

POLITICAL EDUCATION AS A NECESSARY PART OF AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

There is currently a noticeable increase in extremism, populism, hatred and intolerance in all EU countries, which are evoked by several political conflicts, social events (critical situation in Afghanistan, response to the COVID pandemic, conflict in Ukraine, migration from third countries etc.). Political education as an integral part of the educational process in schools, not only at the national level, we therefore naturally consider it one of the tools for promoting democratic tools in society. We also consider foreign language teaching to be one of the tools of political education. Within it, on the example of learning about important political events, which at the same time shaped the moral democratic values of the bearers of a given language, we can mediate a critical analysis of the way of life in a given developmental stage of society. The aim of our paper is to present the idea of the educational process as a driving force for the spread of democratic values on the example of foreign language teaching at our faculty.

From the point of view of theoretical backgrounds, we define the very concept of political education on the example of several experts in the field of sociology, politics and education. In order to find out the current state of the concept of political education in the educational process at national and transnational level, we analyze the individual documents of the European Union. Throughout the post, we mainly use qualitative data, such as thematic analysis, to interpret patterns and meanings in the data and **descriptive data**.

***Keywords:** political education, European Union, democratic society, foreign language, language teaching, society*

INTRODUCTION

Politics is an integral part of the life of every individual in every community. From a philosophical point of view, it makes sense to talk about politics basically every time we are talking about human relations and coexistence. Another natural part of man is education. Beginning at birth, each individual is gradually integrated into certain structures, at each stage of development he improves by natural or systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills in all areas that directly or indirectly affect him. It is similar to policy education, i. political education. However, the combination of policy and education also carries possible risks. At present, the whole society is subject to globalization tendencies. Thus, we cannot

perceive education in a purely national context. In our paper, we will focus on the possibility of building the concept of systematic political education not only at the national level, which we consider to be one of the tools for promoting democratic views in society.

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL EDUCATION

The concept of political education evokes negative connotations in today's society. Especially the older generation still imagines under this term directly focused and especially mandatory ideological courses of Marxism and Leninism, without which it would not be possible to successfully achieve any level of higher education. Perhaps the very word politics in connection with education evokes distrust in people and an adequate negative reaction. All the more so as politics is associated, especially nowadays, with something unfair, with benevolence, bribery and the very distrust of politicians, political parties, which can even result in the radicalization of society. Unfortunately, we encounter this phenomenon in specific forms and in our environment. According to EURACTIV, young people in the Central European region are united by a distrust of standard politicians and political parties. According to B. Hunyadi from the Hungarian think-tank Political Capital Institute in Hungarian society, young people in the 15-34 age group are not interested in politics for more than two thirds (34% are "not interested at all" and 37% are "rather not interested"). One of the reasons may be the perception of politics, in which negative associations prevail: corruption, lies, fraud. The fact is perceived that young people in particular are inclined to the so-called political extreme [1].

To prevent possible radicalization, especially of young people, resp. it can be minimized, it is possible through the return of trust in politics in the form of effective, systematic and modern political education, the content of which must not be ideological directions, constitutions, memorization of political systems of the country, symbols, political parties, resp. their leaders, but especially principles, values and attitudes. B. Crick e.g. defines politics itself as an activity in which public conflicts in one group are resolved according to their mutual strength and the importance of the group's own interests for the survival of that group [2].

The British philosopher M. Oakeshott understands politics as a universal activity of caring for and improving relationships between people brought together by chance or will. According to him, the content of political education should be a way of life. In connection with our topic, his opinion on the connection between political education and the study of history is also interesting. In this context, he sees history as a kind of summary of the ways we think about politics and clarifies the reasons for the existence of political attitudes and institutions [3]. However, the primary goal in the study of history should not be to memorize historical events or their actors, but especially critical analysis of the way of life, revealing the causes of a specific, especially negative event and the connection of

a given period situation with the present. As an example, in the following part of our paper we will present a specific text with which we work in the study of political history at our faculty in order to force a young person to think about possible parallels with the present based on a contemporary description.

In a democratic society, education should be the driving force behind the spread of democratic values. The higher the level of education in society, the better democracy is applied among people.

THE NORMATIVITY OF (POLITICAL) EDUCATION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

If we want to talk about the attempt to define normatively and bindingly the norms, rules, content and goals of political education at the transnational level, it is necessary to mention the state of a unified educational policy within the institution. Slovakia is a full member of the European Union, so we focused on the state of the concept of unified education within the organization. The key documents in the field of education are considered to be the Maastricht Agreement of 1992, which set out a clear but limited order in Article 149: "Society should contribute to the development of quality education by promoting cooperation between the Member States and the responsibility of the Member States for the content of education, the organization of the school system and cultural and linguistic differences" [4].

