THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN GÖDÖLLŐ

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Abstract

The process of globalization already affects all the European countries. Its positive and negative consequences are challenging governments and peoples, too. One of the possible answer for the members of society is the strengthening their status as citizen. This paper will examine what are the differences in national identity, culture, attitudes among different countries in Europe and will analyze how it is possible to create the "public" in different countries. That is to develop civil initiatives and movements and to exert a great effort so that the citizens "opinion" has a real influence on the social life. There is an important role of the education, because its task is to raise a successful young generation which will gain good knowledge and its members will express themselves as morally matured citizens. That requires reaching a certain level of democracy which shows itself by respecting the rights of the minorities (ethnical, political and social), respecting the right to no deprivation of civil rights for freedom of meeting, association and expressing one's opinion by means of petition. Our examination is done upon four dimension of the citizenship (political/legal, social, cultural and economic) and there were interviewed students of economic faculties.

Introduction

Hungary has been a member of the European Union for three years, though the process of Europeanization started just after the political and economic transition. Experts speak about hard and soft criteria of EU membership and emphasize that Hungary meets the hard requirements of the membership, but not the soft ones. To share and get European values, culture and identity is a long process. At certain level people like to be European citizens, but at a deeper level they couldn't recognize or differentiate all the positive or negative effects of it. On the other hand, the Hungarian political system was not developed enough, and even today it has a lot of defects. The civil society is not really built up, which could lead to peripheral situation inside of the EU. At the same time, the support of the EU in Hungary is at about the highest level among the EU member states.

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How is it possible to recognize our possibilities and threats inside of the EU and how is it possible to strengthen the social cohesion and the real European identity and citizenship among people in Hungary? One of the possible answers for the members of society is the strengthening their status as a citizen. There is an important role of the education, because its task is to raise a successful young generation which will gain good knowledge and its members will express themselves as morally matured citizens. That requires reaching a certain level of democracy which shows itself by respecting the rights of the minorities (ethnical, political and social), respecting the right to no deprivation of civil rights for freedom of meeting, association and expressing one's opinion by means of petition.

This paper will examine these questions with the help of a questionnaire survey, done in the recent year.

Sample

Our research (in Frame of the Multicultural Education for the European Citizenship – MEEC) is based on a sample of 193 students at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, at the Szent István University in Gödöllő. The Szent István University was established in 2000 by merging of several formerly independent universities and colleges providing education and training in several fields of life sciences, engineering, humanities as well as social sciences. The geographical location of Szent István University is excellent: this is the only higher education institution in central Hungary with schools in the capital and in Pest County, and even beyond the regional borders, in the area of Jászság. Due to its central location, beautiful landscape and rich cultural traditions, Gödöllő is a perfectly suitable place for a multidisciplinary university centre meeting all international standards.[3]

During the research our team accomplished interviews by the first, second and third year students. The second year students were slightly underrepresented with their proportion of 22 percentages. The sample consists of 44% males and 56% females. The majority of the students (80%) grew up in cities, the minority (20%) in rural areas. The interviewed persons did not really change their location, the vast majority of them live at the same place, where

[3] www.szie.hu

they grew up. 12% lived already abroad as well. Among them there are only few, whose mother or father has different nationalities, as the respondent. 97% of the respondents have Hungarian mother tongue. 62% have a friend of a different nationality or ethnicity.

The same research was implemented at other five European Universities in Ceske Budejovice (Czech Republic), Graz (Austria), Nitra (Slovakia) and Oviedo (Spain). You can find some results from those researches in this paper as well. The size of the total sample is 1053 interviewed persons.

National versus European identity

The expression nationalism derives from the word natio (nation) and nascor (born). Nationalism means thus the reproduction of ourselves, though nation presumes not every time the blood relationship. Nation could be not just a national but a religious, linguistic, economic or ethnic based community, too. Generally people, who have a common language and the same cultural and historical background, would like to live together. Sometimes it does not happen, though we talk about a nation.

According to Hofstede (1983) nationality is important for at least three reasons. The first, very obviously, is political. Nations are political units, rooted in history, with their own institutions. Not only do the formal institutions differ, but even if we could equalize them, the informal ways of using them would differ. The second reason why nationality is important to handle is sociological. Nationality or regionality has a symbolic value to citizens. We all derive part of our identity from it; it is part of the "who am I" . National and regional differences are felt by people to be a reality and therefore they are a reality. The third reason why nationality is important is psychological. Our way of thinking is partly conditioned by national culture factors. This is an effect of early life experiences in the family and later educational experiences in schools and organizations, which are not the same across national borders.

Identity is a complex notion, too. According to Hall: “Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being:

not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities [...] relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'." (Hall 1996: 4)[4]

Identification with the EU is seen as compatible with national and regional identities[5]:

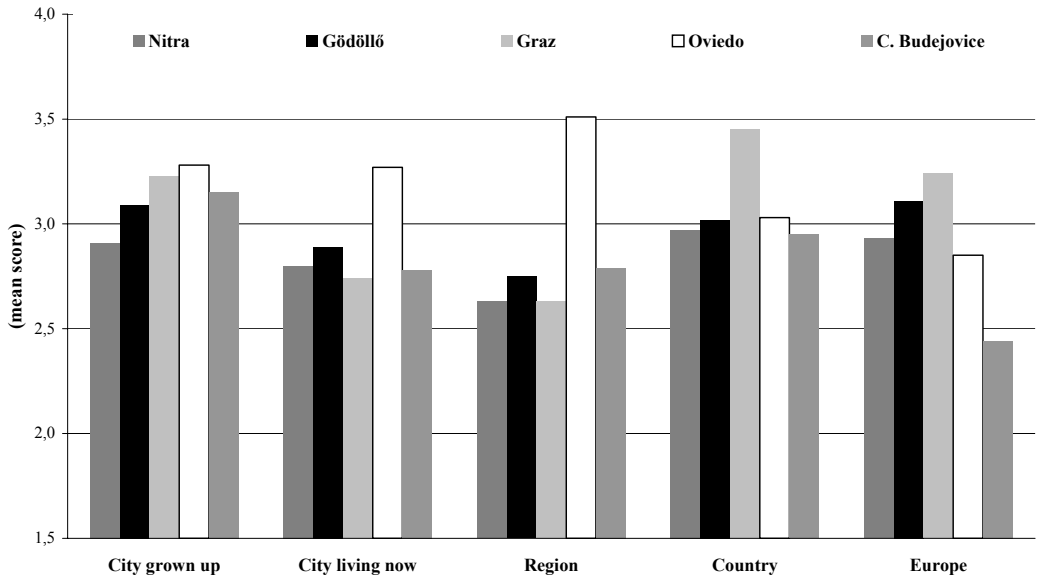
• European identity is associated to state related identity, even in localities where regional identity is more important,

• European identification can be strengthened by increasing the number of personal experiences with the EU,

• The construction of the EU is also reinforced by perceiving the EU as an independent social and political actor.

