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# WHAT MAKES US EUROPEANS?



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# WHAT MAKES US EUROPEANS?

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# 1. EUROPEAN IDENTITY CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Have you ever thought about what makes us European? Is it the fact that we all live within the borders of one continent, that we share a common market and, in general, a single currency? Or about all of us sharing the same values: solidarity, rule of law, freedom of expression and respect.

## Historical perspective

The issue of European identity was officially being mentioned in 1973, at the Copenhagen Summit, when the Declaration on European Identity was signed and could not have been developed without the existence of a union of states: the European Union.

The idea of a European Union emerged from a common aspiration for peace and stability and has its roots back in 1953, when the European Economic Community was created. In 1993, the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union under its current name and introduced the European citizenship.

The EU is a unique political and economical partnership between 28 European states that together cover much of the continent. It operates through a system of supranational institutions and intergovernmental negotiated decisions by member states.

## Institutional perspective

The main European institutions are: the **European Council**, the **European Parliament**, the **European Commission** and the **Council of the European Union**.

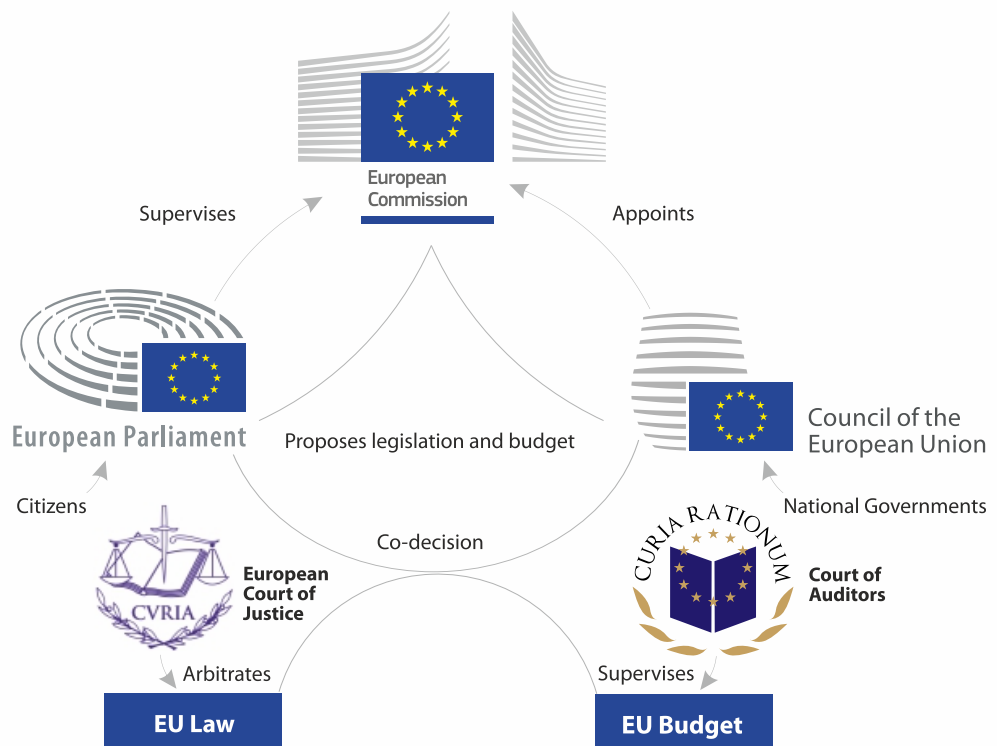
The first one sets the EU's overall political direction but has no powers to pass laws. The last three ones are involved in the law making process, shaping the EU legislation.

The European Parliament represents the EU citizens. 750 MEPs, plus the President, are directly elected by them, every five years.

The European Commission, composed of 28 commissioners, one from each EU member state, represents and upholds the interest of the union as a whole.

The Council of the European Union represents the governments of individual EU member states.

Two other vital institutions are the European Court of Justice, upholding the rule of European law and the Court of Auditors checking the finances of EU activities.



### **28 countries, dozens of languages and idiomas, millions of European citizens**

Europe is a complex society and diversity is one of its key characteristics. European citizens are different in many ways: age, gender, personal beliefs and religion, ethnicity and language spoken.

