



JEAN MONNET

THE EU AND THE WORLD: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

27 IDEAS FROM THE ERASMUS GENERATION

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United in diversity?

Creating and strengthening of the European identity

By

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1 Introduction, explanation of the idea and it's relevancy in today's Europe

The European integration is an ongoing and continuously developing phenomenon. The idea of a common Europe is receiving a more concrete and defined form and it is evolving day by day. The economical and institutional pillars and the intensive intergovernmental communication have visible effects on everyday life of more than 500 000 persons, although the procedure has its long-term objectives and gets visible only with time. Europe was the main scene of international conflicts 65 years ago, Europe was divided in two parts by a wall 50 years ago, Europe was reunited 25 years ago and Europe's philosophy is "United in diversity" now.

The change is radical. But do we feel it? Do we recognize it every day or only if we are thinking it over? Does the idea of Europe influencing our identity? Are we European or national? Or are we both of them? And should the European Union take the responsibility to contribute in the forming of the European identity? How would it be possible? Does the European identity exist?

The Hungarian delegation would like to call the attention of the European governance to the question of the establishment, development and facility of the idea "being a European". Being members of the young generation and coming from Hungary we could experience the European integration itself: we can cross the borders without any obstacle, visa or permission; we can study abroad; gain work experiences in various countries; have intercultural exchanges; participate in European summits or conferences. These experiences and opportunities are essential not just for practical issues like practicing language skills or seeing new places but are an indispensable element of shaping personality, mentality and soft skills such as communication, flexibility, patience, and open-mindedness. Living today's Europe makes internationality average the distances small, not just physically but mentally as well.

Living Europe is essential to promote the European identity. But at this point we have to distinguish the European society in different groups taking in consideration many aspects and factors:

- Age – age is correlating with the fact in which stage did we get in contact with the integration process and how we recognize it. Describing age is necessary to find the best channels of communication.
- Nationality – even if the keywords of Europe are "United in diversity" it is extremely significant to see how nationality, in other words the country of origin influences our European identity due to the different historical and traditional backgrounds: for instance the difference between being one of the founders or joining after 50 years. The best example was when my Italian teacher said: "I remember when the wall of Berlin fall I was in London with Erasmus."
- Residence – living in a village or in a metropolitan affects human personality. Moving to a foreign country or growing up in the same town has its impacts as well. But do we see the same from Europe?

In spite of the several opportunities offered, the general European consciousness needs more extension so that it can become automatic and natural. Furthermore diversity means not just

cultural, linguistical and historical diversification but, according to this, the different approach to the European Union. This approach should be reinforced, balanced and unified, so that different nations and different age-groups can have the same sensation and way of thinking about what means being European.

2 Methods, ways, instruments, equipments – Examples of implementation

2.1 Summer Universities and exchange programs for high-school student

Erasmus is a unique opportunity to gain European experiences as a student. University students have another way to practice intercultural communication like participating in university programs, conferences, simulation programs. One of the existing programs of this gender is AEGEE which is a student association which organizes summer universities, language courses and summer summits under the aegis of the European Union. The Hungarian delegation encourages the fact that this facility which fosters European identity should be extended to make it available for high-school students as well. We would like to stress the importance of involving the younger generation and highlight the necessity of elaborating and providing new ways for them. Therefore we propose to establish and emphasize summer exchange programs, summer schools and language courses provided and united under the management and control of the European Union itself.

In our opinion living abroad, studying in foreign language and experiencing the integration in other cultures changes the approach and the way of thinking of youngsters. However it has to be taken in consideration on one hand that high-school courses like grammar, history or mathematics are requesting a coherency in their teaching and studying. The various lessons of these materials are more interconnected. On the other hand in certain cases age influences the parent's behavior and the longitude of staying abroad, far from the family. Regarding to this factors we think it would be more useful and efficient to provide summer facilities which are not interrupting the coherency and are not longer than the period which fits the age of 15-18.

2.2 European studies

In the opinion of the Hungarian delegation, the implementation of a course of European studies in pre-university education could be helpful to brighten the knowledge and so contribute in the establishment of a European identity.

As the common sense, so the European mentality is strengthened by common values, celebrations, habits and traditions. As the integration is relatively a recent phenomenon our traditions couldn't get automatic and natural yet. However traditions and values make part, moreover are essential for our common sense, our personality and are growing roots thanks to various school activities. On the base of age differences teachers find the adequate way to make students understand certain traditions and memorials. Role plays, presentations, painting and other creative games contribute in the establishment of the importance of common sense. Therefore implementing the European values in the educational system could be a possible way of strengthening the European identity. Explanation of the European symbols, celebration of the European day and role games of the integration process could help to understand its importance for students primarily of elementary schools.