Europe and the European Union are widely used expressions in Hungary, though the interpretation of that notion is confused and diverted. Actually it would be a common product of the member states; it needs a mutual recognizing of EU-membership of the new European states, too. On the other hand, it is difficult to feel a regional identity, if regions never existed in Hungary before and they are administrative and statistical units.

Figure 1. Attachments to different level of territorial units (N=1053)



[4] In: Weber

[5] in: Ros María – Grad Héctor: Who do you think you are? – Regional, National and European Identities in Interaction

In MEEC research our team found, that the attachments to different territorial units are quite different. In Gödöllő, the strongest is the European and the local identity. The weakest point is the regional identity. The reason for that is, that the regions in Hungary have no tradition; they were artificially created, without taking in account of the public opinions and feelings.

It seems that female respondents prefer the higher territorial levels, and males the lower ones. There is no significant difference among the respondents of different residency, either, however the students living in small rural places have the most, and students living in medium cities have the weakest positive attachment to Europe.

Figure 2. Attachments to different territorial levels (N=193)

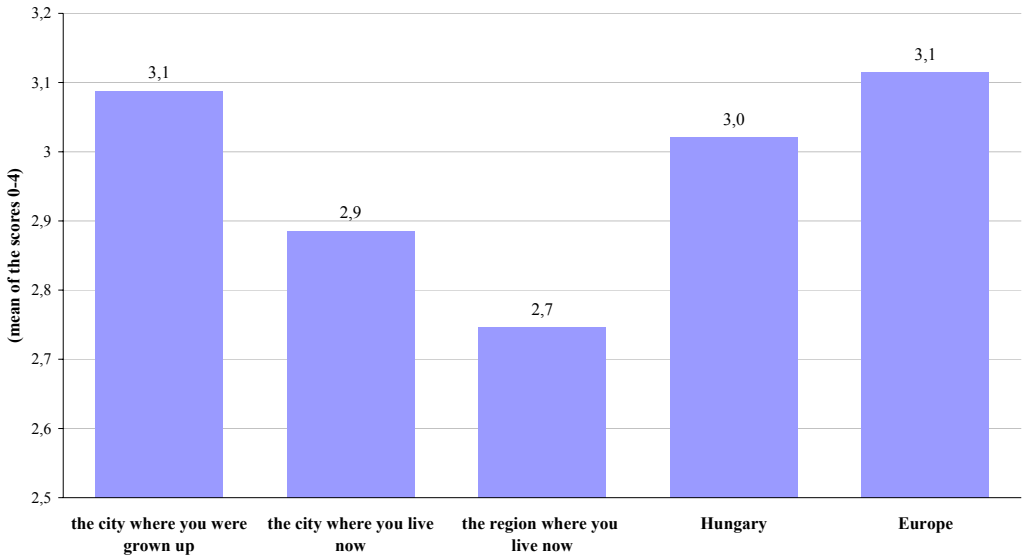
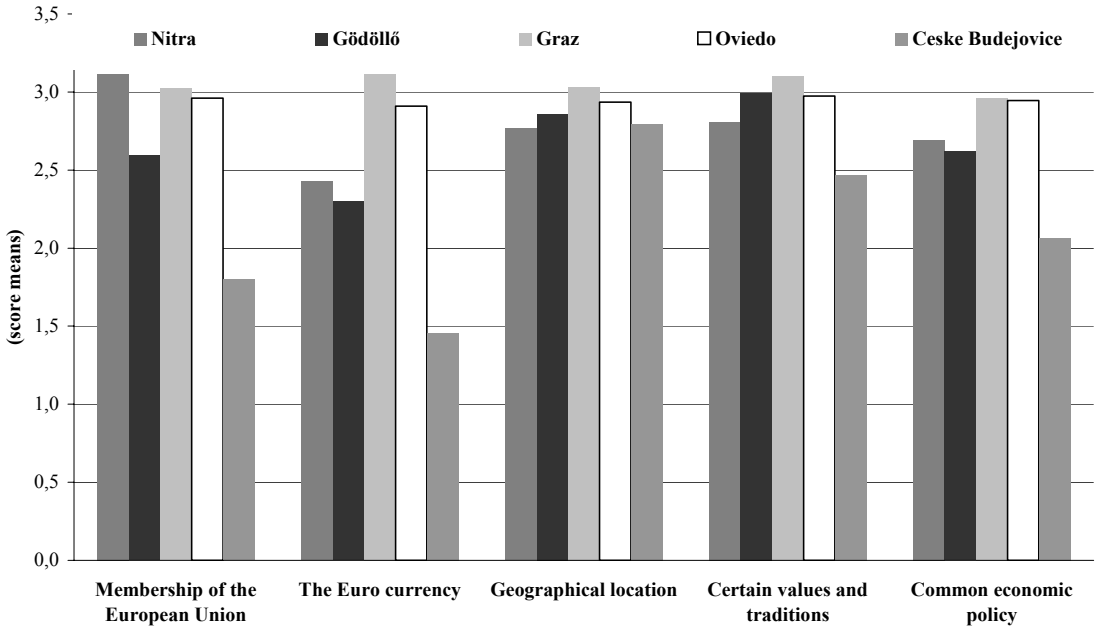


Figure 3. Importance of the factors of European identity (N=1053)



Europe means for the respondents first of all certain values and traditions, rather than geographic location. The Euro currency, because in Hungary it has not been introduced yet, has less importance. The students respected in Nitra the EU membership, in Ceske Budejovice certain values and the geographic location. In Graz and in Oviedo these values have almost the same importance.