This laid the foundation stone for the current state that the European Union's common education policy cannot exist because it has no basis in the legal norm.

The next step was the Lisbon European Summit, at which the European Council presented a program to make Europe "the most competitive, dynamic, education-based economy in the world, capable of continuous economic growth, increasing the number and quality of jobs and social cohesion" [5]. The main method for achieving the goal became the so-called open method of cooperation. Education and vocational training were to come to the fore. These broad strategic objectives have been set:

- improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational education and training in the EU,
- facilitate access to education and training for all,
- open up vocational education and training systems to the wider world. At the same time, 13 unified intentions were formulated, of which the following are relevant for us:
- to support the development of active civic attitudes, equal opportunities and social cohesion,
- improve foreign language teaching.

In 2004, a higher-level group chaired by W. Kok published an important report indirectly on the Lisbon process. This report revealed that the ambitious goals of the Open Method of Cooperation formulated in Lisbon were not achieved due to the lethargy of the Member States and the non-binding nature of the document. The open method of cooperation did not live up to expectations. The Copenhagen Process and the Bologna Declaration became another milestone. The Copenhagen process concerned in particular the modernization of vocational education and training. The result is the development of various tools to improve mobility and change skills. One of these tools is EUROPASS, which lists the types of qualifications an individual has achieved and is used for employment in other European countries [6]. We consider the creation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to be a benefit of universalization efforts, especially in foreign language teaching, which combines the teaching of modern languages into 6 levels with a view to creating greater opportunities for international exchange in modern language teaching. A certain degree of uniformity can be observed at the level of higher education, as expressed in the Bologna Declaration of 1999. It was signed by 29 European Ministers of Education, creating an area of higher education in Europe. It includes a system of comparable bachelor's and master's degrees, the introduction of a credit system (ECTS) and the promotion of mobility between higher education institutions.

The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth contains the following objective in relation to our theme:

- the proportion of early school leavers should fall below 10% and at least 40% of young people should have a university degree. Therefore, if we were to summarize the current state of a single European education policy, we can conclude that there is currently no uniformity in education. The European Union therefore has only a supportive and recommendatory role in the field of education. We consider it beneficial, at least, that there is a consensus in some of its segments on common activities and objectives for education policy in the EU.

From the European Union's latest contributions on education with a link to cultural values, I will present the outcome of the European Commission's November 2017 meeting in Gothenburg to encourage discussion on the future of education and culture. As part of the ongoing debate on the future of Europe, the Commission set out its vision for the European Learning Area until 2025. The document states, Europe's great asset is its cultural diversity, which stimulates creativity and innovation. At the same time, however, it is united by common values, which are a special feature of the European way of life.

If we focus on the field of political education, we do not mention the need for political education in any of the basic documents mentioned so far in the indication of a kind of education strategy within the European Union. Expressing

one's own ideas, promoting them, mutual respect based on the principles of soft power is not just a matter of politics and diplomacy. We consider politics to be an everyday part of society. Although we are researching among young people across Europe, as we said in a previous section of our paper, I am not interested in politics. It is they who are becoming a suitable target for supporters of undemocratic concepts, xenophobia, racism and intolerance. That is why we naturally consider the concept of systematic political education in schools not only at the national level to be one of the tools for promoting democratic tools in society.

POLITICAL EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

In today's globalized world, the education of a free and responsible personality, and thus the education of justice, tolerance and respect for the truth, is becoming a priority in a democratic society. Every educational institution should therefore pay increased attention to the rise of extremism in society, hate speech, xenophobia, intolerance. All the more so as in many cases the young generation is becoming the disseminator of these ideas through several social networks. The need to provide democratic views, ideas, whether e.g. in the context of historical contexts in the international context or in the context of knowledge of intercultural contexts or the need to develop critical thinking of young people should be a natural agenda of every educational institution also within the European Union. All the more so because we could assign political education as one of the tools of soft power as a form of promoting interests and ambitions in the current international political system.