The history of the European integration and some actual European questions should be thought at high-schools. The course could give an idea of the integration process so that it contributes in the vision and the idea of the changements by describing the main steps, most important persons and

some treaties of European Union's history. Furthermore the institution's functions laid down by the Lisbon Treaty should be explained and some actual questions can be handled in course so that students can understand the issues appearing in newspapers and magazines. The content of the course should represent one chapter at the final exam of history so that it gains importance and a common and general knowledge of the European Union.

2.3 Erasmus – Ways of development

Erasmus is a European exchange program of university students. It is an opportunity of which more and more students take benefit from. The project is growing not just geographically but quantitatively as well. The exponential growth of participating students take significant measures in Hungary as well, on one hand because each year numerous youngsters are getting motivated by others and on the other hand each year more universities are joining the Erasmus program, moreover they are able to assure always more places of exchange. As we both participated in the program in our sight it was natural and understandable that we elaborate some ideas of its improvement.

2.3.1 Strengthening and deepening intercultural experience-exchange

This capital is dedicated to the importance of the integration of foreigner students in the hosting society and the elimination of isolation of the Erasmus subculture, some ideas of programs which are making it possible.

Being an Erasmus student means first of all the possibility of living in another country, another culture and to get known a multicultural branch of students of which the common point is to be at the same country, the same university as an Erasmus student. Language courses and cultural activities help these students to get in touch among each other and to deepen and brighten the relation with the country and among themselves. However Erasmus students move together and as they know first of all each other, they are not in a direct connection with national students.

In our opinion this should be taken in consideration and there should new and innovative ways established to help the development of the experience-exchange among foreigner and native students, which is fundamental for the complete integration. This process can be facilitated by various programs such as university projects where the various cultures are presenting themselves, common workshops about European issues, cultural activities, travels, which are practically covered by the Erasmus offices, and ESN centers themselves. In our opinion so called mixed programs (between foreigner and native students) could be organized by the already existing offices as an additional facility.

2.3.2 Strengthening of the collaboration and flexibility of sending institutions with the Erasmus program itself

The second challenge which has to be faced is the transparency and permeability of the interstate Erasmus system. Documentation and bureaucratic questions should be simplified and united. Several students are not participating in Erasmus due to the fact that maintaining the level of votes is much more difficult (if not impossible) with staying abroad for one year than frequenting the lessons personally. The adaptation and the individualized acceptance of the courses frequented and obtained is not always automatic, in other words the different teaching methods are not always equivalent which causes difficulties regarding to make accept the studies at the hosting university and not to do the exams - as we were not abroad - at our sending university. This could make available Erasmus for more students who pay attention and care for the average medium of votes.

2.3.3 Recalculation of the scholarship budget

Finally the third potential obstacle in participating in the Erasmus program is related to the budget and the financial aid of the scholarship. Monetary differences, everyday life costs, rental prices can be quite diversified which sometimes does not interfere with the financial contribution guaranteed by the fund. This obstacle eventually limits the opportunities of students. However recently a European Citizen Initiative was launched regarding this topic, hopefully we will hear about this movement and manage to address the attention of the European governance to this question.

2.4 Adult Society - Possible Instruments

We are witnessing the constantly widening opportunities for young people to become familiar with the European Union on the whole. International exchange programs, conferences and study trips organized by universities from all over Europe are all excellent methods of bringing students from different countries closer to each other and perfect ways of creating and strengthening a European identity. This process is on its way for decades and however, rethinking and innovation are always needed, by and large it is functioning successfully, which makes more and more young people feel themselves as European citizens not only citizens of their home country.

The importance of focusing on these young people is unquestionable because they are the future generation of Europe but who cares about the adults? How can those adult people become familiar with the EU who live for instance in the post-soviet region of Europe and whose country became a member of the integration only in 2004? There are also many people living in western part of Europe, even in countries, which are members for many decades, who are not familiar with the EU because they are not living in the most central and most important cities of the European Union and they do not get in touch with the processes and institutions of the Union.

We argue that it is essential and important to lead these masses closer to the European Union itself, to provide them information daily and to create the alternative of a common European identity in this section of the society as well. This is even more important at the time of the recent crisis. It is essential to make average adult people feel that the EU is not an authority that gives orders and regulations but it is something we are all part of and what we have created and built gradually together. These people are the very present generation of the Union.