But our common European identity is supported by a common cultural and educational heritage.

According a Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> 9 out 10 young people have participated in a cultural activity in the last 12 months. Also, when asked about what contributes most to their sense of community with other Europeans, most people (27%) chose culture over economy (24%).

Initiatives like the European Capital of Culture or the European Youth Capital are, annually developed, to encourage us to explore Europe in its whole, realizing that despite a different national background, we are all the same.

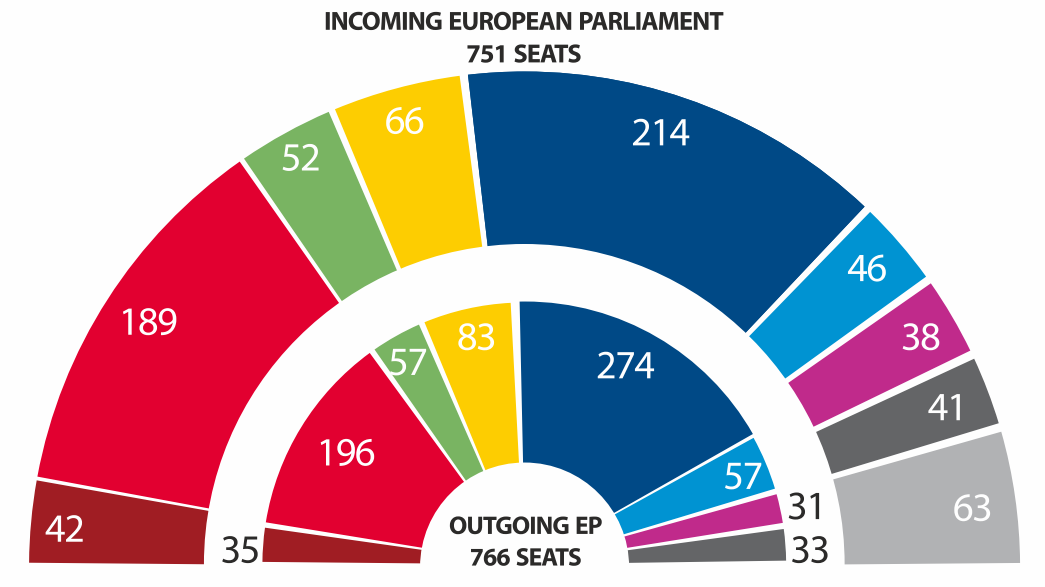


## 2. CURRENT EUROPEAN CHALLENGES

### The wide-rise of euro scepticism, Europhobia, hate speech and the fall of trust in the EU

The major financial crises Europe faced, changed the European Union as we all know. Extremist political parties are gaining more and more followers, the euroscepticism is increasingly present and the Europhobic speech is strongly present among European leaders. In this turbulent context, young people are confused and tend to embrace the nationalist side.

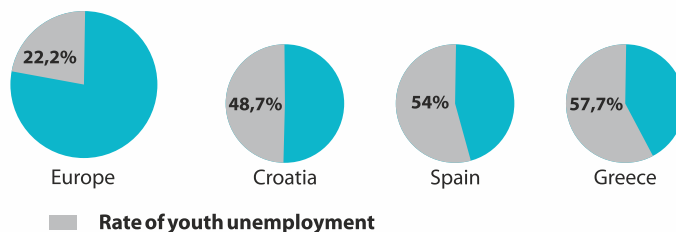
#### European Parliament Elections results 2009 vs. 2014<sup>1</sup>



#### Key

- Hard Left Group
- Socialist Group including British Labour
- Greens Group including British Greens
- Liberals including British Liberal Democrats
- European Peoples Party (Centre Right)
- European Conservatives (British Conservatives + Allies)
- European Freedom And Democracy (UKIP + Allies)
- Independents (Including French Front National)
- Others: Newly elected members not allied to any of the existing political groups

Much more, they have to face dramatic levels of unemployment. In May 2014, more than 5.2 million young Europeans were unemployed. One in five young European could not find a job and in countries such as Greece and Spain, the proportion is even more concerning: one in two. 22.2% is the rate of youth unemployment in Europe, the largest being registered in Greece (57.7%), Spain (54%) and Croatia (48.7%).



