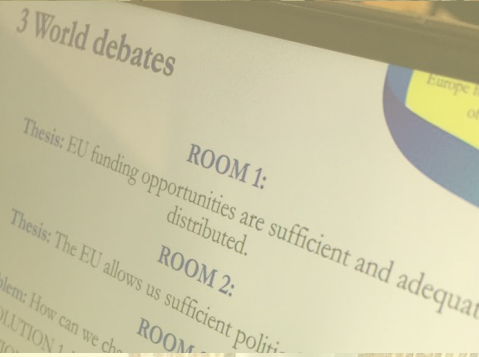




Activities and results





“Europe for citizens is perfect for people to get together. It leads to knowledge and a broader sense of culture.”

“Be patient and stay together, because nothing will come through night. Time is needed for change to happen.”





Small
MUnicipalities
a**G**ainst
EUroscepticism



Opening words of the president of LAG PRIZAG

Dear Sir/Madam,

Before you is the brochure of the project “Small municipalities against Euroscepticism” – SMUG EU that has been carried out from September 2017 to April 2019 by the project developers Local action group Prigorje-Zagorje (LAG PRIZAG) with partners, aimed at understanding and debating Euroscepticism in rural areas.

Beside us as the developers, another 15 partner organizations participated in the Project – municipalities Torres Novas, Bistrita, Dagda, Kameno, Srem-

ski Karlovci, Novo Mesto, Sopronkovesd and Krivogashtani as well as their associations DRPDNM, Dunav 1245 and LAG AGRO LEADER. Through their exceptional engagement, 4 international debates have been organized.

Support in carrying out the project have been and our partners in Croatia: municipalities Breznički Hum, Breznica, Gornja Rijeka, Udruga Mladi za Marof and City of Novi Marof which, in this project, has been represented by LAG PRIZAG.

During the said time period of 19 months, 6 events have been organized, from which 4 of them were public debates on the topic of Euroscepticism who had participants from Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

During the debate citizens shared their experiences and opinions about European union, politics and the legislation as well as the future of Europe and the European union as community. They indicated all the good and the bad aspects of the EU and the ideas for its improvement.

Through teamwork, activities and commitment of all the project participants we obtained results which can

be found in the following parts of the brochure.

This is an achievement of all of us who have contributed in any way in making this Project start, develop and after all, to the satisfaction of all of us, end at the final conference on March 9th, 2019.

Through this time which we spent together travelling, sharing opinions, experiences, presenting our culture, economy, achievements, perceiving imperfections and shortcomings..., in fact we realized that in all our differences, one thing remains the same – we are all just ordinary people, wanting peace, security, prosperity and welfare.

I hope that we will continue in that direction and that through our projects we will manage to reach the ones that make DECISIONS on our behalf,

To hear OUR voice,

That conclusions that came out of this Project don't remain only on paper, but they contribute to making a difference in every one of our LITTLE MUNICIPALITIES.

I am aware that we are small and that as individuals we can achieve little or hardly anything, but I am hopeful

that together we can reach those that we must reach and that our voice will be heard.

Successful realization of this Project confirms that.

As we achieved the set goals in this project, we are referring to making of new project ideas and future successful cooperations.

Until then we leave you to explore the topic of Euroscepticism as well as Euro-optimism on the following pages and to bring your own conclusion about the future of Europe and every single one of us as well as all members of that community.

Once again, I would like to thank everybody who had contributed in any way to the successful accomplishment of the project „Small municipalities against Euroscepticism“.

Novi Marof, 25.4.2019.

President:
Nevenka Benjak



PROJECT INITIATIVE

We were motivated in writing this project by the general lack of knowledge about the EU, its institutions and its role in the everyday life of the population of small rural municipalities. Talking to our partners from other countries made us realize that they have the same concern and that we should give more importance to it. That's how the project SMUG EU – “Small municipalities against Euroscepticism” came to life, in which we dedicated solely to the matter of Euroscepticism and the opinion of the citizens about the European union.

The main objective of the project is understanding and debating Euroscepticism in rural areas. Through public debate citizens have expressed their opinion and experiences with EU. Emphasis was on positive and negative sides of the EU membership, experiences with projects and problems concerning their execution. Collaboration between civil society and the state institutions has been put in perspective and tangible results of

EU co-financing (institutions, buildings, parks...) have been presented.

Project lasted for 19 months and 6 public events have been organized. 4 of those events were the debates in the subject of Euroscepticism which involved participants from different age and working groups such as students, agriculturists, public figures, pensioners... In all the events youth was actively engaged.

With this project we learned what Euroscepticism is and what factors lead to it. Also, we managed to gather some ideas for the improvement of the current situation and generation of a better and more positive atmosphere in the society.

With the help of the participants and the other volunteers, debates granted a detailed insight into Euroscepticism (reasons of incurrence, threats, best practices). A debate on the topic of EU has been initiated, and citizens were granted an opportunity to verbalize what would they change for a brighter future of their surroundings.

OUR PARTNERSHIP

Through previous partnerships and acquaintances, we have gathered valuable and wise partners for the execution of the SMUG EU project. They come from 9 different countries and in the period of 19 months they worked together as one big community.



LOCAL ACTION GROUP „PRIGORJE-ZAGORJE“

LAG PRIZAG is a non-profit organization whose goal is the development of rural area of 11 local government units. Our vision is: “Become sustainable, economically developed area with the increased standard and quality of life, desirable for living, in which natural beauty, cultural, historical and traditional heritage will be valorized and preserved.”

