

# *The challenges of an education about Europe*



*Executive summary, July 2021*

# THE CHALLENGES OF AN EDUCATION ABOUT EUROPE

## *Executive summary*

A report submitted by

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# Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. What is the importance of education about the European Union in your country ? .....	5
2.2. Who is responsible for the framework / curriculum for schools ? How much freedom do schools have in setting their own teaching priorities ? .....	5
2.3. Which subjects cover education about the European Union in your country at the moment ?.....	6
2.4. Barriers and challenges identified by teachers / headmasters ...	8
2.5. What is the level of confidence of knowledge about the European Union in your country ?.....	9
<b>3. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>11</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This *Executive summary* is one of the results produced for the MEGA – Make Europe Great Again project. The MEGA project is an Erasmus+ project, funded by the National Agency “Agence Erasmus+ France / Education Formation” 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 European Union in Europe, as well as to improve learning materials, available resources and understanding on the European Union in secondary education.

The respective target groups are:

- Teachers in secondary education ;
- Pupils aged 13 to 17 in secondary education;
- Policy makers who are involved in the national education framework in Europe.

The expected results of the project include:

- Research: National White Papers on the challenges of education on the European Union across Europe;
- Platform: A Material Library including practical and useful learning resources to be utilised in education about the European Union;
- E-learning materials and modules to reinforce teachers’ knowledge about Europe and improve their teaching approaches for learning about the European Union;
- 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 European Union.

These National White Papers revolve around education about the European Union in France, Germany, Portugal, Croatia, and Spain, and includes one White Paper on European level for cross-reference between the respective countries.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between December 2020 and June 2021, the project partners of the MEGA project carried out surveys and focus groups with headmasters, teachers, and pupils. In total the partners collected 1283 questionnaires for pupils, 675 teacher questionnaires, multiple focus groups with teachers and 80 surveys with headmasters, across all participating partner countries.

Participants came from public and private secondary schools, general high schools without specialization, as well as vocational schools and training centres.

### 2.1. What is the importance of education about the European Union in your country?

For the topic “European Union” to even be covered in the curriculum of a country, education about the European Union must be seen as an important factor for the country and its inhabitants, as well as a significant influence into the life, decisions and choices of its population. As one of the participants of the survey put it, their reason for being interested in the European Union is as simple as “because I live in Europe”. But what importance does education about the European Union really have in the partner countries? Is it seen as an important aspect of education due to the EU’s influence on its population and daily life?

While all interviewed headmasters in Spain, Germany and Portugal agreed that education about the European Union is at least somewhat important for their country, only 57% of headmasters in France name it as moderately important. At the same time, about 89% of school administrators in Croatia found education about the European Union moderately to fully important in their country. This should not be seen as an overall representative number of the educational situation in all countries but shows a trend for the schools interviewed during this project.

### 2.2. Who is responsible for the framework / curriculum for schools? How much freedom do schools have in setting their own teaching priorities?

While it is important how headmasters and school administrators think about education about European Union, as they may emphasise extra-curricular activities, school projects and similar exercises in their institutions, it is not always their decision

to include the topic in the curriculum. At times, the curriculum is set by a national framework and depending on this framework, the school are able to decide on their subjects, topics and teaching content.

All partner countries have a general framework set by the national government, the federal state or a regional authority. The programme for French schools is set by the Ministry of National Education, with 80% of headmasters stating they have no real authority over the subjects to be taught. They do have some leeway in setting the specific activities of school projects, especially in the private sector.

In Portugal the national curriculum is also set by their Ministry of Education, however, there is a difference between public school, which have no freedom in their curriculum, and private schools, which can adapt their curriculum to a certain degree. In that regard, they have similar differences between the public and private sector as France.

Over 65% of headmasters in Croatia also state that their general curriculum is mostly prescribed by the national framework, while the majority of headmasters do agree to have some freedom in the detailed design of their curriculum.

Different from the other countries, the Spanish and the German educational framework is set by regional authorities. In Germany, the teaching curriculum is designed by the federal state and, depending on the type of school, gives some freedom to set their own priorities. All headmasters in Germany agreed to being able to adapt the framework into a detailed curriculum according to their own priorities.

In Spain, the teaching curriculum is set by their autonomous community instead of the national government, with some freedom in adapting the curriculum, as long as the programme adheres to the pre-set priorities of the community.

### 2.3. Which subjects cover education about the European Union in your country now?

The survey showed different results regarding which subjects should include education about Europe between headmasters and teachers.

#### Headmasters:

Subject	Croatia	France	Germany	Portugal	Spain
History	63%	26%	67%	60%	//
Geography	84%	26%	67%	80%	67%

<b>Civic Education</b>	42%	26%	33%	60%	//
<b>Foreign Languages</b>	52%	22%	//	20%	100%
<b>Politics</b>	86%	//	100%	//	//
<b>Economy</b>	86%	//	//	20%	//

All numbers are shown rounded to the nearest full percentage. // signifies 0%

### Teachers:

Subject	Croatia	France	Germany	Portugal	Spain
<b>History</b>	18%	23%	44%	82%	85%
<b>Geography</b>	24%	14%	15%	82%	85%
<b>Civic Education</b>	2%	30%	3%	84%	38%
<b>Foreign Languages</b>	5-8%*	21%	17%	48%	60%
<b>Politics</b>	24%	//	86%	48%	58%
<b>Economy</b>	24%	6%	25%	53%	5%
<b>Social Sciences</b>	3% ("Sociology")	6%	53%	52%	53%

All numbers are shown rounded to the nearest full percentage. // signifies 0%

\*counting mentions of "Foreign languages", "English language" and "German language".