Figure 4. The most attractive European countries for the Hungarian students (N=193)

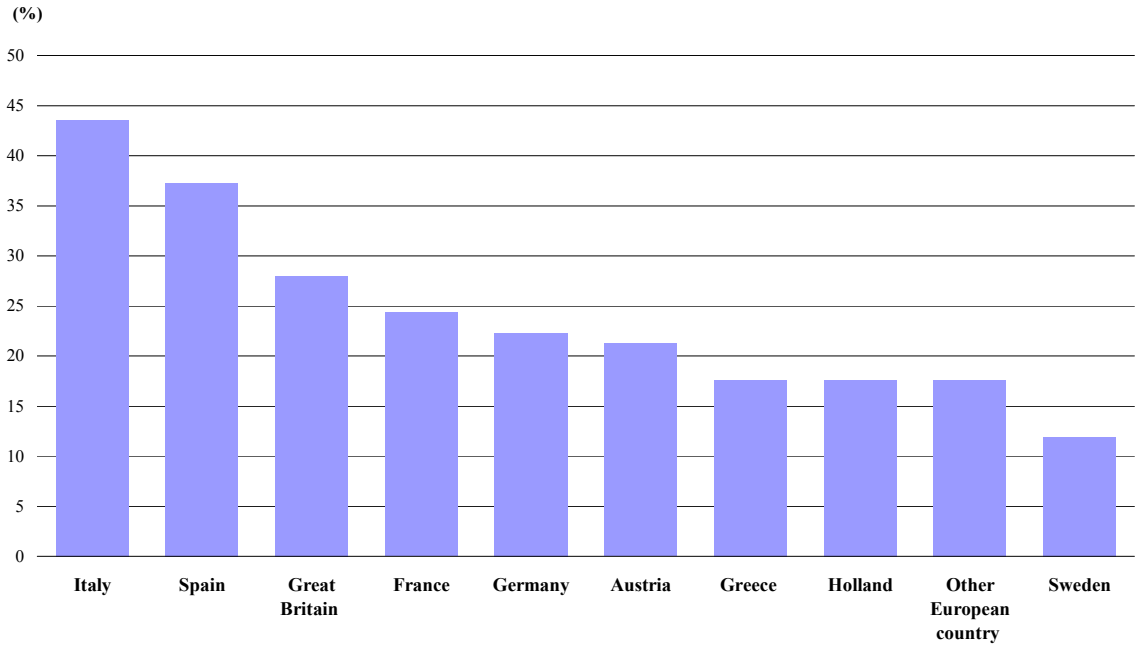
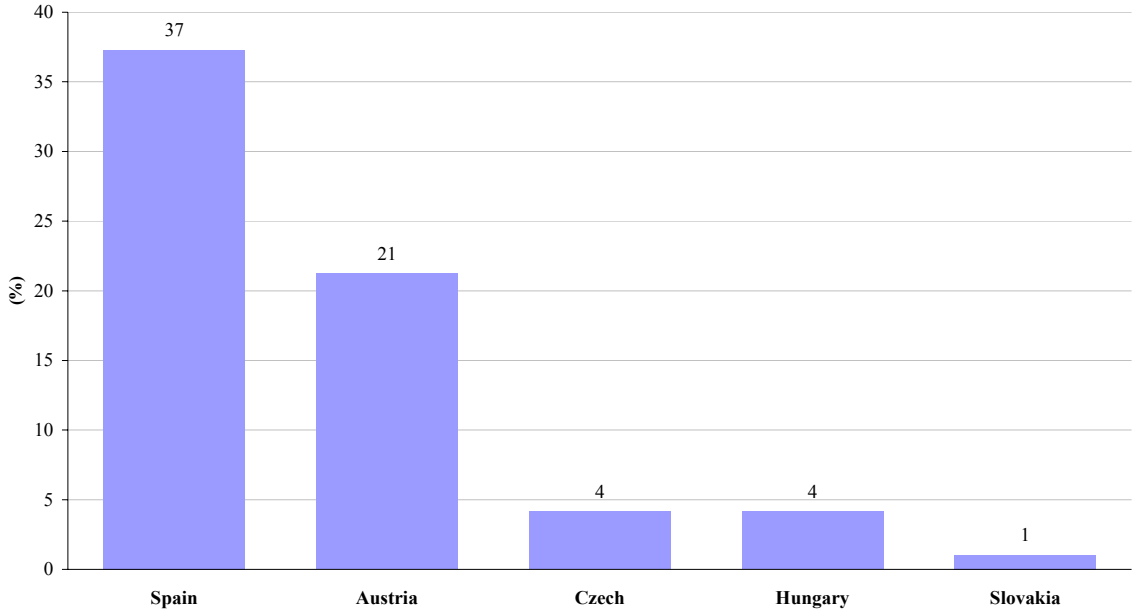


Figure 5. **Attraction of selected European countries (%, N=193)**



The most attractive European countries for the Hungarian students were the long standing and larger member states of the EU. They don't feel attached to the former Soviet block member states like Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Italy and Spain seems to be popular because of being an important tourism target country. Austria has a quite good position behind the large EU countries. It could have some historical (e.g. Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) and romantic (e.g. Sissy cult) elements, too. (See figures 4-5.)

Benefits and problems of diversity

Along the nationality and regionalism, which have their motivating power, the differences of our cultures are our strength, too. Europe has a rich society because its people come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. To benefit from the full wealth of skills, talents and ideas in Europe, it is vital that everyone is included.

Diversity can bring huge benefits in the workplace. Companies are increasingly recognising that diversity is not just a moral argument or a question of meeting legal obligations. In a 2005 Commission report, 83% of companies with a diversity policy in place said that it had brought real business benefits.