Considering all these, we are somehow entitled to ask ourselves what makes a European citizen more prone to lose his trust in the European Union and why is euroscepticism on the rise? Whilst recent elections results show a sharp increase of support for political parties that carry a strong anti-EU message all Union, a Eurobarometer sheds some scientific light on this subject.

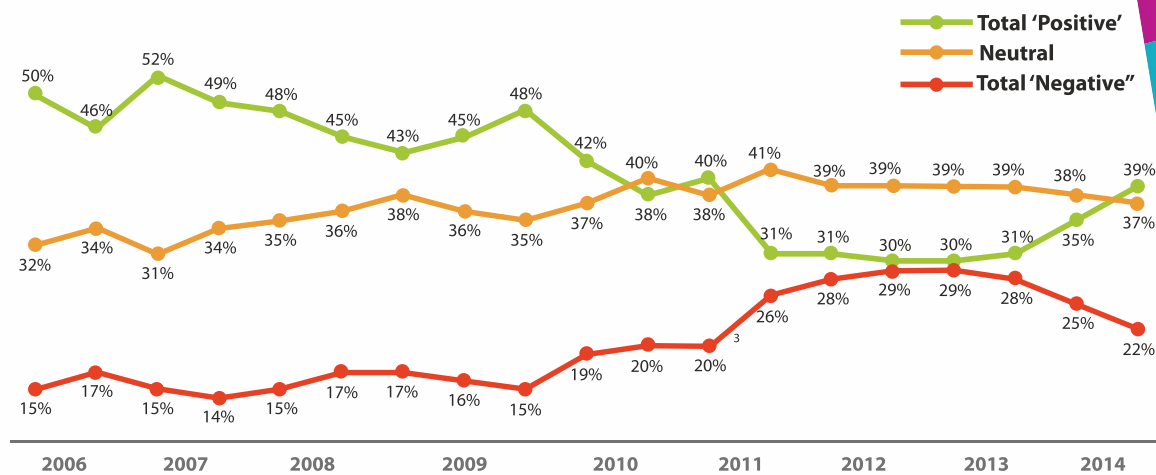
<sup>1</sup>European elections 2014: Marine Le Pen's Front National victory in France is based on anguish, rage and denial <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/european-elections-2014-marine-le-pens-national-front-victory-in-france-is-based-on-anguish-rage-and-denial-9436394.html> Accessed May 2015

According to Euractiv "eurosceptics are citizens or politicians who present themselves as 'sceptical' - critical - of the Union which they say takes powers away from their national government and poses a threat to their national sovereignty."<sup>1</sup> Euroscepticism comes in two forms - 'hard' and 'soft'. For 'hard' or 'withdrawalist' eurosceptics the opposition to membership or the existence of the EU is adamant.

'Soft' or 'reformist' eurosceptics supports the existence of the EU and membership to the Union, but opposes further integrationist EU policies and the idea of a federal Europe. But euroscepticism can further be viewed as part of a spectrum, ranging from 'europhobia' -- to a healthy sceptical attitude, and questioning of accepted beliefs. As such, certain forms of scepticism exist across all political spheres.

According to the latest Eurobarometer survey in the autumn of 2014, the majority of Europeans have a positive image of the EU in 12 Member States, led by Poland (61%), Romania (59%), Ireland (53%), Bulgaria (51%) and Luxembourg (51%), where the EU conjures up a positive image for more than half of the population. In the Netherlands, equal proportions of the population have a positive and a neutral image of the EU (37% positive, 37% neutral, 26% negative). Respondents are most likely to have a neutral image in 12 countries. In the remaining three Member States, majorities of respondents have a negative image of the EU: Greece (44%), Cyprus (38%) and Austria (36%). The proportion of EU citizens with a positive image of the EU has increased in 23 countries, most strikingly in Ireland (53%, +12 percentage points since spring 2014), Luxembourg (51%, +9), Poland (61%, +9) and Slovakia (39%, +9).