While headmaster and teachers from all countries agreed that Geography includes education about the EU to a certain degree, not all countries agreed that it is included in other classes with sometimes even a big difference between the teachers and the headmasters.

When looking at the results, other aspects have to be considered as well: not all subjects cover education about Europe to the same amount and some of these classes cover the topic because it is a mandatory part of the curriculum while some teachers cover it on a voluntary basis in their subjects. About 53% of teachers in Croatia were unsure whether it was part of the mandatory curriculum while it is an obligatory part of classes in Germany.

## 2.4. Barriers and challenges identified by teachers / headmasters

In summary, about eleven different reasons were named by different countries for why teachers and headmasters did not include education about Europe in their lessons:

- Time constraints: not enough preparation time as well as not enough time in class to analyse the topics. If not set as mandatory in the curriculum, many teachers commented on the curriculum already having too much content to fit the topic of the European Union;
- Lack of necessary funding and financial support;
- Lack of training for the teachers to be able to include education about Europe;
- Lack of motivation or interest: headmaster identified especially lack of interest from pupils and teachers as a reason for not including the topic in their lessons;
- Not a priority in the curriculum: some teachers noted that they are less likely to cover the topic of the European Union in their subject due to it not being a priority in the educational framework or curriculum to their knowledge, showing that they would cover the topic more in their teaching if it was more emphasised in the curriculum;
- Multiple teachers and headmasters named the adaptability of resources and materials as a problem for teaching. Many resources are not adaptable to their school environment or their subject and teaching, preventing them from using the materials;
- Lack of resources (technical resources, materials, staff, etc.)
- Not enough support from their institution: some teachers named the missing support from their institution, their colleagues, the headmasters and other parties as a reason for not being able to include education about Europe in their classes;
- Too much content: Teachers from Germany and Spain noted that the topic is so vast and detailed it is hard to separate the important aspects which should be taught to pupils from the rest of the content;
- No connection/priority of the subject: participants stated there was no connection between their subject and education about Europe, while some teachers and headmaster noted that often other topics take priority over education about Europe, resulting in the topic not being covered in classes.
- Unfamiliarity with European projects and programmes: Answers showed that many teachers are not too familiar with established programmes/initiatives that exist either at European or national level to integrate education about the European Union in schools, with the most known being Erasmus+, while other transnational programmes like eTwinning or national projects are less known to teachers.



## 2.5. What is the level of confidence of knowledge about the European Union in your country?

The survey explored how confident teachers as well as pupils felt in their knowledge about the European Union and what they felt most confident in.

### Teachers:

Confidence in...	Croatia	France	Germany	Portugal	Spain
General EU knowledge, institutions and economic structure and influence	46%	58%	78%	69%	33%
EU's social and civic impact and processes	46%	47%	67%	74%	33%
EU's history and development	57%	57%	76%	71%	33%
EU's cultures and cultural heritage	59%	52%	62%	70%	28%

All numbers are shown rounded to the nearest full percentage. Positive confidence is taken from answers "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" to the respective questions.

It shall be noted that most of the questioned participants in France were history and geography teachers, making history part of their required knowledge. While most teachers in Germany felt confident in their knowledge about the EU, 79% of them stated they think they and their colleagues could benefit from additional training.

### Pupils:

Blue shows the percentage of pupils feeling confident in a specific area while red shows the percentage feeling insecurity regarding the topic.

Confidence in...	Croatia	France	Germany	Portugal	Spain
General knowledge about the EU	55%	47%	58%	60%	62%
Name all EU member states	50%	64%	62%	39%	56%
Purpose of the European Parliament	56%	60%	38%	45%	72%
Purpose of the European Commission	71%	67%	64%	46%	73%
Knowledge of all EU institutions	74%	68%	70%	39%	76%
Origin and development of the EU	52%	53%	51%	71%	54%
Impact of the EU in their own country	69%	45%	34%	68%	55%
Different cultures and cultural prejudice	61%	41%	50%	62%	51%

All numbers are shown rounded to the nearest full percentage. Positive confidence is taken from answers “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” to the respective questions. Negative confidence is counted with answers “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree”.

All countries showed most pupils claiming they would like to learn about the European Union and were interested in finding out more information.

Headmaster, teachers, and pupils identified multiple challenges in improving education about Europe, while also stating their interest in including it more in their teaching and learning. The Focus Groups showed that many teachers highlight the need to have clear and structured materials which can be easily implemented and adapted to their classes, which corresponds with the survey results of them having to have time to even prepare all the materials. The survey results do show that general interest is there, both for pupils and teachers alike.

### 3. CONCLUSION

What can be learned from the following analysis:

- The audiences interviewed confirm the importance of dealing with European issues in the classroom.
- Because of this importance, it is necessary that the place of Europe in the school curriculum be set by a national, federal, or regional authority.
- Different subjects can include teaching about the EU: history, geography, civic and moral education, foreign languages, politics, economics, social sciences. The degree of importance given to each subject varies from country to country.
- Obstacles were identified by teachers and head teachers to the implementation of European education: not enough time in class; lack of technical and financial support; unsuitability of existing teaching resources.
- Teachers are generally confident in their knowledge of European issues, but the question of more specific training arises.
- Pupils confirm a general knowledge of European issues, but with gaps in geography and the functioning of Europe (institutions). Students generally ask to learn more about the EU.

In addition to this analysis conducted at the level of the five project partner countries, a more in-depth study was conducted in each of these countries

[Challenges of European education in Croatia](#)

[Challenges of European education in France](#)

[Challenges of European education in Germany](#)

[The challenges of European education in Spain](#)

[Challenges of European education in Portugal.](#)

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