LAG covers the area of 510 km² and is occupied by 35.000 inhabitants. It's comprised of 10 municipalities and one city from 3 counties:

Varaždin county: municipalities Breznica, Visoko, Breznički Hum, Ljubešćica and the city of Novi Marof

Krapina-Zagorje county: municipalities Budinščina, Hrašćina and Konjščina

Koprivnica-Križevci county: municipalities Gornja Rijeka, Kalnik and Sveti Petar Orehovec

3 of afore-mentioned are directly engaged in the project partnership: municipalities Breznica, Breznički Hum and Gornja Rijeka. LAG PRIZAG has participated in the project as the representative of the city of Novi Marof.

Members of LAG come from economic, civil and public sector. The common goal is to improve the quality of life and to encourage the active citizenship in the local area. Numerous civil society organizations are members of LAG: cultural and art societies, youth associations, women and pensioners associations, fire departments... A great number of them include volunteers to their activities who can then participate in projects and public interest issues.

LAG PRIZAG continuously works on drawing close the EU to their citizens – by applying to and carrying out the projects of co-operation on the level of EU and by participating in other projects being conducted.



YOUTH FOR MAROF

„Youth for Marof” is an association of young people which is trying to attain greater social inclusion and activism among the citizens. The main goals of this organization are the development of cultural, democratic, social and ecological awareness of young people, promotion of

volunteering and cooperation between youth from different interest groups. Also, it's aimed to achieve greater influence of young people to the local community.

YFM has volunteers that take part in various trainings for working with youth. They have been organizing lots of local happenings and have been a part of transnational projects for youth through the “Erasmus+ Youth in action” program since 2009. The young people from YFM are managing the center for informal learning where they organize various workshops for local youth with the help of a high school and other organizations.

MUNICIPALITY OF BREZNIČKI HUM

Municipality Breznički Hum is located at Hrvatsko zagorje region, central Croatia, and is comprised of 5 villages with around 546 inhabitants.



As being a local self-government, its main activities are regarding infrastructure, education, sport, social and health care of the residents.

Breznički Hum organizes thematic events every year so that local associations and happening can be promoted. Besides that, it takes part in number of cooperation projects, especially in the field of “Europe for citizens”. Also, it counts as one of the municipalities with most implemented projects in Croatia.

OPĆINA GORNJA RIJEKA

MUNICIPALITY OF GORNJA RIJEKA

Gornja Rijeka is a municipality located at the north-west part of Croatia and is comprised of 14 villages with around 1779 inhabitants.

Cultural development and environmental protection are extremely important aspects of Gornja Rijeka, former noble's capital. In the economic sense, the municipality takes care of urban infrastructure, social rights, health care, education and sport.

Through the years, Gornja Rijeka had actively collaborated in transnational projects and experience sharing together with other municipalities across Europe.



MUNICIPALITY OF BREZNICA

Municipality Breznica is located at north-west part of Croatia and is comprised of 10 villages with about 2300 inhabitants.

For the last 10 years Breznica has been working actively on economic development and cultural and social inclusion. Citizens can actively be a part of the public life through the events during the year. One of the most important such events is "Domestic products and handcrafts fair". And through different associations citizens can be involved in public processes. One of better know is the "Prigorčica" association which actively contributes to cultural life.



ОПШТИНА КРИВОГАШТАНИ

MUNICIPALITY OF KRIVOGASHTANI

Municipality Krivogaštani is a local self-government through which citizens can actively participate in the public interest. It's located in Prilep region in the north-west of

Macedonia. The municipality takes care of urban infrastructure, environmental protection, health care, social welfare etc.

Through the project implementation objectives for maintaining the culture and developing the European spirit in this Macedonian region are being attained.



LAG AGRO LIDER

LAG AGRO LEADER was founded in 2014 and is a non-profit, voluntary organization. Through it the public, private and civil sectors of municipalities Dolneni, Krivogaštani and Kruševo successfully cooperate. Activity of LAG is connected to informing, education

and activation of inhabitants in rural areas.

The main objective of LAG is the promotion and development of rural area of before mentioned 3 municipalities. That is being attained through public initiatives, partnerships and other LAG activities.



MUNICIPALITY OF SOPRONKOVESD

Municipality Sopronkovesd is located at Hungary, close to the Austrian border. With its 1250 habitants is considered a small municipality.

The main scope of the municipality is enabling decent life for its citizens and their involvement in democratic processes. Through the projects being carried out there, the positive EU atmosphere is being achieved. Nevertheless, it is important to connect outside of the borders so that new knowledges and experiences can be gathered.

Among the priorities there are environmental protection, concern for people, volunteering and public dialogue. There are even 10 associations operating in the municipality.



MUNICIPALITY OF NOVO MESTO

Novo Mesto is a municipality on the south-east of Slovenia, close to the Croatian border. It has roughly 36.000 inhabitants, of which 22.000 lives in the city of Novo Mesto.

The city is specific for its successful pharmaceutical, auto, construction and textile industry. Hence the title of “main exporting city in Slovenia.”

A lot of association conducts their activities in the municipality area. Volunteering, intercultural competencies and inclusion of citizens have always been supported by the municipality, especially activities regarding education, culture and social rights.



ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPING VOLUNTARY WORK NOVO MESTO

DRPDNM is a non-profit organization operating for public interest in the area of youth, culture and social welfare.

The mission of the organization is to contribute to opening the community for everyone. Therefore, the main activities include involvement of those left out, encouraging the development of associations and civil dialogue. Besides that, the organization promotes values such as solidarity, tolerance, volunteering, clean environment, awareness of the population and intercultural dialogue.

They have 25 years of experience in education, working with youth, migrants, entrepreneurship, transnational cooperation, organizing and taking part in international events, rural development and sustainable management.



MUNICIPALITY OF KAMENO

Municipality Kameno is located at the south-east of Bulgaria, in the territorial area of the Burgas district, and has around 4848 inhabitants. According to the historical sources, Kameno originated over 500 years ago.

