

Integration of Europe through civic education

<http://gu.us.edu.pl/node/260271>

Since 2008 the Institute of History of the University of Silesia has participated in a European educational project entitled Common Constitution and Language Learning (CCLL), which focuses on the problems of the European Constitution. The idea of the project was born within the Comenius Programme and it aims at the dissemination of knowledge about the united continent. Empirical research connected with the referendum has shown that the European youth do not possess sufficient knowledge about the European Union or the project of a Constitution for Europe. The Irish referendum on the European Constitution, in which the citizens rejected the Constitutional Treaty, has clearly shown the consequences of such lack of knowledge. It has also proved that the European policy is unknown and incomprehensible to the citizens of the EU.

The intention of the participants in the project is to integrate Europe through civic education connected with foreign language teaching. This is why the aim of the project is to prepare teaching materials in two languages: English and German. The materials can be used in the foreign language classroom or in bilingual teaching of civic education subjects in the countries whose representatives participate in the project (in case of Poland the subject is knowledge about society). In Poland bilingual teaching becomes more and more common (especially in Upper Silesia and Dabrowa Coal Basin) and is usually based on the well-known CLiL method (the abbreviation stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning). In CLiL the content of certain school subjects is conveyed and discussed in both the mother tongue and a foreign language, which facilitates its faster and better acquisition, but also consolidation of the subject matter. Since such education gives an opportunity to organise and conduct debates, there is a huge chance to stimulate students in order to make them interested in the problems of structures, organisation and functioning of the European Union. The originators of the project have noticed that a debate on a common constitution is a springboard for further discussion about the European identity and gives an opportunity to pose questions, both complex and elementary.

To make such education interesting, innovative teaching materials have been prepared as part of

the project. Firstly, the materials will meet relevance criteria of social sciences; secondly, they take into account current methodology standards and thirdly, they will be prepared in two language versions. The present project has always been as an effect of international cooperation. Partners from 12 European countries take part in it. Among them there are schools of different levels from Austria Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Poland. Poland is represented by the employees of the Institute of History of the University of Silesia and the didactic workers of the Teacher Training College of Foreign Languages in Tychy. The coordinator of the project is Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und Lehrerbildung (the National Seminar for Teaching and Teacher Training) together with high schools and special schools in Freiburg. A website (www.ccll-eu.eu) with the most important information about the project activities serves as the main platform of communication. At present the website contains, among other things, information about the methods of teaching civic education in Europe (in Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Spain/Catalonia and Great Britain) data and presentations describing the partners and institutions cooperating with the project (among the latter there are for instance Deutschland&Europa (Germany and Europe), a periodical from Baden-Wuerttemberg, the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Freiburg, the European Youth Parliament or the Education Centre for Ethnic Germans in Hungary).

Apart from publishing the effects of their work on the website, representatives of institutions participating in the project meet for a few days, each time in a different town. The meetings were organised e.g. in Freiburg (2-5 March 2008), Innsbruck (2-4.09.2008), and in Dutch Venlo (12-15 February 2009). Reports and arrangements can be found on the website. However, the most important element that should be available on the website in the nearest future is a set of teaching materials. They should stem from the recommendations of the Bologna Process, according to which teacher training should be changed. Various experiences of teacher training institutions, the possibility of international cooperation, exchange of ideas and experience, together with the didactic output of particular institutions should result in interesting solutions.

When it comes to the employees of the Institute of History and the Teacher Training College of Foreign Languages, they focus on the migration of Poles to other EU countries, the problem of their employment and the elections to the European Parliament. In both cases the employees of the Institute of History are responsible for the content, whereas the representatives of the TTC for the language aspect of the materials. The final effect of this cooperation will be lesson plans, together with necessary language materials, available in print version and in electronic form (on the project website)

It is worth noticing that the teaching materials, meeting the CLiL criteria of teaching in English and in German, will be standardised in appropriate groups of students. Consequently, their usefulness in the classroom will be tested. The authors of the project believe that all activities should contribute to the improvement of the quality of civic education, to a better understanding of issues important to contemporary Europeans, to noticing the colourfulness and diversity of European political culture and to improving foreign language skills of young Poles. For the participants, the project creates an opportunity to compare the state of knowledge and skills in different EU countries and also to use the information gathered in the teaching process. The latter solutions are particularly important from the perspective of preparing young teachers in the field of foreign language teaching (TTC) and civic education (Institute of History).

Authors: **Maciej Fic**