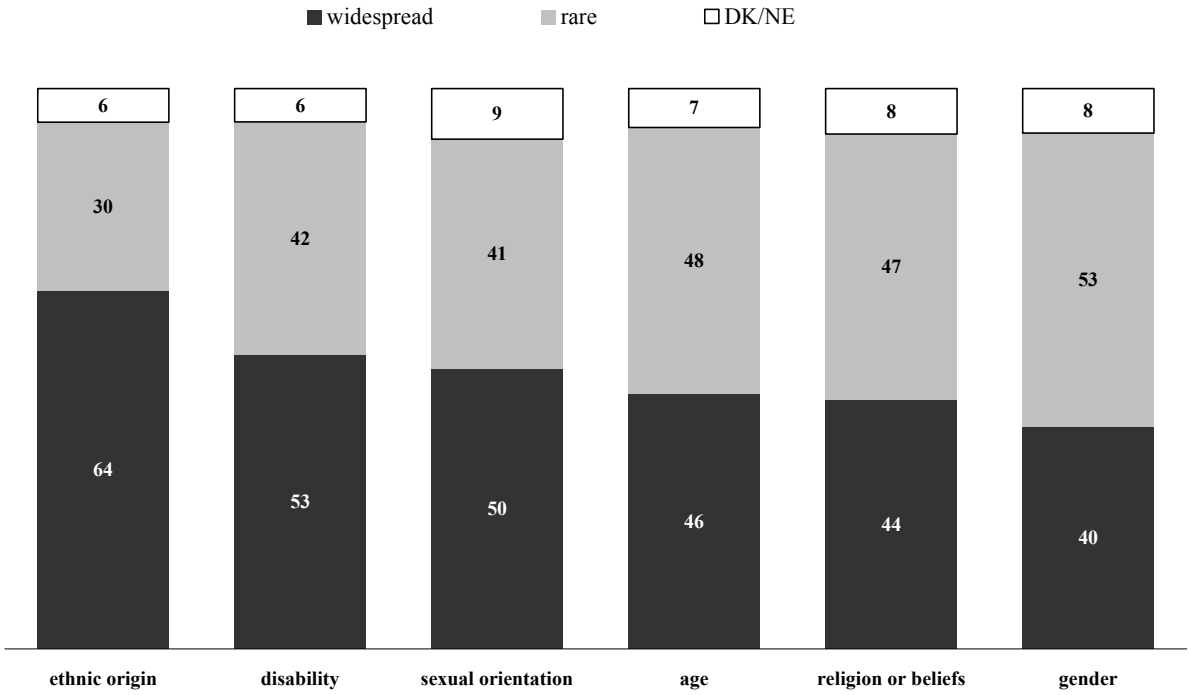
In order to make benefits from the diversity of Europe The European Commission launched an online consultation on combating discrimination in the Member States and at EU level. The public consultation would help the Commission plan new measures to tackle discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in areas beyond the job market.

"We want to hear the views of as many people as possible on how to take on discrimination effectively in areas such as healthcare, education and housing," said Vladimir Spidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities- "The EU already has some of the most extensive anti-discrimination laws in the world. But we want to make sure that protection against discrimination is focused where it is most needed and that the right balance is struck between everyone involved - be they individuals, employers, public authorities or associations."[6]

Two European Community Directives, the Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Framework Directive, define a set of principles that offer everyone in the EU a common minimum level of legal protection against discrimination. The directives prevent people in the European Union from being discriminated against on grounds of race and ethnic origin and on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, primarily in the workplace. This comes in addition to the numerous laws adopted in the past 30 years to fight discrimination based on sex and to allow for equal treatment between women and men in the workplace.

[6] http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?language=EN

Figure 6. Perception of discrimination on the basis of EU25 (%)



Source: Eurobarometer, 2007

A recent Eurobarometer survey (January 2007) showed that 64% of Europeans believe discrimination is widespread in their country and 51 % think that not enough is being done to combat the problem. These averages hide considerable discrepancies between countries. These differences by country result from different factors: socio-economic, historic and cultural ones. The presence and proportion of people from a different ethnic origin, or different religion and beliefs than the rest of the population also impact on the results. It is difficult to explain the differences between countries. Firstly, people's perceptions and opinions about discrimination are formed on the basis of personal experiences and beliefs as well as on actual contextual events. Furthermore, people's perceptions and opinions about discrimination are formed on the basis of norms and standards. The term "widespread" can therefore be interpreted quite differently depending on what people perceive as the norm. Nonetheless, there are some patterns in the results which provide some insight.[7]

Discrimination on the ground of ethnic origin is perceived to take place most widely. Close to one respondent in five considers this form of discrimination to be very widespread in his or her country (19%) and a further 45% believe it is fairly widespread. Only 2% of the