The territory of the municipality is suitable for agriculture and livestock farming. With the convenient financial and tax situation the investments in this area are more and more wanted.

In addition to taking care of infrastructure, health care, social welfare and education, the municipality actively engages in EU projects and realizes mutual cooperation with organizations across Europe.



MUNICIPALITY OF BISTRITA

Municipality Bistrita is located at the north-east of Transylvania and has about 90.000 inhabitants. Known as “anthem city” and “city of passages”, Bistrita has a well-known city web with 22 narrow streets, medieval arcades and arches.

They value their past and their monuments for the purpose of tourism. Consequently, successful EU projects have been carried out for that purpose. Active citizens and inclusion are also the point of interest of the municipality.

In addition to taking care of infrastructure, health care, social welfare and education, the municipality is active in the EU projects and takes part in programs such as Europe for citizens, HORIZON and INTERREG.



MUNICIPALITY OF DAGDA

Dagda is located at the east of Latvia and has around 7608 inhabitants. The most represented activities in this municipality are livestock farming, agriculture, wood processing and commerce. Dagda is known by its lakes, as is the whole Latvia. There are 123 of them.

In addition to taking care of infrastructure, health care, social welfare and education, the municipality also encourages informal education. They even have 4 youth centers and 10 youth clubs that actively contribute to volunteering and informal education.

Dagda organizes various multicultural events and has been a part of different transnational projects during the years (EAFRD, ESTLATRUS, Europe for citizens, Erasmus+, LLI).



Општина Сремски Карловци

MUNICIPALITY OF SREMSKI KARLOVCI

Municipality Sremski Karlovci is located next to Danube and is known as a historical town with rich cultural heritage. It has about 8839 habitants. Urban center of Sremski Karlovci dates back from 18th century and it owes its rich history to the exceptional geographical location and soil quality.

The most represented activities in the municipality are agriculture, fruit production, viticulture, services and tourism. They actively work on strengthening the local capacities, democracy and including the citizens by supporting the work of 50 associations.

In addition to taking care of the population, the municipality collaborates with other organizations on an international level through various EU programs like Europe for citizens, INTERREG etc.



DANUBE 1245

Association “Danube 1245” was founded in 2015 in Sremski Karlovci. It acts as citizens’ initiative which deals with nowadays challenges and encourages activism of citizens. They are building partnerships actively as well as participating in projects and organizing various meetings.

Danube 1245 builds and promotes positive values, innovative services and supports experience interchange. They had been a part of 4 EU projects till now. Over the course of 3 years they developed cooperation with over 38 organization from 14 different European countries.

Members of the organization are experienced in informal learning, training in the field of rural development and tourism and in organization of various events such as conferences, round tables, panel discussions etc.



MUNICIPALITY OF TORRES NOVAS

Municipality Torres Novas is located at central Portugal, 100km from Lisbon. There are around 37.000 inhabitants.

In addition of taking care of urban area, environment, education and other activities, Torres Novas invests in EU projects and uses them to finance sporting, cultural and other investments.

Besides that, mutual collaboration with other European organizations are of a big importance for the municipality. Some of the programs that the municipality is a part of are Program for lifelong learning, Youth in action, Erasmus+ and Europe for citizens.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

During the course of the project, 6 international events were organized. The official project opening was held in Croatia. This was followed by public debates in which citizens of all partner countries participated and exchanged views on the EU. First debate was held in Portugal, second in Romania, third in Macedonia and fourth in Slovenia. The final event, closing conference of the project, was held in Croatia.

On the following pages, we present you activities and findings gathered during the above-mentioned events.

Event No 1 LET'S BEGIN!

The official opening of the project called "Small municipalities against Euroscepticism" was held on 11 and 12 November 2017.

A conference was held in the city of Novi Marof in which numerous guests

from the local authority and citizens from the area of LAG PRIZAG participated.

Two important people visited the conference: Ivana Maletić, Croatian Member of the European Parliament and Nebojša Blanuša, a professor from the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb who is active in the field of Euroscepticism. Together with the mayor of





Novi Marof, Siniša Jenkač, a group discussion was held for the guests.

With their presentations on Euroscepticism – reasons and research – a solid basis for the further course of project activities has been set.

Event No 2 HEAR THE WISDOM

The second event called “Hear the wisdom” was held on 28 February and 1 March 2018 in the municipality of Torres Novas in Portugal.





Margarida Marques, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, attended the event and held a presentation on Euroscepticism. With her help, some

of the factors that cause Euroscepticism have been defined:

- Lack of knowledge on what the EU is and what does it represent
- Influence of local politics and media
- Migrant crisis and fear of terrorist attacks
- BREXIT and the confusion about it
- Economic crisis (and the lack of support)
- Corruption
- Problems in domestic production
- Lack of solidarity in times of crisis



By sharing their knowledge as the oldest in the EU, the Portuguese citizens were mostly pointing out lost opportunities, bad investments of EU funds and poor policy implementation. Since the crisis emerged, the Portuguese confidence in the EU fell sharply due to the rise in prices, decrease in wages and deficit in goods. However, the si-





tuation improved and the Portuguese citizens are very pro-European today. Nowadays, the Portuguese government is working hard in order to inform the public on what is being done and why.

The key part of the debate in Portugal was the workshop "Let your voice be heard". Participants were divided

into 3 groups to discuss topics related to Euroscepticism. Results are below.

ISSUE 1: EU funding opportunities are sufficient and equally distributed. TRUE OR FALSE?

Regarding the EU funding opportunities, the group agreed that the funds





were sufficient, but not adequately distributed. They are too centralized so small rural places have less funding opportunities than the big urban ones.