The concept of soft power is a key concept in one concept of international politics today. Soft power, like other forms of power, is the ability to change the behavior of others in order to achieve what the subject of influence desires. Nye defines soft power as "the ability to shape the preferences of others"[7]. The sources of soft power are predominantly intangible (culture, values, foreign and domestic policy). Soft power "can be measured by a change in mind, not by the amount of dollars spent or the production of brilliant packages"[8]. Gallaroti places it in neoliberalist and constructivist theory. In his conception, the state is a rational actor, with an effort to maximize profits. "To achieve the best individual results, it is necessary to achieve the desired collective results" [9]. The foundations of soft power are thus a cooperative strategy and collective interest.

POLITICAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE ON THE EXAMPLE OF EDUCATION OF STUDENTS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The field of education is currently an important part of social and political life. It is the subject of interest of the professional public not only from a theoretical but also from a practical point of view. The training of experts in diplomacy, international relations, security studies and political science (these departments are studied at our Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica) must focus not only on the expertise itself, but also on the acquisition of competences in a foreign language (resp. in several foreign languages). Quality higher education in such a field is subsequently a reflection of the functioning of the whole society and in the future a mirror of the whole country, its moral values and settings. Graduates of the study are subsequently the bearers of the quality of education not only in the European area but also in the world format, their quality, targeted training contributes in their very competitiveness on the European and world labor market. At the same time, they are also spreaders of democratic ideas.

At our Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, political education in a foreign language is given due attention, e.g. by learning about the political history of a nation in a specific foreign language (English, German, Russian, Spanish, French). Students in the third year of bachelor's study have the opportunity to get acquainted with important historical milestones of the political development of the country, which significantly influenced the culture, mentality, and especially the value rankings of the nation.

We can state that the language policy at our faculty is friendly in this sense. Although the subjects of foreign language teaching are not included in the group of compulsory elective courses, successful completion of the entire master's and bachelor's degree in international relations, diplomacy and security studies is conditional on passing a comprehensive exam in a foreign language, within the bachelor's degree it is comprehensive English language exam, then within the master's study each potential graduate must also pass the comprehensive exam in a second foreign language (German, Spanish, Russian, French). The content of the exam consists of syllabus for the entire 5-year study of professional foreign language. This is the area of political systems of German (Spanish, French, Russian) speaking countries in comparison with Slovakia, political history of German-speaking countries in comparison with Slovakia, diplomacy, international relations, international institutions, international law.

Teaching foreign languages through a targeted selection of topics thus offers several opportunities to mediate a critical analysis of the way of life in a given developmental stage, to provide a reflection on the milestones that created and shaped the moral, democratic and cultural values of the foreign language. The

study of several foreign languages at the same time, which is actually one of the tools of plurilingualism within the European Union, also offers the possibility of comparing not only contemporary socio-political milestones but also the cultural backgrounds of several European nations in a certain time. The EU pursues a policy of multilingualism linked to the European Charter. This was adopted by the Nice European Council in December 2000 and complements the European Convention on Human Rights. Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Human Rights also include the protection of language. The EU is an economic and political space that is culturally diverse and in which its citizens can share values and ideas while respecting their specific needs cultural identity. The EU declares the development and promotion of language learning in its language policy, which is why the Council of Europe's Language Policy Department was established in Strasbourg in 1998-2000 to promote plurilingualism and multiculturalism, and in 2003 the European Commission issued an Action Plan to promote language learning and linguistic diversity.

At the same time, students can become acquainted with important political milestones in the field of English-language teaching in the teaching of professional English, in German-speaking countries in the teaching of professional German, in French-speaking in the study of professional French or Spanish in the teaching of professional Spanish.

CONCLUSION

The socio-political situation in today's Europe is typical of distrust of the traditional values of a democratic society, which results in the search for various alternatives, not only at national levels. Europe is exposed to a number of socio-political conflicts, the management of which requires a high dose of expertise, but also tolerance. Educating young people precisely in the values of humanity, democracy should therefore be a priority for every ruling party. The concept of political education hides several negative experiences. However, even at the political level, it has become one of the tools of soft power in a democracy as a form of promoting democratic ideas in society. However, we do not encounter a unified position on the issue of political education at the level of the European Union; at present, we do not find a consensus even on a unified EU education policy. We also consider foreign language teaching to be one of the tools of political education. Language is not only a means of communication, in today's globalized society it becomes a direct mediator of the cultural values of the bearers of a given language. Support for the teaching of several foreign languages is in European Union documents. Within it, on the example of learning about important political events that simultaneously shaped the cultural values of the bearers of a given language, we can provide critical analysis of the way of life in a given developmental stage of society.

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