[7] Eurobarometer 2007

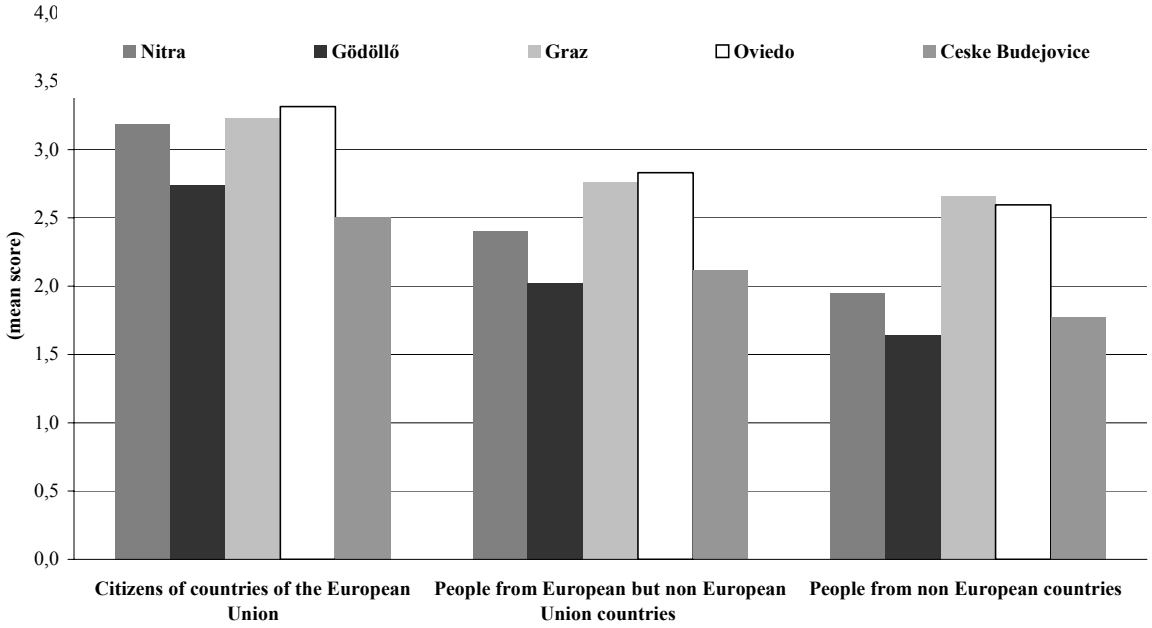
interviewees believe it does not exist. There are large differences between Member States of the European Union when it comes to the perceptions of how far discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin occurs. The first cleavage highlighted by the survey is between the former EU15 countries and the 10 new Member States. In the latter, people are significantly less likely to feel this form of discrimination is widespread (42% vs. 68% in the former EU15 countries). The country results show that the view that this form of discrimination is widespread in their country is most widely held by people in Sweden (85%), the Netherlands (83%), France (80%), Denmark (79%), Belgium (78%) and Italy (77%). Conversely, in Lithuania (23%) and Latvia (29%) fewer than 3 out of 10 respondents share this view. [8]
Summarized the results of the Eurobarometer survey, it can be stated:

- that people's views appear to be influenced whether or not they have friends from other ethnic origins,
- that people who feel that other forms of discrimination are widespread are more likely to feel that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin is widespread,
- in all but 4 Member States, a majority of citizens find that people of another ethnic origin enrich the national culture and,
- People's attitude towards a multi-cultural society is strongly related to their sociodemographic characteristics, with education acting as the most powerful predictor: the longer people benefited from education, the more they favour the concept of a multicultural society.

In our survey, conducted at five European Universities, the discrimination was measured by acceptance of immigrants. The perception of discrimination in Hungary is at high level and the real discriminative attitudes (e.g. acceptance of immigrants) are quite strong as well. This behaviour is similar in the Czech Republic. In other partner countries the acceptance of immigrants is much higher than in Hungary. The reason for that could be the unfavourable labour and livelihood situation in Hungary.

[8] Eurobarometer 2007

Figure 7. Acceptance of immigrants (N=1053)



Hungarian students do not really concern about discrimination against immigrants or other minority groups. They concern much more about job opportunities, the quality and content of the education, public service and facilities and the environmental issues. Female respondents are more aware of differences between man and woman and terrorism. Beside variable Equality between man and woman, and Terrorism, there is a weaker correlation by sex with the variables Poverty and the Quality and Content of the education, too. From our survey it turns out, if somebody is concerned about the environment, than he or she is concerned about other social questions or problems as well.

From the Eurobarometer survey turns out that European people think the best tools to fight against discrimination is the education, the socialization in the family and the media and the national government.

Figure 8. Personal concerns of the students (N=193)