Participants agreed that there should be a minimum of funding for small ru-

ral areas in order to have equal opportunities for everyone.

A remark was also made regarding the controls that are very strict when it comes to the verification of the objective fulfillment of the project. For example, the importance is given to the fact that equipment was bought, but no one is questioning if this equipment is being adequately used.

ISSUE 2: The EU allows us political independence. TRUE OR FALSE?

In this case, two sides collided – the Portuguese on one side, other international participants on the other side. There were both arguments for YES and NO.

NO (the Portuguese team):

“The political independence depends on the economic independence, so mo-



ney=decision. In recent years, Portugal suffered from bad political decisions. If the EU decides something, we have to do it. The EU tends to ignore the will of people. For example: the UK opted for Brexit because they want to close their borders, because they have a lot of people coming from everywhere. The bureaucrats in Brussels, that were not elected, take decisions that affect everyone, as well as our sovereignty.”

Yes (others):

“More or less we have political independence because the EU has political structures which allow us to make our opinion be heard. The EU has mechanisms to elect representatives from different countries, which enables direct participation of Member States. The EU allows small Member States to have more members in the Parliament in relation to bigger countries. Also, the presidency of the Council rotates among the EU Member States every 6 months. Participants from Croatia pointed out that the EU influence led to less corruption and economic growth. Institutions are better now than before.”

No:

The EU imposed laws that led to corruption instead of giving advice on how to reduce it.

Yes:

However, if the prime minister is corrupted, we need a higher level of decision to help countries to end this corruption.

ISSUE 3: How can we change the negative perception on the EU?

Regarding this topic, 2 solutions were given to participants to discuss.

SOLUTION 1: better information to citizens at the local level

- Implementation of projects that focus on informing citizens on the EU
- Exchange of experience between institutions and people
- Better involvement of media (newspapers, radio...) that inform people about events
- Establishment of centers financed by municipalities to disseminate information about EU projects, programmes and events
- Organization of European Culture weeks (“I am a member of a European country”)
- Focus on education since childhood. Teach about national identity during the first year of school and later about the EU identity. Furthermore, teach the teachers so they can transfer the knowledge to younger generations
- Organization of EU clubs at schools and special activities with children

SOLUTION 2: better information to citizens through the media on the EU level

- The media can be used as a connection between the EU and citizens. Provide the public with concrete information about the EU opportunities and benefits of EU membership
- Prepare infograms that would give an insight into the EU and organize their promotion
- During their stay in Portugal, participants visited locations of special in-



terest, co-financed by EU funds. The company “Digidelta” operates in the field of digital printing and visual communication. With the help of EU funds, the company employs over 140 people. “Esteiros”, a strawberry producer, got the EU support for the production facility. Nowadays innovative fruit products are manufactured there. The last example is Start Up Torres Novas – a municipal project where new businesses and ideas are incubated. It was also set up with EU funds.

Event No 3

LET THE YOUNG BE HEARD

The third event of the project called “Let the young be heard” was held on 6 and 7 June 2018 in the municipality of Bistrita in Romania. More than 90 participants attended the debate, mostly from countries that joined the EU after 2000.



On that debate, the topic of Romania before and after joining the EU was elaborated. A presentation was held by Mrs. Monica Muresan from the Chamber of Trade and Industry of Bistrita – Nasaud County. She pointed out many benefits that the EU membership brought to Romania:

- Raise of gross domestic product
- Improvement of the Romanian economic structure
- Presence of Romanian products on the European market
- Increase of population
- Reduction of unemployment
- Environmental protection and sustainable development
- Free circulation for people
- Education opportunities abroad for young people
- Erasmus for young entrepreneurs
- Simplification of working procedures





The key part of this debate was the discussion moderated by Professor Mr. Mircea Maniu from the Faculty of European Studies within Babes-Bolyai University. After an introduction into the theme (Euroscepticism), participants were split into 2 groups: Pro-Eu-

ropeans and Eurosceptics. The topic discussed was: “European Union – a people’s community?”

Eurosceptics spoke first. The statement that came from a participant questioned the inequality of development in countries and areas of the European Union. In addition, the living standard and wages are different. The participant also adds: “If we live in a Union that has same rules, why don’t we all have the same standard and rights? This makes people question the need of the EU as they don’t see the benefit directly. We should all be equal as EU citizens.”

On the other side, the Pro-Europeans gave a positive opinion on this issue. They state that the EU cannot





be responsible for a country's development and it is impossible to dictate every policy. Every country has its own progress and the EU can contribute by setting some general policies. It cannot impose laws. Pro-Europeans added also that people like to complain on the EU's imposed laws and lost sovereignty. However, on the other side, they complain that the EU is not adopting

enough laws and it is not supportive. So, it is necessary to decide what we actually want as a community and not give opposite statements."

The Eurosceptics replied: why should we strive to be a part of the EU? Looking at the current situation, something is going on in the EU, giving a negative perception to the people that there is no benefit from being a member.





With all those negative connotations, people are losing interest in the EU. For example, the Eurosceptics are pointing out that there are many developed countries that are not EU members. So, is there a purpose for the EU at all?

The positive group's answer included laws that ensure human rights and justice. In addition, they mention outside enemies. Europe and its citizens should unite and work together, because the threat is coming from outside. European countries shouldn't be enemies to themselves.