In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? %EU



<sup>1</sup>Euroscepticism: More than a British phenomenon <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/euroscepticism-more-british-phenomenon-286609>, accessed May 2015.  
<sup>2</sup>Public Opinion In the European Union - Standard Eurobarometer 82, Autumn 2014 [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_first_en.pdf), Accessed May 2015  
<sup>3</sup>*Id.*

# 3. HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION STRENGTHEN OUR EUROPEAN IDENTITY?



**Do you feel a citizen of the EU?**

In a Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in the spring of 2014, 65% of the citizens declared that they feel they are citizens of the European Union, an increase of six percentage points compared with the previous survey. The sense of European citizenship reached its highest levels since 2010, when this question was asked for the first time.

The European citizenship comes along with various benefits and opportunities. Many of us are tempted to take them for granted. Just think for one second that you can pick up your backpack and travel from Bucharest to Wien, just like that, or that you can go study or work in any of the 28 EU member states.

**1.5 million young people** have completed part of their studies in another member state just with the help of the Erasmus programme and more than **15 million EU citizens** have moved to other EU countries to work or enjoy their retirement.

That's because the EU treaties guarantee the right of free movement for EU citizens, goods, labour, services and capital. As a European citizen you most certainly benefit from a comfortable level of stability and equity. EU is one of the strongest economic areas in the world and accounts for **23% of nominal global GDP**.

The European Union is, also, strongly committed to respect human rights, to fight discrimination and to ensure access to justice for each of its citizens.



Morover, the European Union has one of the most eco friendly environmental policies, being committed to reduce its global warming emissions by at least 20 % (compared to 1990 levels) till 2020.

We are different not only as individuals, but also as communities. 63,4 billion Euros are available, through the Cohesion fund, to help reduce the disparities and development gaps between the region. This is the response of the union to poverty and the way it's ensuring social cohesion and a wealthy life for each European citizen.

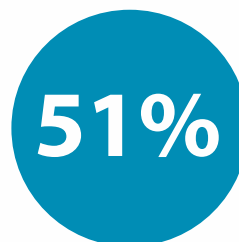


**Did you know?<sup>2</sup>**



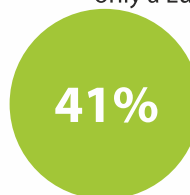
- You can shop in any EU country without paying any taxes when you return home;
- You can call cheaper abroad because of a 2007 CE directive;
- Countries in the EU, are amongst the highest positions in the Human Development Index (HDI)

**I have:**



- a national and European citizenship

- a European and national citizenship **6%**
- only a European citizenship **2%**



- only my national citizenship

With regard to the sense of European citizenship compared to the national one, 51% of the respondents defined themselves first by their nationality and then by their European citizenship. 6% defined themselves first by their European citizenship and then by their nationality and only 2% solely as European citizenship.

<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb81/eb81\\_citizen\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb81/eb81_citizen_en.pdf) Accessed May 2015.

<sup>2</sup><http://econ.economicshelp.org/2007/03/benefits-of-european-union.html>, Accessed May 2015

