics about EU languages, geography and history being the most present.

that they were not sure that they could list European institutions.

— Headmasters and expert staff single out the following challenges when it comes to education about the EU: lack of teachers' interest, lack of European knowledge by teachers and the fact that the education about the EU is not a priority in the curriculum.

— Teachers emphasize these challenges: overlapping schedules, lack of support by the school staff, lack of systematic (local and national support), mostly volunteer work and insufficient financial support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Curriculum

— Educational authorities should introduce Civic Education as a compulsory subject together with Civic education as a cross-curricular topic as an appropriate basis for the development of civic competences which includes European dimensions.

— Civic Education, both as a compulsory subject and cross-curricular topic, should have an appropriate curriculum that includes the EU education dimension on all levels of education and should be oriented towards learning outcomes.

— Curriculum should encourage interdisciplinary approach to EU topics.

— The EU and democratic society have been declared as key policy areas in the Republic of Croatia, and, consequently, they should be included in the teaching and assessment of pupils.

Institutional support to schools and teachers

— European education should become a mandatory dimension of teachers' pre-service training as well as supplementary pedagogical-psychological education for all professionals working in schools.

— Educational authorities should regularly map and record the needs of teachers for professional development in education about the EU and respond to those needs with systematic and continuous professional development.

— It is necessary to provide a stimulating environment for their professional development where every teacher can acquire the competencies needed to teach about the EU, as well as for its cross-curricular implementation.

— Introducing a system of identification and recognition of schools with good practice in EU education and a system for the dissemination of good practice to other schools.

— Activities implemented in school should be adequately included in teachers' workload.

— Encourage schools with financial and institutional resources to teach and implement the EU education.

Teaching materials

— Provide conditions for the development of instructions, manuals, textbooks and other teaching materials according to the outcomes of the curriculum.

— Provide material support to schools, and teachers in the implementation of the curriculum, including the exchange of experiences between teachers who implement the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

— Provide a variety of digital and printed resources adaptable for learning and teaching about the EU in class.

— Encourage school libraries to become centers for the dissemination of information about the EU.

Implementation

— Teaching about the EU should first and foremost emphasize values shared among EU nations which are the sole foundation of the EU: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, human rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, equality between women and men.

— When teaching about democracy and citizenship, European dimension should be emphasized, especially European citizenship.

— Teaching about the EU must be seen as one of the instruments for developing the democratic school which should not be omitted.



Educational authorities should introduce Civic Education as a compulsory subject together with Civic education as a cross-curricular topic as an appropriate basis for the development of civic competences which includes European dimensions.





Teaching about the EU must be connected with the everyday life of pupils. They must be fully included in the teaching process from the planning to the implementation.

- Critically identify political indoctrination and mythology in defining the EU's role in everyday life.
- Conduct EU education using interactive, research and collaborative learning methods with an emphasis on research-project teaching, debate and extracurricular activities.
- Encouraging pupils to critically observe and analyze real social problems with an emphasis on different points of view. In this context, the EU itself should not be excluded from critical observation and constructive assessment.
- Teaching about the EU must be connected with the everyday life of pupils. They must be fully included in the teaching process from the planning to the implementation.



“White Paper on the Challenges of Education about Europe in Croatia”

You can download the complete research report in Croatian and English from the website of the Forum for Freedom in Education - www.fso.hr.



Challenges of Education about Europe in Croatia: Research Summary

Publisher: Forum for Freedom in Education — Đorđićeva 8, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia — For publisher: Ana Munivrana

Authors: Mario Bajkuša and Maja Šarić — Graphic Layout: Mario Bajkuša — Zagreb, 2021.

Citation: Bajkuša, M. and M. Šarić (2021) Challenges of Education about Europe in Croatia: Research Summary. Zagreb: Forum for Freedom in Education.

The document was created within the Erasmus + project „MEGA: Make Europe Great Again” (2020-1-FR01-KA201-080193). This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