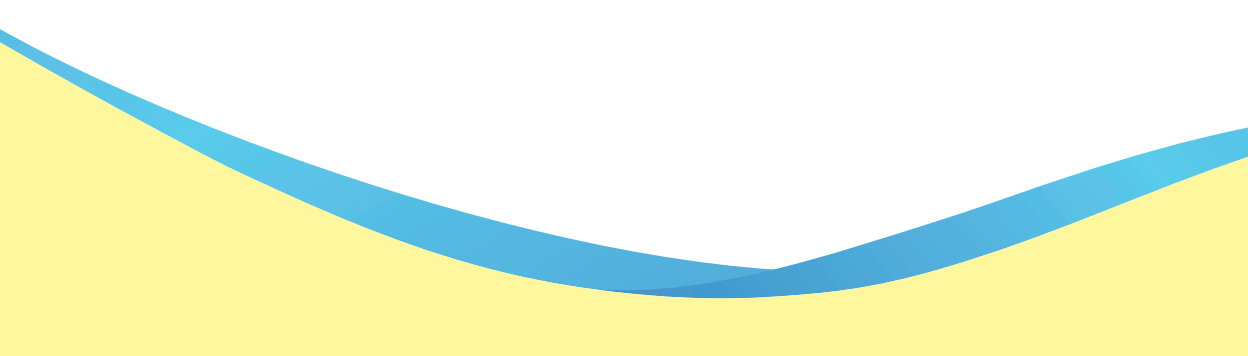
At the end of the debate, participants came to a joint conclusion:

We need both: Eurooptimism and Euroscepticism. In order to have a successful Union, we must be critical towards bad regulations in order to see what's missing. On the other hand, we should be optimistic that these problems would be solved. That's the right way to ensure that change can happen. However, the criticism has to be on all levels – local, national and EU level. Projects like this one are a perfect way for people to be critical and express their opinion.

During their stay in Romania, participants visited organizations and initiatives of special interest for Bistrita: Youth Community Center and National Center for Tourist Information and Promotion. Moreover, positive examples in the field of youth were presented and 4 associations presented their work: Bistrita Europe Direct Center, Youth for Community, Impact Association and Interact Association. It is important to point out that the adults were impressed by the youth's engagement, positivity and effort for the community.

The Europe Direct Center acts as a network between youth and the Europe Union, providing numerous activities in the field of information to citizens about the EU, promoting EU values, giving feedback to EU institutions about citizens' opinions. The Europe Direct Center organizes many competitions, volunteering activities, debates on EU topics, camps and training sessions.

Youth for Community aims to promote active citizenship through personal development and community projects. They organize various activities





such as after school workshops, fund raising events, summer programmes, development projects for volunteers and educational programmes, youth exchange (Erasmus +) and other.

Impact Association focuses on young people and educational projects. The aim of the organization is to promote active participation of youth, inform young people and involve them in the society. Impact Association implemented many educational projects in the local rural area with disadvantaged young people living in poverty and foster homes.

Interact Association is a volunteering club gathering young people aged from 12-18. Sponsored by the Rotary Club, there are more than 14 Interact

clubs in Romania and even more all over the world. The main aim of these young people is to make a change for their community. They raise funds for charity causes, organize events for socializing and promoting good values and various workshops for the community.

Event No 4

THROUGH ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

The fourth event of the project called "Through another point of view" was held on 19 and 20 September 2018 in Krushevo, Macedonia. This debate hosted over 90 participants, mostly from countries that are still in the process of becoming EU members.



Marina Tosheska, Vice President of AGRO LIDER LAG, held a presentation at the debate regarding the Macedonia's EU accession process. Some important facts were stated about the process that started in 2004 when the formal application for membership was submitted. However, official negotiations started in 2015, after which the country has been working actively on introducing necessary changes. As for EU funds, Macedonia is participating in the Erasmus+ projects. High praise

was made to this programme for giving many opportunities to young people.

The key part of the event was a debate on the topic: "EU membership – yes or no?". Participants were divided into 3 groups, each one having their own sub-topic.

1. Group – participants from Macedonia and Serbia debated the issue of the EU membership – YES or NO.

Both groups gave their reasons why their country should or should not join the EU.

The main arguments for YES included open borders, open big market for goods, higher availability of EU funds, possibilities for people to go work and study abroad, easier way to keep youth inside the country, easier sharing of knowledge and better development of infrastructure with co-financing.





The NO group stated that they are not against the EU, but against any kind of policy infliction, giving example of Macedonia being forced to change its name. Other problems are local population leaving the country because of open borders, inappropriate education and youth leaving the country, unfair competition on the EU market, imposing standards to be fulfilled in order to join the EU. They added that high quality staff would leave the country and higher inequality in standards and wages would occur.

2. Group (Eurocritics) was given the factors that cause Euroscepticism.

Their task was to sort them by relevance. These are the most relevant ones (from most to least important):

1. Lack of knowledge about the EU (values, policies and institutions) in both EU and non-EU countries.
2. Inequality in EU countries (such as difference in living standards, wages, distribution of funds). All citizens in the EU should have equal standards and rights. Nevertheless, this cannot happen overnight.
3. Media – distributing too much negative information instead of giving positive examples concerning the EU.
4. Migrant crisis – people were not prepared and informed about migrants, which is why they are afraid.
5. Economic crisis – the crisis that struck in 2008 is still ongoing in some countries. There are doubts in the EU because it was not prepared for such crisis and it cannot support countries.



6. Lack of solidarity in times of crisis – between the institutions, as well as people (for example, lack of solidarity in the migrant crisis). People are losing the sense of belonging in such situations.

3. Group (Eurooptimists) was given the task to figure out what makes an EU citizen feel like being part of the EU.

The following key factors to EU optimism were outlined:

1. The sense of unity in different cultures – solidarity keeps us together, we are a union of people (unfortunately, recent

happenings in the world are endangering this).

2. The sense of peace and prosperity in the EU – we all want safety, prosperity, peace and high quality of life
3. Common economic growth – by using resources of each country to produce unique goods.
4. Gathering on events where citizens mingle and get to know each other and educate themselves about different cultures, religions...