2.4.1 Media – TV

We propose that classic forms of the media such as a common TV channel and a daily European newspaper would be a possible solution to this problem. However there are several successful initiatives such as on-line broadcasts, where briefings from the institutions, press conferences, EP plenary sessions and interviews can be followed every day, still a classic TV station does not exist, at least not in Hungary or in the surrounding EU member countries. A common European TV station could broadcast not only political programs such as live coverage of plenary sessions or press conferences but also could put cultural programs documentaries, talk-shows, European films and even programs for children in the schedule. The language of the programs could be English, but not exclusively, subtitles could be used alternatively. Or multilingual such as the Vatican Radio which elaborates its broadcast dividing the time between several languages.

By this not only cultural barriers could be reduced but also different common languages could be taught automatically for children and adults by listening to the programs and following the subtitles at the same time. The main goal would be to make average people, who do not have time and access to watch on-line broadcasts regularly, feel well-informed and up to date, furthermore, to transfer European values from the past and from the present for every segment of the society from young children to the grandparents. With this instrument Europe could be brought to the homes of the families and in the daily routines of everyday people.

2.4.2 News paper

In our opinion a common daily printed newspaper by the European Union could be another instrument of achieving the above-mentioned goal. It is a fact that more and more people, mainly the younger generations, live their entire life on the internet and get all the information they need from on-line editions of different newspapers, blogs, facebook pages, twitter etc. however, everyday people still do read newspapers. They still love to sit in a café for breakfast and read the daily news; they also like to spend time with reading the newspaper when traveling on public transport or waiting at the airport. This habit won't change in the near future, just like on-line streaming cannot displace TV entirely these days. The emphasis would be on the sameness of the printed edition, which would be written and edited centrally and then translated to the own national languages of the member countries.

This EU Newspaper would function like a regular daily paper providing mainly general information and the latest news about the European Union, about its institutions and policy, interviews, special reports, opinions and also news from member countries and world news from all over the world. For instance policies and legislation, innovation and enterprise, environment and sustainability, health and lifestyle could be just a few of the main everyday topics. Contemporary culture of Europe would be another immense part of the paper offering programs such as festival events, concerts, exhibitions, galleries, theatre, all encouraging people to open to other cultures and to travel to different destinations in the continent

At this point we have to add the European newspaper already existing, the European Voice, which is a European edition of the newspaper The Economist. However its distribution, availability and the question of translation has to be improved and resolved. It is available only in English and could not be found in various newspaper stands and as a consequence it could not gain a significant number of lectures.

2.4.3 Nationality and internationality

Funding and objectivity are the two main crucial points about a potential EU TV and EU Newspaper. These two questions are highly connected when we want to avoid too much influence and the direct control of any political or economic group. If the money comes exclusively from private partners and investors it is unlikely to be able to create a fair and unbiased media and this is the reason why we suggest that the mentioned TV station and paper should be financed mainly by the EU itself through a common fund set up by the member countries and in a smaller share by private partners. The team behind would be fully international with editors and journalists with experience and routine gained in other spheres of the media so far; the management would be democratically elected within the EU institutions.

We are all aware that overall and universal objectivity is something, which is very unlikely to achieve. Moreover, it is not the purpose to exclude European political parties or private advertisers; on the contrary, the aim is to promote equal opportunities for every democratic party from the European Parliament and any private partners irrespectively of political commitment to create a colorful and multicultural TV channel and newspaper, to establish solid media forums providing varied and alternative interpretations of today's Europe for the everyday people.

3 Summery

The starting point of our argument were our own Erasmus experiences, which providing possibility of intercultural communication, facilitating the progress of language knowledge and other soft skills (such as flexibility, openness and acceptance) bring students close to the European Idea, and the European Integration itself. Our main purpose is to make available this way of thinking for a wider population. Taking in consideration various aspects (e.g. age) we were elaborating some individualized instruments.

Following the example of Erasmus and AEGEE guaranteed for university students we underline the involvement of high-school students into a well-organized, multilateral exchange system. Furthermore we highlight the necessity of introducing European Studies into the pre-university education.

To call the attention of the majority, in other words the adult, post-university part of the European society we need to find new channels which can be efficient and convenient. Therefore in our opinion the media and it's direct, personalized communication could contribute significantly in the spread and transmission of the European mentality, the common identity. We have some concrete ideas of how it could be realized: for example an own TV or radio channel, an own newspaper. We think that the enforcement of mass-communication and the development of alternative educational methods could help to decrease misinformation, encourage future integration and make understand what is EU about.