



Newsroom Europa – Portugal 13th-19th July 2021

German-Portuguese-Slovenian youth exchange (EAB, FAJUB, DRPDNM)

By Petar Buric, Ida Büsch, Jovan Derovic, Maximilian Hahn, Beatriz Melo

The Youth Exchange “Newsroom Europa 1.2”, is a project organized by the DRPDNM and funded by the Erasmus + program. It took place in Penhas da Saúde, Covilhã, in the Youth hotel from 13th to 19th July 2021 and it joined participants from Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The key topic of this project is to increase knowledge about the European Union and its main objectives were EU Citizenship, EU awareness and Democracy, reaching the policy level/dialogue with decision makers and civic engagement/responsible citizenship. This Youth Exchange also had the purposes of developing civic, social, creativity and teamwork skills among young Europeans of different nationalities and different cultures.

During these 8 days, the participants learned more about and worked on the topic of the current Trio Presidency of the Council of the EU. Trio Programmes ensure a fluid transition from one EU member state Presidency to the next through an 18-month agenda. Following this respective order, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia took over this presidency on the 1st of July of 2020 and they will conclude their rotative task on the 31st of December of 2020. The three countries already worked together in 2007-2008, when the EU was also facing difficult times and now they face this task on a very challenging period as well. These 3 countries with 1 programme worked from the motto “Working together for a stronger, more equitable and more sustainable Europe”.

The German Presidency



With the end of the year 2020, one of the most disruptive years in the recent time, Germany handed over its presidency of the Council of Ministers to Portugal. 6 months, 24 weeks, 153 days that gave Germany the chance to set the European agenda and to get Europe ready for the future. But did Germany use this chance? „Together for Europe’s recovery“ was the presidency’s motto: the attempt of finding a direct answer to all the challenges caused by the very dominant coronavirus pandemic. With strengthening the implementation of national minimum wages and social partners, Germany intended to secure jobs and the existence of working people. By deciding on the „Next Generation EU“ fund during the German Presidency, the EU created an instrument that intends fast help for those most affected by the crisis. The recent shape of the EU household with a priority on health, climate protection, digitalization and youth exchange, gives us the impression that urgent topics of our time are finally on the political agenda of decision makers in Brussels.

It all seems good, but nevertheless we need to underline that actions speak louder than words. In our project week in Portugal, we had plenty of exchanges on recent trends in Europe, the upcoming election in Germany, domestic controversies about corruption in Slovenia but also the rise of populist policies in Poland and Hungary. The interview with a Slovenian representative showed us that the upcoming years are going to be fundamental for the EU as it will get clearer into which direction the European project will go. We, as the young generation, are proud to be an European family but in our point of view Europe does not just need to recover from the pandemic but as well from backwarded politics. Even though there is now an upcoming mechanism for the rule of law in Europe, this problem will not disappear as anti-european powers will continue trying to destabilize the EU. The German Presidency should have highlighted it more clearly, in order to guarantee a stable and liberal European future. Germany used its chance and set essential priorities. In Portugal, Germany has a sincere and active successor for the presidency of the Council of the EU.

Portuguese Presidency



Portugal took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in the first semester of 2021 with the individual motto "Time to deliver: a fair, green and digital recovery". During these 6 months, counting the 4th presidency of Portugal, the country was able to achieve essential results for their established goals, showing a strong will to build a better future for Europe that presents concrete answers to the fears and expectations of the EU citizens. Some of the highlights of this presidency were the EU Digital Covid Certificate, the boost of the Social Pillar and the launching of the Conference of the Future of Europe.

Slovenian Presidency



The last country of the current Presidential Trio is Slovenia. The Slovenian presidency has four priorities for this second semester of 2021. Its goal is to accelerate the EU's recovery, strengthen its resilience, strengthen the rule of law and European values, and increase security and stability in the European neighborhood. Given that the COVID virus has affected all EU member states, and that they are not in a position to overcome the crisis on their own, Slovenia has the task of strengthening resilience as one of its main priorities. At the same time, Slovenia must enable recovery in all sectors of the economy and public life, putting emphasis on the digital transformation. Slovenia's second goal is to work on strengthening the rule of law and they intend to do it through dialogue, to enable member states to learn from each other's experiences and to further strengthened with full respect for national constitutional systems and traditions. Special attention will also be paid to the integration of the Western Balkan countries and the EU. As Prime Minister Jansa once said: "If we do not take steps towards the Western Balkans, those steps will be taken by someone who has different interests and values." And lastly, given the many challenges the EU has faced in recent years, it is now needed more than ever to have a comprehensive debate on our common future, in which the Conference on the Future of Europe, that officially began on May 9, 2021, will play a key part since it intends to involve citizens, including the significant role of young people, civil society and the European institutions as equal partners, with a view to launching a debate on what the EU should look like in the future and to meet human expectations. With the hope that all of these goals will be fulfilled, we will reach the end of the Trio Presidency in a better EU. And even though the Youth Exchange is coming to an end, the participants will surely follow the last months of the Trio Presidency and come out of this experience more connected with their European selves.

Erasmus +

Erasmus + is a program that supports the education of young people in Europe. In the field of education and training, it supports the mobility of individuals and international partnerships between different organizations in order to modernize and cooperate between education and the labor market. It also encourages the development of competencies of youth workers and leaders for the organization of non-formal learning activities in youth work and youth inclusion in dialogue with youth policy makers at local, national, European or international level. Participation in these projects inspires and strengthens self-confidence and gives you the opportunity to change something for the better and at the same time to develop your skills and competencies. . All young people improve their CV by participating in the project and its activities, with new knowledge and skills and increasing employment opportunities and leaving a better impression in job interviews. More and more companies demand from their employees: teamwork, organization, accuracy, patience, planning and information literacy is crucial for working in a company. It is a rich experience of volunteering and enables the development of social skills and competences. not only work experience but also competencies that he can use when looking for a job. Another advantage is that it offers you the opportunity to try new things, which are not part of our formal education and thus we discover new talents. Another advantage of non-formal education can be mentioned as socialization, the moment in which we are embedded during education and offers us the opportunity for new networking with people. Non-formal education and volunteering are great opportunities to enrich your CV, different qualifications, skills and competencies that non-formal education brings. Through informal learning you train your performances, collaborations with other people and opens new horizons and introduces you to different things that I would never discover.

Becoming European

The Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia came together as one to reach their goals, and so did our trinational youth exchange group. We arrived as Portuguese, Slovenians, and Germans, but we will all be going back to our home countries as Europeans.

"If someone asks me whether I feel more German or more European, I will always answer European," said Jan, participant from the German team.

Milja, participant from the Portuguese team, said she already felt like a European citizen before being part of this project, but added that she has learned something new about the German and Slovenian stance on the EU and their engagement through the youth exchange.

Maja, participant from the Slovenian team, said: "I learned how to compromise and work together with people from different cultures."

We arrived in Penhas da Saude with just clothes in our suitcases, but we will be leaving with so much more: inspiring impressions of each other's cultures, a widened knowledge of the EU, and friendships that might last a lifetime. Another thing that we will take back home in our metaphorical suitcase is an important piece of advice from Slovenian decision maker Klemen Vitkovic. Use every opportunity that the European Union has to offer, because even if things don't always go the way you expect them to, you will always learn something.

Ziva, participant from the Slovenian team, agreed that it was important for youngsters to be involved in pan-european projects.

Being active and engaged is an investment in your future, and, from our experience, it is also a lot of fun! While it was the first Erasmus+ project for some of us, it is certainly not going to be our last.