Until now, we focused on the question: “What can the EU do for us?” This group came up with another question: “What can we do for the EU?”

As on the previous debate, presentations of associations that serve as a positive example were held. The following associations presented themselves:





presented projects that are closely linked to the EU. The Municipality of Ohrid applied for many funds and programmes: Interreg – IPA CBC programme for cooperation between Greece and Macedonia, Interreg Balkan Mediterranean, Cosme Programme, Erasmus, Australian Embassy, German Embassy and other. Projects that were carried out contributed significantly to the promotion of EU values in the community and protection of cultural heritage.

Event No 5

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Centre of Education and Development, Youth Initiative for Regional Development, Academic Organization Krushevo and Youth Council Krushevo. All these organizations aim to foster democratic engagement in the local community, development of local areas and creation of opportunities for young people.

Moreover, a small referendum was held where participants voted FOR or AGAINST their country joining the EU (if again they were to choose). As expected, FOR won with 44 votes while AGAINST had only 12 votes. The special part was a visit to Ohrid. City representatives

The fifth event called “We’re all in this together” was held on 7 and 8 December 2018 in Novo Mesto, Slovenia. This debate hosted over 100 participants with many discussions and exchanges of experience in an international environment.

Dr. Milan Brglez, former President of the Slovenian Parliament, presented 5 scenarios for the future development of the EU, known also as White paper on the future of Europe.

According to the first scenario, nothing will change. The second scenario focuses on creating single EU market. The third scenario predicts that Mem-

ber States will have more opportunities to cooperate in certain areas, while according to the fourth scenario, we will do less, but more efficiently. The fifth scenario talks about larger cooperation in all areas. In addition, the sixth scenario was proposed by civil society organizations: sustainable Europe for citizens that will be Europe of citizens, and not Europe of corporations.

Looking at these scenarios, the best option that was pointed out is going towards doing less more efficiently. In reality, something between the third and the fourth scenario could happen. Dr. Brglez also pointed out important factors for the EU future: peace, solidarity and prosperity, human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, security, defense

and migration. The EU will have to face many challenges in the future.

Continuing on, a press conference and workshops “Let your voice be heard” were held. Participants were divided into 4 groups:

1. Group on the topic “What can we do for a better EU” – how citizens like us can contribute to the whole idea of the European Union

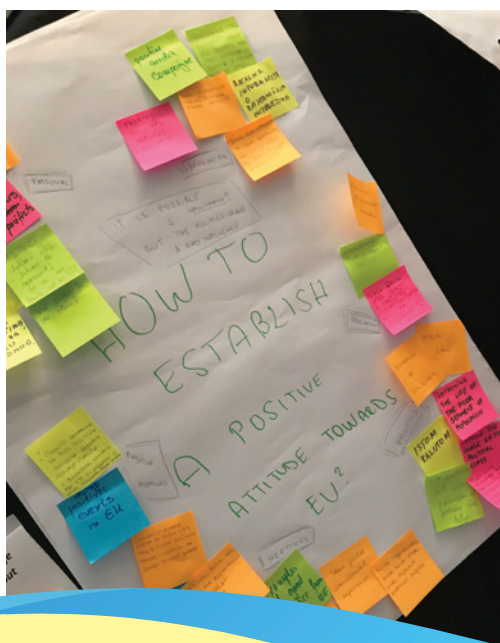
This group identified 3 main areas that we need to work on:

- Heritage and culture – preserve our culture and traditions to be unique, share these traditions with other people from different countries, build a platform for all countries to share, gather and exchange experiences





- Social issues – build better work opportunities, set equal standards so everyone could have equal opportunities, build better institutional support, include citizens in decision-making process



- Education – build equal opportunities for all children (rich and poor), enrich the school programme with information about the EU in order to teach children from an early age, build a better education system that teaches for life and is more adjusted to the labor market

2. Group on the topic “What do we need as EU citizens” – how to feel like a part of the EU

- Better distribution of aid, with focus on rural regions
- Equal standards for everyone
- More tolerance and mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity
- More campaigns and sharing of knowledge and culture
- Less corruption and more politicians that work for the people
- Freedom in all cases (speech, movement, safety)
- Peace (without peace, there is no wealth and economic growth)
- Concentrating on the future

3. Group on the topic: “How do we fight Euroscepticism” – establishing a positive attitude towards the EU and preparing an informative page “All we need to know about the EU”.



- Regarding the positive attitude, the group identified the following fields:
- Meetings – organize events on EU positivity, culture, experience and knowledge
- Politics – better institutions
- Education – improve, listen and learn
- Information – publish more information about what the EU is and does
- Personal – be more positive, respect others and keep peace
- basic information (seat, currency, rights and obligations, membership, languages, institutions and laws)
- history (idea behind the Union, founding Member States, development through history)
- strategies for the economic development, education and culture
- future mission (goals, work and prosperity)

This group had similar thoughts as group 1.

Regarding the informative page “All we need to know about the EU”, participants identified what every EU citizen should know:

- values (justice, equality, tradition, human rights, democracy)

4. Group on the topic: “Euroscepticism from the aspect of new members, old members and non-members – what do we have in common”

In this group, all participants worked as their country’s voice and expressed their thoughts about the EU. They found many things in common.



As for the current situation, good things about the EU are not shared through the media. There are many benefits of the EU membership but people are just not informed well. Therefore, positive contributions and EU achievements should be presented to the public. Moreover, it should be clearly pointed out how EU funds are used, with real examples. Citizens should also be more involved and express their opinions.

