

European Academy on Democracy

One Europe - Many democracies

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If Europe is not to be defined exclusively in terms of economic agreements and reduced to a common market, the definition of a common political identity must be at the head of the agenda, and this requires addressing the question of citizenship.

Chantal Mouffe, Dimensions of Radical Democracy

One keeps this indefinite right to the question, to criticism, to deconstruction (guaranteed rights, in principle, in any democracy):
no deconstruction without democracy,
no democracy without deconstruction.

Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship

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I. Abstract

Different conceptions of „democracy“ result in different ideas about „good governance“ across Europe. These need to be made explicit; respective conflicts have to be addressed in order improve policy making.

The project concept presents a European Academy focusing on different understandings of "democracy" in Europe.

Different and conflictual perspectives on „democracy“ will be elaborated in a week-long European Academy by young decision-makers involved in European politics.

The focus will be a qualitative understanding of democracy and take into consideration personal (emotional), professional (rational) and historical (cultural) dimensions.

In the context of the European elections 2009 this will lead to an enhanced conscience of the need for „active citizenship“ as the foundation of Europe as well as the relevance of democracy in all aspects of European politics.

II. Background

In Europe (EU, bordering countries and members of the Council of Europe) one will find a diversity of conceptions and traditions concerning democracy. European politicians act according to their understanding of democracy when taking decisions in the various institutions and committees. They have to find a way of remaining capable of acting despite all differences.

The risen number of member states of the European Union as well as the number of the members of the Council of Europe makes it difficult for decision makers to keep an overview and develop an understanding of the various perspectives on „good (democratic) governance“.

Making these differences explicit and developing a competence for dealing with them in one Europe is a pre-condition for a peaceful coordination of politics.

III. Structure

The project concept aims at making explicit and constructively working on this topic via a „European Academy on democracy“.

Goals

- Being able to constructively deal with the multiplicity of conceptions of democracy in Europe
- Making explicit historical and cultural dimensions of democracy and their connection to identity
- Developing a new qualitative understanding of democracy for private and professional life
- Asking the question of democracy on all levels of European politics
- Fostering participation by focussing on „active citizenship“ as a model of putting democracy in Europe into practice
- Developing a stronger European political identity by networking with other decision-makers and developing common strategies

Target group

Young und future European decision-makers close to government responsibility and working in European politics between 25 and 35 years of age.

Participants should be interested in an intercultural and focused exchange. They have the willingness for developing strategies for European challenges. They speak English fluently.

The participants will be individually suggested by chosen politicians (mentors) in government responsibility and/or responsibility in European politics.

Possible variations:

- a. Six member states of the European Union are sending a delegation of 4-6 participants each (24 - 36 persons)
- b. Six member states of the European Union an 2 bordering countries / candidates are sending a delegation of 3-4 participants each (24 - 32 persons)

c. Six member states of the Council of Europe are sending a delegation of 4 – 6 participants each (24 – 36 persons)

In any case there should not be more than six countries present at one European Academy in order to keep the number of backgrounds, perspectives and concepts limited.

Academy

Each year there will be two week-long European Academies on democracy with a specific topic. They will take place in April / Mai and September / October. In this way each country will obtain the possibility of sending a delegation every two years.

In each cycle a new combination of countries will be found. In the third year all participants will be invited to a conference focussing on the results of the projects having been developed by participants so far.

IV. Contents

Elements of the week-long Academy:

- Education and training via units on individual competence and transfer of knowledge
- Exchange and development of a network structure
- Developing common strategies for handling challenges concerning Europe and democracy

There will be three interconnected levels defining the contents:

1. Education and Training

a. Concerning knowledge transfer there will be topics focussing on the current development of democracy in Europe, like:

- Different concepts, traditions and cultures concerning democracy
- The question of legitimization of European institutions
- Chances of democratization via web2.0
- Chances and limits of participation
- Active citizenship as the base of European identity

There will be input by leading thinkers and practitioners in the respective field.

b. Concerning individual competence there will be process-focussed units for reflecting democratic principles and dilemmas. Participants will obtain the possibility of getting to know and using a qualitative understanding of democracy.

2. Exchange

Discussions following input and training will make possible an exchange of getting to know the various traditions and concepts of democracy of the others. At the same time they will become sensible for possible conflicts which may result from different perspectives.

3. Development of strategy

One important aspect of the Academy will be developing strategies via activating methods for planning and commitment in the last third of the time.

The specific topic will be background for developing concrete steps of change.

Results will be transformed into trans-border activities after the Academy. They will be accompanied by press activities and are the base for the conference in the third year.

Sample Unit „The pumpkin“

Developing a qualitative understanding of democracy



Three people have found a pumpkin at the same time. Each of them wants the whole pumpkin for him-/herself.

What would you suggest to them they should do?
Try to find five different possible solutions – be creative!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



Very often we try to immediately find a **compromise**. We cut things into pieces, we try to be just in a form of quantitative exchange.

This is one of the ways we find very often in democracy. Democracy as a formal procedure is looking for compromises with which each one can live.

If that is not possible, for example if there was a „candidate“ instead of a pumpkin, very quickly a **majority decision** is being taken, with winners and losers. This is also an inherently democratic procedure.



An alternative way is stopping for a moment and going beyond the positions and arguments of „this is definitely mine“. Beyond that more essential **needs** might become visible. There is a good chance that the conflict will dissolve or more **creative ways** of democratic interaction can develop.

Working with the approach of qualitative democracy

Suggestion for looking at a personal or professional conflict and trying to work with a qualitative understanding of democracy:

Step 1: Reflecting Needs

Checking if there actually is a conflict. Checking the needs of the persons involved. What do they essentially need? What is behind their explicit positions and arguments? Do I know what I really need? Why is my perspective so important, what's behind that?

If I know all the needs and they remain conflictual:

Step 2: Conflict - Dilemma - Conflict and Creative Solutions

Discovering the perspective of the others within myself (Dilemma). This makes it possible for deciding for one position without negating the other person as a human being.

This makes all open for looking for creative solutions by changing the situation and/or its frame conditions.

If that's not possible:

Step 3: Compromise

An equal limitation of the interests and needs of the persons involved.

If that's not possible:

Step 4: Majority Decision

Limiting as few as possible of the persons involved.

Working with these four steps means turning upside down our „normal“ understanding of democratic procedures. It makes democracy a direct and personal dimension of life and gives a fresh look at different perspectives on conflicts.

Source: Ulrich, S. / Henschel, T. R. / Oswald, E. Miteinander – Erfahrungen mit Betzavta. 4th Edition Gütersloh 2005