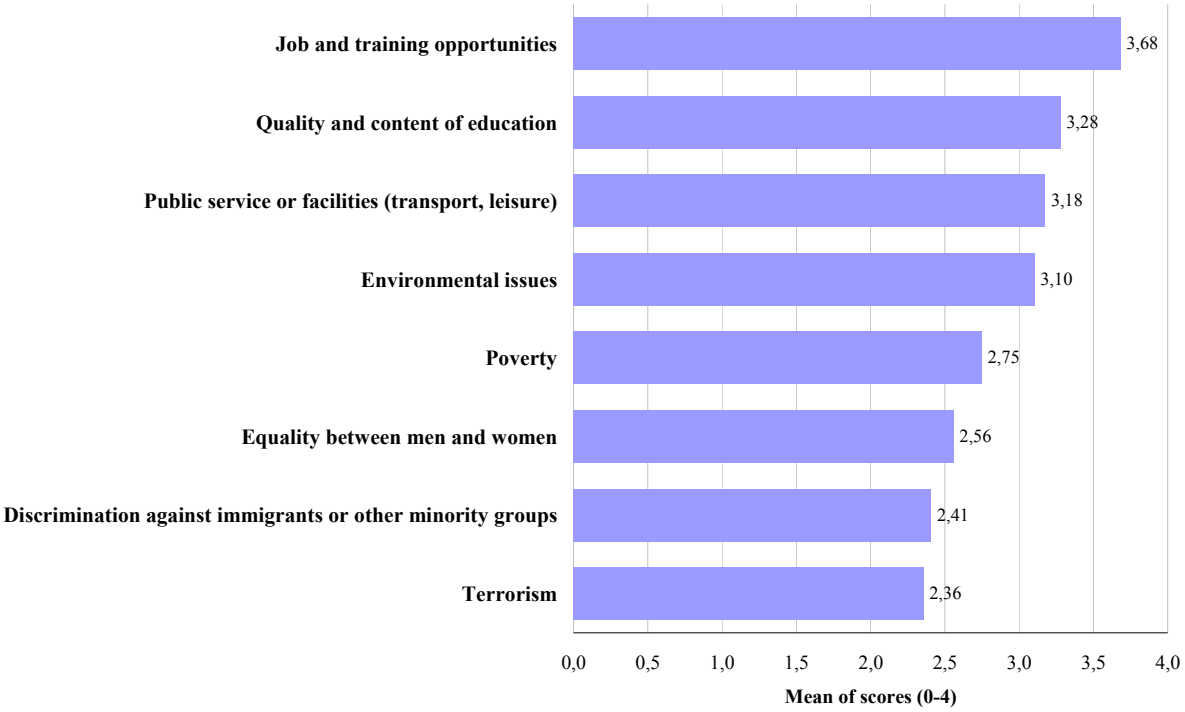
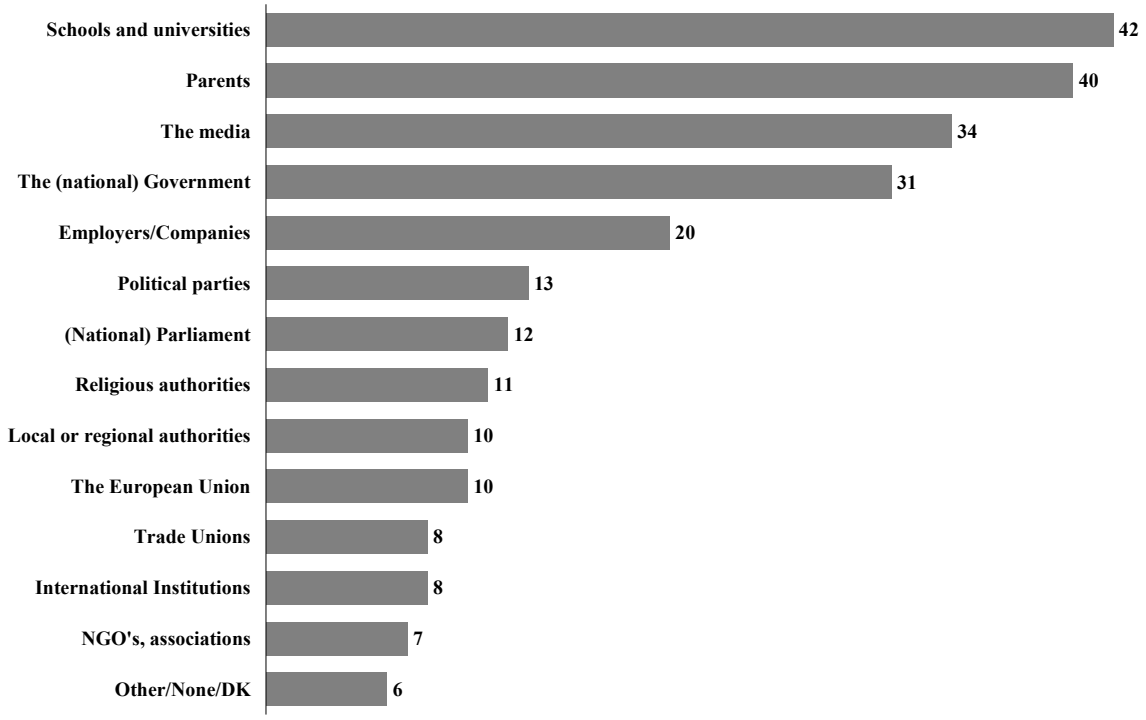
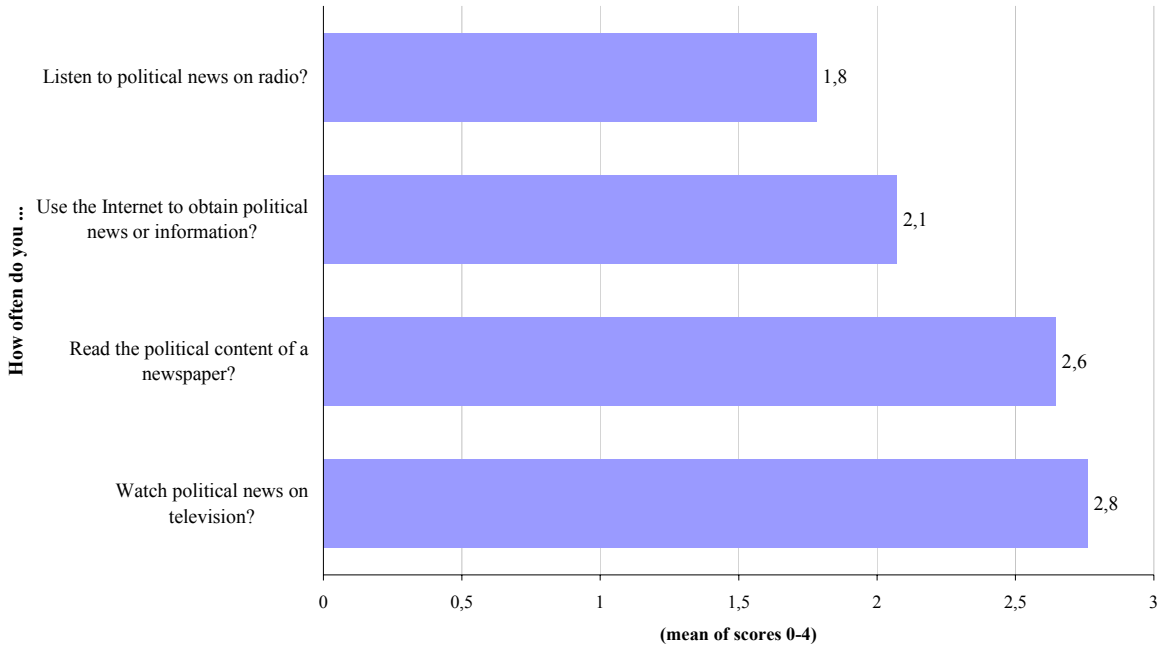


Figure 9. The importance of factors, which have a role to fight against discrimination



Source: Eurobarometer, 2007

Figure 10. Media resources of the political news (N=193)



In our MEEC survey it is found, that students get most of the political information from TV, but in Graz. At the Austrian university students prefer newspaper to TV. The students in Gödöllő are connected or dependent on TV at highest level. Using radio is the weakest media tool to propagate multiculturalism and tolerance.

Citizenship and political activity

In the MEEC survey there were questions about political or civic activities as well. The dataset shows, that the students are not really active at political and civic level. Most of the mean scores are below the value 2, namely the respondents are not likely to participate in that kind of actions. This is rather worse for the students in Gödöllő, they wouldn't engage in any kind of civic or political activity. Among the activities boycotting or buying of different goods has the highest probability. In Gödöllő, there is a weak correlation between the study year and the participation in political meetings or rally, and between the sex and boycotting. Among the below mentioned variables sometimes stronger correlation could be observed as well.