Lots of the elderly population are eurosceptics because they don't understand the EU. Therefore, we need to inform people better and have ambassadors (local people, not politicians) who can share their positive examples. Despite the negatives, with young generations, more and more eurooptimism is coming and people understand better the EU.

As it can be seen, this debate confirmed the findings from previous events. All ideas and opinions of people are repeated and lead to a common conclusion on the Euroscepticism.

Like every time, associations were presented that work in the field of culture, democracy and the EU: Society of Mach's heritage under Gorjanci, Institute for Slovenian Emigration and Migration and Nefiks Association. All these organizations have experience with the EU projects.

The last workshop called "Designing a campaign for eurooptimism" was held as a World Cafe. Participants shared thoughts about various media solutions that can be used to foster eurooptimism, events that can be organized to bring people together, and ways to improve the institutional support for a better EU climate.



MEDIA strategy

Every citizen of the EU is in the target group. All types of media should be used (digital, paper, radio...). The following examples were given:

- Rural area magazine called “We are Europe”
- Billboards on more languages with informative texts
- EU YouTube channel with interviews on topics “Europe for everyone”, “Our EU”, “Europeans united”
- EU channel with TV shows about cultural differences and economic development
- webpage designed exclusively for citizens (with information they can easily access and understand)





EVENTS strategy

- the EU should organize tournaments for young people and non-governmental organizations to promote the EU spirit and values, for example tournaments on the knowledge of the EU and online games (“Triviador”, ”Pub Quiz”)
- organize events that focus on culture and exchange of experiences
- organize exchanges and camps, not only for young people, but for adults as well

INSTITUTIONS strategy

Participants agreed that institutions should communicate with citizens and transfer information about the EU. How to promote the optimism? Actually, laws themselves set good or bad

examples. If the institutions are good, so will be the citizens’ confidence.

The other idea includes the preparation of a common platform for all citizens to share experiences.

At last, participants visited the GRM, Center for Biotechnology and Tourism, where they saw various good practices and new technologies in the field of viticulture, agriculture and education.

Event No 6 SPREAD THE WORD

The last event of the project called “Spread the word “ was held on 8 and 9 March 2019 in Novi Marof, Croatia.

Partners from all 9 countries gathered to summarize and present the results of this joint cooperation. Over 100 participants gathered on the last event.





This one is crucial because the discussion was held in order to elaborate final results of the project. Through the discussion, participants were able to share final ideas concerning the Euroscepticism and complete results and guidelines for the EU on how to improve the current situation.

The whole point concerning Euroscepticism is based on the fact that the EU is a strong political concept. The politicians are not putting enough effort to bring the EU closer to people. On the other hand, there is also the lack of involvement from citizens in democratic processes. Both sides should put more effort into cooperation.

A group of students from high school Novi Marof joined the adults, got to hear positive sides of the EU membership and shared their thoughts. The youth is the key to ensure a positive future in our societies.

Results of the project, gathered with this joint cooperation, were presented to the local community. In addition, three special guests presented examples of good practices in the EU field: Dario Žmegač from the association Youth for Marof, Zoran Hegedić from the municipality of Breznički Hum and Željka Markulin from the contact point Europe for Citizens.

Besides the presentations, a short discussion was held on the results of the project. The press visited the conference in order to spread the word in the region.

CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EU

At the beginning of the project, our goal was to answer the following questions:

- What is Euroscepticism and how does it manifest?
- Why does it occur (factors)?
- Are there special groups prone to Euroscepticism? Is there a difference in non-members, new members and old members of the EU?
- How does it influence the local community?
- How do people see the EU?
- How can we tackle this problem? Move closer to citizens and ensure a positive future?
- Can we turn it into something positive? Improve the quality of life in rural areas?

What is Euroscepticism and how does it manifest?

Generally accepted definition of the term is that it's conditional or limited opposition to the process of European integration.¹

¹ TAGGART, P. (1998). "A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems", *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol.33, pp. 366.

Euroscepticism can be soft, where there is a doubt in some policies or national and EU interests are different. In addition, it can also be hard, where there is a principled objection to the EU and integrations with advocacy to leave the membership.²

Why does it occur (factors)?

Euroscepticism occurs due to many factors. Through the project, we defined the most important ones:

- Lack of knowledge about the EU (values, policies and institutions) in both EU and non-EU countries.
- Inequality in EU countries (such as difference in living standards, wages, distribution of funds). All citizens in the EU should have equal standards and rights.
- Media – distributing too much negative information instead of giving positive examples concerning the EU.
- Migrant crisis – people were not prepared and informed about migrants, which is why they are afraid.
- Economic crisis – the crisis that struck 2008 is still ongoing in some countries. There are doubts in the EU because it

was not prepared for such crisis and it cannot support Member States.

- Lack of solidarity in times of crisis – between the EU institutions, as well as people (for example, lack of solidarity in the migrant crisis). People are losing the sense of belonging in such situations.

These factors are even more influenced by the political situation in the community. Due to a big gap between politicians and local citizens, citizens are losing trust and interest.

Are there special groups prone to Euroscepticism? Is there a difference in non-members, new members and old members of the EU?

Less developed countries and those with less experience and knowledge tend to be more sceptic. Opinion about the EU mostly depend on the level of information of citizens and influences of the media and government.

Regarding EU projects, they are present in local areas, but people lack interest. Institutions are far away from people and politics tend to work without respecting citizens' opinion. Due to this, people do not feel close to the EU and blame the EU for everything.

Young people are more positive about the EU than the older generation.

² TAGGART P; SZCZERBIAK, A. (2002). "The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States", Sussex European Institute & Georgetown University, pp 4

Despite the negatives, with the young generation more and more eurooptimism is coming, people are getting more positive and understand the EU better.