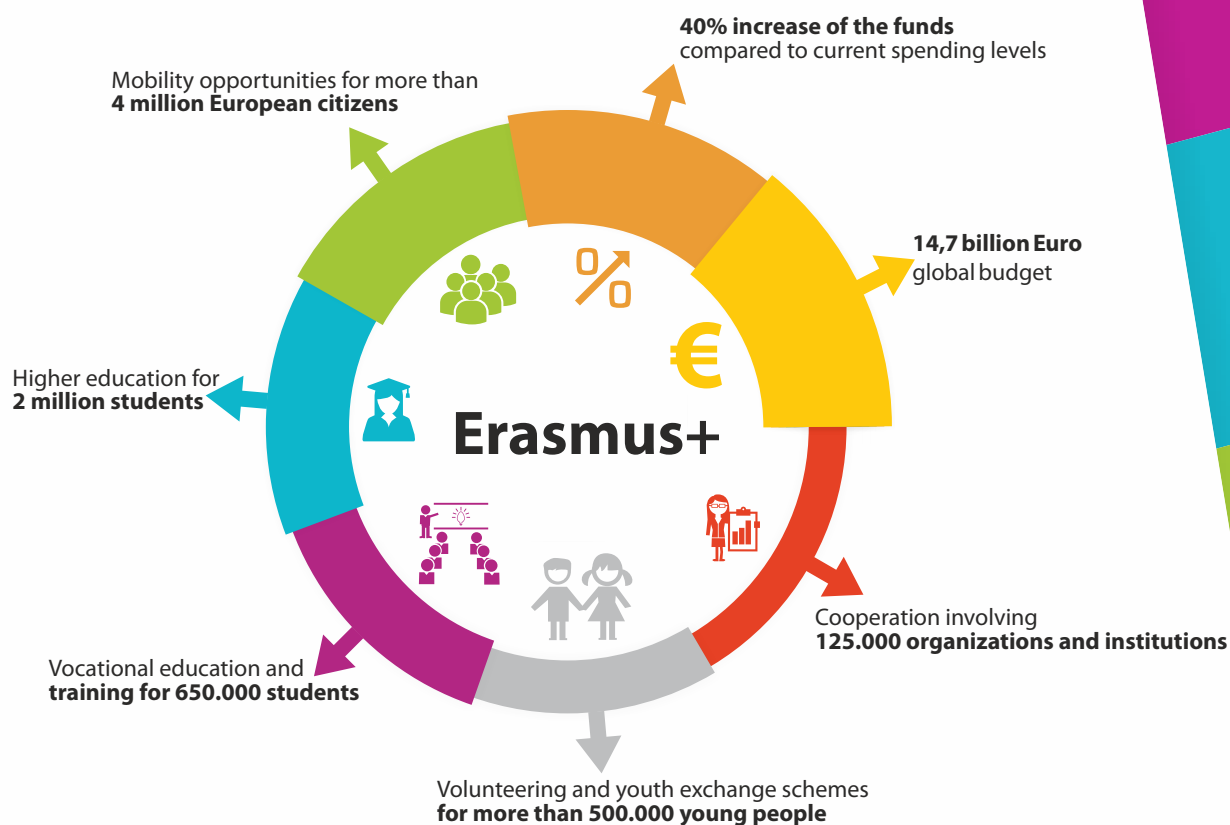
<sup>3</sup>Id.

# 4. ERASMUS+ AS AN INSTRUMENT TO CONNECT THE YOUNGSTERS TO THE UNION

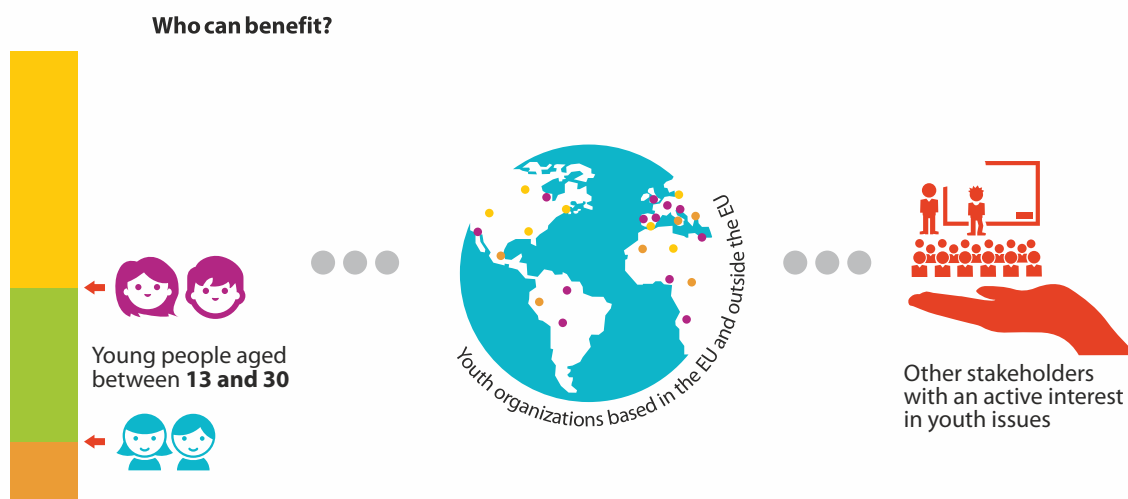
The European Union is further committed to invest in its young European citizens and Erasmus + is the best place to get the latest opportunities. 14,7 billion Euro will be available, between 2014-2020, for youth, education and sport with the main purpose of improving the employability of the young people.