Figure11. Probability of political or civic actions (N=1053)

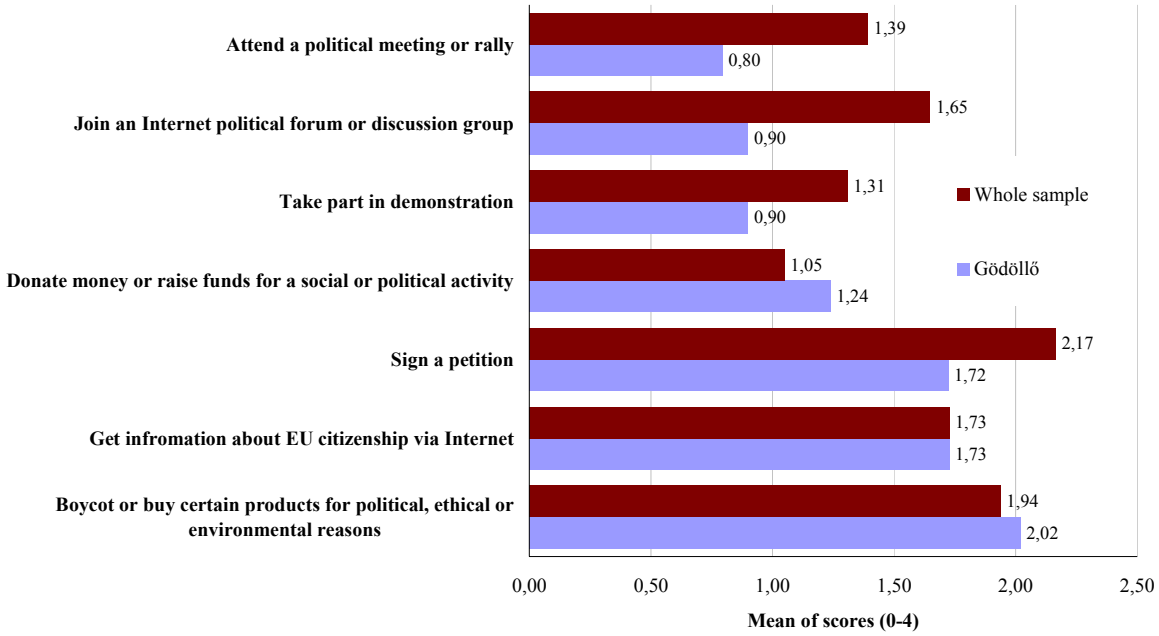
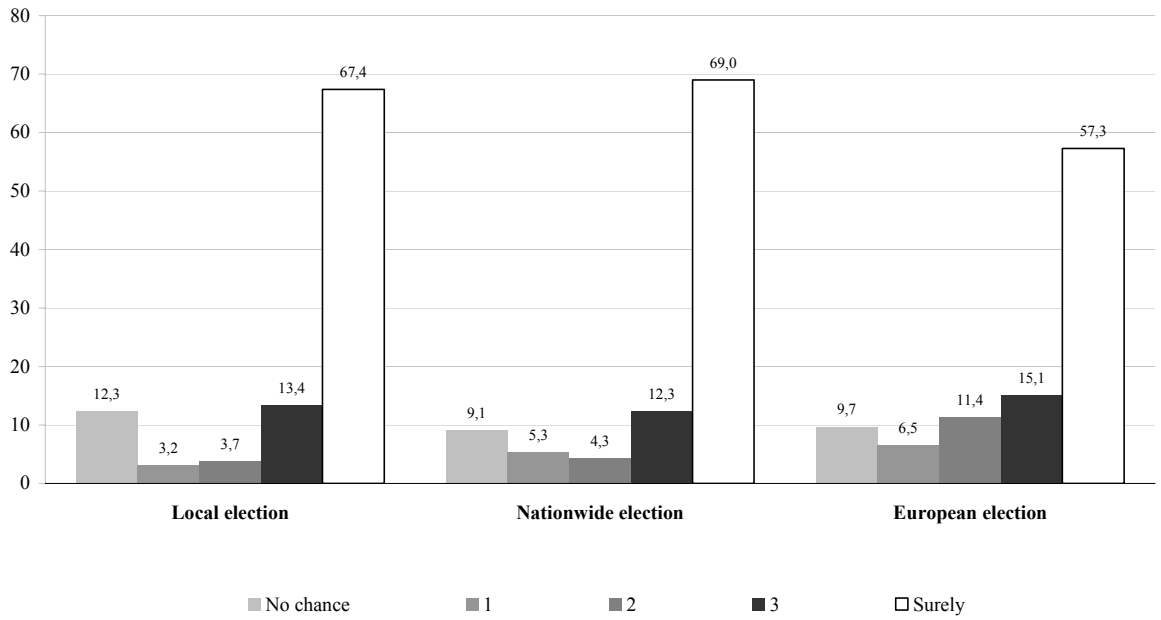


Figure 12. Participation in elections (N=193)



Though the respondents in Gödöllő are politically not active, they would be participating in the elections at local, national or European level. Oviedo has the highest values, while others have lower values compared to the whole sample. The weakest readiness could be observed in

Ceske Budejovice. Whereas more than half of the Austrian students have membership in a civic organization, in Nitra, Gödöllő and Oviedo less than third of the students are active in that field.

Figure 13. Membership in civic association (%, N=1053)