How does it influence the local community?

Euroscepticism has a bad influence on the community. Sceptics are not very motivated to use EU funds, which leads to the loss of valuable investments in growth and development.

Moreover, if a negative atmosphere is present, the community has a hard time to develop.

How do people see the EU?

Specific thoughts depend on the individual itself. However, most participants agreed to see the EU as a strong, but complex political concept. In order to be closer to people, institutions need to act more in small areas. The EU is necessary for having peace and good life standard, so more focus should be put on developing countries and strategies for a sustainable future.

The national identity often prevails over the EU identity. That's why focus should be put also on teaching the EU identity since an early age.

How can we tackle this problem? Move closer to citizens and ensure a positive future?

People have to see the benefit. There are projects that contribute to the communities, but they should be clearly visible to the people. Having more balanced availability of funds, less corruption and politicians that work for the people can help to reach the sense of unity.

Nevertheless, it's not just the politics. People should show more tolerance and mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity. Nations have to come together and act.

Our message to politicians: ***make more effort and listen to citizens!***

Our message to citizens: ***make more effort and engage in political matters!***

By informing citizens at the local and EU level, using media the right way to spread positive examples and messages, organizing events and having institutions that work in a right way, a better and more optimistic society would emerge. With all the ideas given through all debates, a high quality campaign can be set up in order to promote such values.

***Can we turn it into something positive?
Improve the quality of life in rural areas?***

Participants discussed this topic and got to the conclusion that optimists are mostly happy and successful people.

They can be a good example for others and share their optimism. The EU programmes give us opportunities to develop our local tradition, tolerance and uniqueness.

At last, we need both: Euroscepticism and Euro-optimism!

In order to have a succesful Union, we must be critical towards bad regulations and identify weaknesses. On the other hand, we should be optimistic that these problems could be solved. That's the right way to ensure that change can happen. However, in order to achieve that, constructive criticism has to be present on all levels - the local, national and EU level.

LESSONS LEARNED

19 months, 6 events...what did we learn from this journey?

Below we present you reflections from our participants after the last debate. Parts of some statements have been modified due to mistakes in speech. However, the meaning and context was not changed.

SERBIA, Municipality of Sremski Karlovci:

“I learned that Euroscepticism still exists, but it's mostly due to our personal opinions and it is up to us to change that way of thinking.”

“There is so much more than we see in the media and what people tell us. This conference made us learn more things and enriched our knowledge.”



HUNGARY, Municipality of Sopronkovesd:

“Mostly, we have to accept each other. We saw a lot of good examples and what I think is very important, we should go to the local people and inform them about the EU. So, not only politicians should talk about it, but all people should know on what the EU is doing and how things are changing.”



SERBIA, Danube 1245:

“We learned that we cannot live just by ourselves, we need to cooperate, we need partners. Here we were able also to make some agreements and discussions on how to cooperate and what to do. Not only on this conference. This is an opportunity, everywhere close to the EU, to extend our connections and live in a bigger world.”



PORTUGAL, Municipality of Torres Novas:

“We are the oldest member here in the project. But, as you could see, Portugal asked the same questions the Serbians and Macedonians have concerning Euroscepticism and the future of Europe. To summarize, I think we should make an effort, every one of us, that are optimistic about Europe, to inform all those people that are around us about the meaning of this project and how we can improve it. We have a special role to do it, each one of us, because we must keep this peace and development project going on. As a town counselor yesterday told. Yes, we are all in this together, and we don't want to come back. This is what we learned from these 2 days here in Slovenia.”



LATVIA, Municipality of Dagda:

“Europe gave a lot for Latvia...projects. I am so lucky that we are in Europe. This meeting provides us solutions what we can develop in our country and everyday life in our city.”

“We, as the Latvian team, believe in our future in Europe. As Europeans, we see our culture as a history of democracy with privileges. This is the right time for direct participation of European citizens in shaping the future of a united and democratic Europe. I think this project is not the end, it is the beginning of new projects.”

BULGARIA, Municipality of Kamenno:

“We learned that we got much closer for the 10 years that we are in the EU. This we see from the project. We all feel very welcome and I hope that this is due to the European Union. I would suggest to the Serbians and Macedonians to see what Bulgaria achieved as a self-esteem and to change all our belief that we are poor and so on. We are part of the Union, and those differences don't matter.”

ROMANIA, Municipality of Bistrita:

“We learned that the Europeans need to talk more about unity, identity and trust. Euroscepticism is mostly due to fears that we have and we have to fight against that new phenomenon we have nowadays like inequalities, migrations... I think we are not so naive these days to think that at a national level we can fight these fears, but together we are more united and can fight.”

NORTH MACEDONIA, Municipality of Krivogashtani and LAG AGRO LIDER:

“It's our honor to participate in this kind of event, especially when we talk about the EU and Euroscepticism. We shared good practices and experiences with countries that are part of the EU, but also those who started the accession process. This will help us a lot when Republic of Macedonia becomes a member of the EU.”





SLOVENIA, Municipality of Novo Mesto and Association of Developing Voluntary Work Novo Mesto:

“Throughout these two days we were able to show the real values of the European Union, which is unity, solidarity and cooperation. As somebody else already said today, this project is not the end, but the beginning of our further cooperation.”

CROATIA:

“The most valuable thing we will bring home is the understanding how it's all up to us. We are all part of the EU and every single one of us should engage. So, if we succeed at the end or not depends on our own attitude and persistence. We might feel hopeless at times, but this is not the case. Everything can be changed if we just work on it and stick together. We have to be the change we want to see. It all begins with us.”

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**Small municipalities against euroscepticism
Male općine protiv euroskepticizma**

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Measure 2.2: Networks of Towns



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