If you are a young European who wants to study or volunteer abroad, get a scholarship, change your live and make a difference, Erasmus + is definitely the place to start!

## Facts and Figures



## 4.1 Youth and mobility for young people





## What can you do?



Spend between 2 weeks or 12 months, as a volunteer, in another country through the **European Voluntary Service**



Take part in a **Youth Exchange** and improve your abilities, meet new people and discover different cultures



**Training and networking events** to enhance your professional opportunities



**Job shadowing**



**Strategic partnerships**

## 4.2 Education and training

### Who can benefit?



Students, trainees, apprentices



Teaching staff



Adult learners



Public or private institutions, NGOs



Business communities

### What can you do?



Studies, including Master's level



Structured courses or trainings



Job shadowing or observations



Teaching assignments



Traineeships in businesses



Joint projects to modernize teaching methods, materials and curricula



Cooperation between schools (eTwinning)

## 4.3 Sport

The latest Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity (conducted in October – November 2013) revealed high levels of inactivity in the EU. With 59% of European Union citizens never or seldom exercise or play sport, there was a need to provide support for several opportunities in this field. Thus, sport is a key pillar in the new Erasmus+ framework.

### Who is it for?



Public sporting bodies



Sporting organisations, leagues, and clubs at any level



Sporting unions or representations



Organisations active in promoting physical activity, including social inclusion in sports



Event organisers in the sport sector

### What can you do?



Collaborative partnerships



Non-profit European sports events



Actions that strengthen the evidence base for policy-making

# 5. YOUNG INITIATIVE ASSOCIATION AS A ROMANIAN NGO SUPPORTING THE YOUNG PEOPLE

ASOCIATIA  
Young  
Initiative



Young Initiative Association is a Romanian NGO that promotes projects in the field of youth and education. With a team of approximately 60 volunteers, AYI is committed to provide young people with personal and professional development opportunities.

In the last years, the association is a strongly promoter of Erasmus + program in Romania, advocating for active European citizenship, youth participation in the democratic process and consistent development of the civil society.

## Erasmus plus projects:

- 3 approved EVS projects
- 1 youth exchange
- 2 seminars
- 1 strategic partnership

## 4 permanent projects:

Bridges to Knowledge, Click & Know, Bibliolounge and Blogunteer

## One unique center:

Dedicated to the management of the nongovernmental organizations, financed through an EEA grant and developed in collaboration with Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

## Active participation:

of dozen of young people or volunteers in international mobilities.

## Projects for the local community:

career counseling for highschool students, donation campaigns for vulnerable social groups or trainings and seminars

# 6. COMMON HERITAGE COMMON FUTURE - BEST PRACTICE PROJECT

Common Heritage, Common Future was a youth exchange, organised by Young Initiative Association and financed by the European Commission, through Erasmus + programme.



## Highlights

30 young people (aged 18-24), 6 countries Sweden, Portugal, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Romania, 7 days of activities - interactive locations: European Institute of Romania, Bibliolounge, Ion Creanga Metropolitan Library



## Context of the project:

After one of the most critical financial crisis of the last decades, Europe is seeing rising rates of euroscepticism. Extremist political parties are emerging strongly with an anti-EU agenda, while the mainstream political leaders are afraid of adopting strong pro-EU positions. In all these sweeping changes, young people are becoming increasingly confused and can easily adopt a pro or against position without being aware of the "whole story" and the potential consequences in the long-term for their country. A lot of them are either totally not interested in European topics and do not participate in elections and other democratic processes, while others are prone to the influence of their local reality.



## Aim:

Encourage reflection and critical thinking on the past, present and future of Europe and of the European Union among young people from EU Member States.



## Objectives:

1. Increase the awareness of minimum 30 young people from 6 countries about the European Union and its institutions, European Citizenship, European values;
2. Provide at least 30 young people from 6 countries the space and tools needed in order to reflect and use critical thinking in regard to their European identity, thus allowing them to have their own argued opinion on the subject;
3. Create an interactive exhibition about our European identity, values, citizenship, past and future for increasing the awareness of other young people and of the local community;



## Methods used:

Role-play, debate, European Parliament simulation, small groups work, interacting non-formally with experts, creation of a cultural exhibition, using social media, outdoor activities, teambuilding exercises.