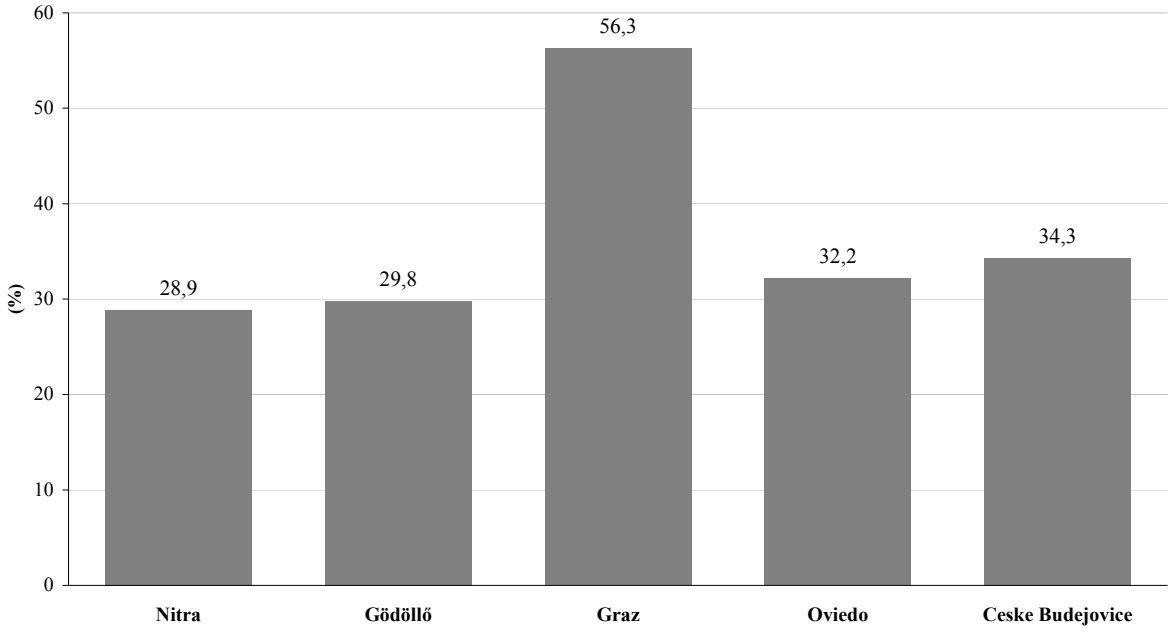
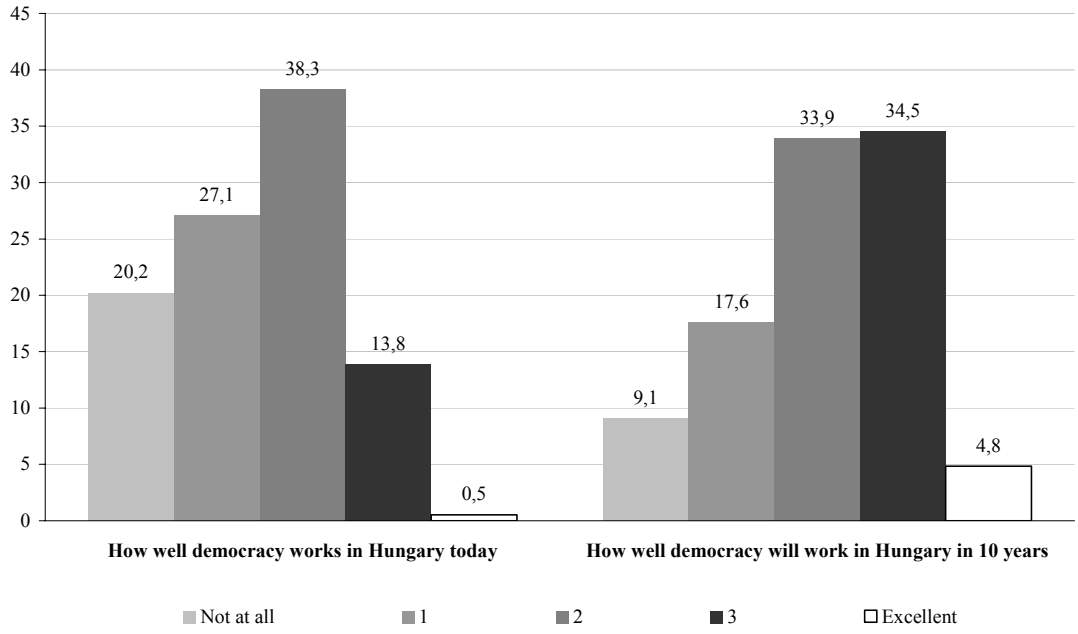


Figure 14. Opinions on Democracy (N=193)



According to the political activity, the opinions on democracy are quite unfavourable. 20 percentages of Hungarian students says that democracy does not work in Hungary at all. In

ten year's time they are more optimistic. Compared to the whole sample, these opinions have the lowest values in the present and the one before the lowest in a ten-year period.

CONCLUSION

Nationality, identities, multiculturalism, citizenship, the notions measured and analysed in the MEEC survey are complex definitions. Certain type of nationalism (e.g. ethnic nationalism) could enhance interethnic intolerance, discrimination against different ethnic or minority groups. On the other hand, identity, national identity could be the innovation of tradition and the different national cultures and identities mean multiculturalism inside of the EU.

Among the students of Gödöllő, there is a high level of European identity, the second strongest among the five countries involved in the survey. The attachments to the locality are at the same level. The most important factor of their European identity is the culture and certain values and traditions. The students in Gödöllő prefer the bigger European states, especially in cases when they have summer holiday resorts as well.

In the EU the perception of discrimination on ethnic origin is felt to be the most widespread. At the same time, in all but four Member States, a majority of citizens find that people of a different ethnic origin than the rest of the population enrich the national culture. In our survey we found, that students not really would accept people from non-European countries. The students from post socialist countries, in contradiction with the pupils of Spain and Austria, have a stronger negative attitude towards the immigrants. The question of immigrants and minority groups is not important among Gödöllő students. A less interesting concern is terrorism, the most interesting is one is job and training opportunities.

The interviewed students in Gödöllő get the political news from TV and the not really like to get political information from the radio. They are not ready to get involved in most of the political or civic actions, the are politically quite passive. Their political gun is eventually the boycotting or buying certain products for political or for other reasons, though they are not satisfied with the situation of democracy at the moment. In the same time, they would participate in the elections, especially on the nationwide parliamentary election.

This paper is just the first result of a three-year long international research program. More complex analysis is to be expected just after the evaluating the results in the partner countries. However, it turned out that the students of economics in Gödöllő had European identity, but they would not be active European citizens, because they are much more interested in their carrier and study circumstances than in civic actions. They feel the problems and concerns of the recent Hungarian parliamentary democracy, but they don't know how to participate and get involved in that. It is clear, that beside the family, the education has a very important role in order to enhance that kind of competences of the students.

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