## Main activities:

European Parliament simulation

Bucharest treasure hunt

intercultural night

debate on the European identity

creating of an exhibition on European identity

an interactive presentation of the European institutions

debates and round tables at the European Institute of Romania

**What does European identity means to you? (before the project)**

“ Being:Tolerant Open-minded Respecting human rights. Being interested in science Helping to solve economical and political issues. ”

**Donatas from Lithuania**

“ „European Identity" is so complicated concept. Actually there is no one answer for me. As I am studying philology and advertising, I always interpret. I can say that two words"European Identity" associated with democracy, free market, traveling without any problems, respects for human rights. Also, Identity related with common things like EU flag, common culture, passport. But if everyone has EU passport, are they really Europeans (I am talking about mental and cultural sense). This is a common question. ”

**Krystina from Lithuania**

“ I connect the idea of European Identity mostly with the feeling of personal identification or simply the feeling of belonging to Europe. I think young people will get this feeling if they are more informed and know more about the European Union. That is why raising awareness on all the issues related to it is so important. ”

**Boryana from Bulgaria**

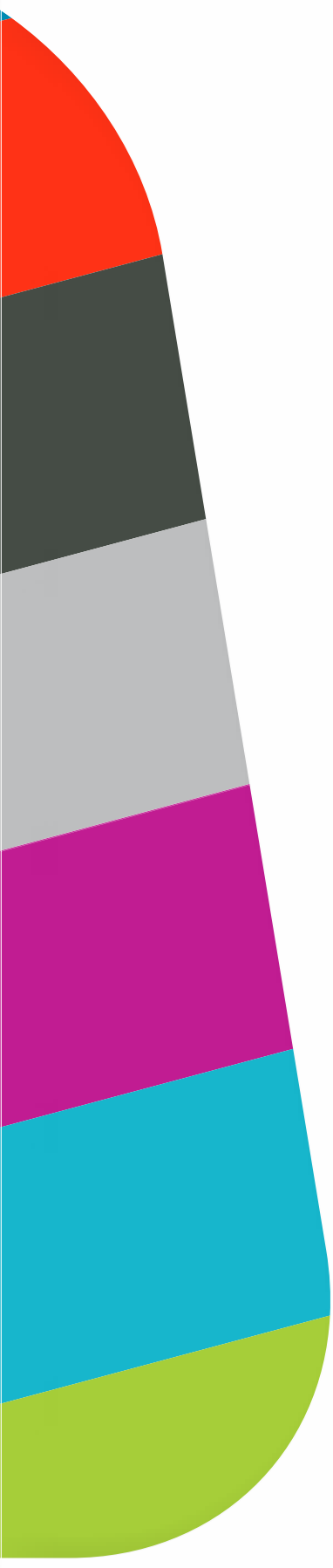
“ In my opinion "European Identity" means that more countries have same values, principles and finality. Also I think that "European Identity" means that the member countries in this group have a common market, a common institutions and policies. ”

**Alexandra from Romania**

“ It means that we belong to a group of people that share values, believes and an immense and various cultural identity that works together for the single purpose of exchange knowledge, safety and culture. ”

**Sara from Portugal**





In my opinion "European Identity" means that more countries have same values, principles and finality. Also I think that "European Identity" means that the member countries in this group have a common market, a common institutions and policies. Alexandra from Romania

It means that we belong to a group of people that share values, believes and an immense and various cultural identity that works together for the single purpose of exchange knowledge, safety and culture. Sara from Portugal

4. How would you define European identity? (after the project)

European identity is so simple to define - to have no boundaries, to feel no limits. To overleap one's national self and be open-minded and open-hearted. Always to know that no matter where from, we all are one. - Tsevelina from Bulgary

From my point of view european identity is very broad. It can't be defined in a specific way, because every individual sees it differently. I feel a part of a community, a part of something bigger - but I take into consider the others opinions as well, since some may not think like I do. But we together can make and develop our own kind of european identity, it does not have to be the same from every point of view, because that's the beauty in it. Something different will become something common. Josephine from Sweden

European identity, to me, is the union of all the member states that are part of the European Union, which despite all the multicultural differences, economic, political and social are able to unite and form a single form, a single symbol : the European Union. Pedro from Portugal