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Mapping surveys and focus groups in Austria before EP elections

AIT Austrian Institute of Technology

POLITIKOS – Wir müssen reden!

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Executive Summary

The objective of Deliverable 4.2 is to present the implementation process and key findings of the mapping activities that were undertaken before the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections in Austria. As the project proposal prescribes, parallel activities have been implemented in Estonia by consortium partners (see Deliverable 4.3 for overview). The mapping activities included one pre-election survey among the target group (direct beneficiaries) and two pre-election focus groups with the target group in Vienna (for more information on direct beneficiaries and key stakeholders of the project see Deliverable 4.1). These activities were conducted based on the methodology developed in Work Package (WP) 2 that will be presented in Deliverable 2.1.

The pre-election survey and the focus groups aimed to assess the interest and attitudes of the target group towards the 2019 EP elections, with a particular focus on the barriers of political engagement encountered by the target group in their host countries. Also, another objective of the pre-election mapping activities was to understand the ways and channels through which the target group got information about EP elections, how they reacted to it (for example, whether they discuss it with other students), and to which extent they were interested specifically in the politics of their host country. Additionally, the general political engagement of the target group and their interest in the European politics was investigated.

The pre-election survey and the focus groups investigated three main topics:

1. General political activism and engagement of the target group; the meaning of being politically active and interested in European politics.
2. The voting experience, interest in, and attitudes towards European elections among the target group, their reasons for voting and not voting.
3. The use of communication channels and social networking media in getting and handling the information about European elections.

The first section of the report at hand provides an overview of implementation of pre-election mapping activities during April and May 2019. It describes the announcement, dissemination, and response to the pre-elections survey and presents information about the conduct of two pre-election focus-groups in May 2019.

The second section focuses on key findings of conducted mapping activities: it provides the important figures of the pre-election survey, as well as illustrating the arguments by evidence from the focus group discussions. The second section is divided into subsections in accordance with the three topics presented above. A comparative analysis of the mapping activities in Austria and Estonia will be presented in Deliverable 2.2.

1 Implementation of the Pre-Election Mapping Activities

This section provides an overview of implementation process of pre-election mapping activities conducted before the European Elections in May 2019. More specifically, it outlines the main aspects of announcement and dissemination of the survey and describes the activeness and main characteristics of respondents. Furthermore, it presents information about the process of conduct of two pre-election focus groups in Vienna as well as a specific session on the EMY Project and the EP Elections 2019 at the EMY Partner school BG and BRG Boerhaavegasse.

1.1 Announcement of the Survey

The pre-election survey was conducted online using the [Survey Monkey environment](#) from April 19th to May 26th 2019. The online survey was also embedded into the EMY website in order to reach as many participants as possible (see Deliverable 5.1 and 5.2 for information on communication tools of the project). The survey was adaptable so that it could be completed on mobile devices.

In the preparatory phase of the dissemination of the survey, e-mail templates and social media postings were prepared and made available to the international offices of the universities (University of Vienna, Technical University of Vienna, Business School - WU Vienna, MCI MANAGEMENT CENTER INNSBRUCK, University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication - FH Wien der WKW, University of Graz), Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Austria, all subdivisions of the ESN, Österreichische Hochschülerschaft, AIESEC, JEF¹, Erasmus+, OeAD², and other key stakeholders (for more information on key stakeholders of the project see Deliverable 4.1). These stakeholders shared the survey invitation (Annex 1) either directly to e-mail addresses of the target group, through the social media channels they manage, or via newsletters.

Furthermore, the participation in the survey was promoted regularly in EMY social media in correspondence with the communication strategy (see Deliverable 5.2). The participants of the pre-election focus groups were encouraged to fill in the survey as well (Annex 2).

In order to increase the response rate of the survey, all respondents were invited to take part in a lottery by providing their e-mail addresses. The project team offered 5 [oeticket](#)³ event gift cards to the winners of the lottery (each worth 50 EUR).

In addition to the dissemination of the survey by key stakeholders, the project team held a two-hour session with the partner school, BG and BRG Boerhaavegasse Vienna, - on April 25th of 2019 to introduce the project and main information about the forthcoming 2019 EP elections. At this event the survey was promoted to the target group of 16 to 18year-olds. A mixed group

¹ Young European Federalists

² Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research

³ Available at: <https://www.oeticket.com/> 1.07.2019

of students attended the discussion (40 students in total, about 25 mobile EU students between 16 and 18 years old from six different EU countries). Various materials on EMY and EP elections were distributed to the teachers and students before and after the event.

Furthermore, due to the fruitful cooperation with the student organization AMSA⁴, the project team was invited to take part in the information event about exchange programs of the Medical University of Vienna (14.05.2019), where the project was introduced in a 15-minute slot to roughly 400 students. The pre-election survey was promoted at the event.

1.2 Response to the Survey

Overall, as many as 191 mobile students responded to the survey, with 191 completing it by answering most of the total of 37 questions (see the list of survey questions in Annex 3).

The respondents represented 23 EU countries (no responses came from Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania and Malta; Austrian students do not belong to the target group). More than half of the responses came from three countries, namely: Germany (45%), Italy (13%) and Romania (6%). Mobile students aged 18 to 24 years old enrolled in the Bachelor (45%) and Master's (35%) study programs provided 79% of all the responses. The students representing the University of Vienna, Technical University of Vienna, and the University of Innsbruck supplied 35%, 8% and 10% of responses respectively. The survey indicates that 24% of all respondents have been living in Austria for at least one year (since 2018) and a similar proportion (26%) came to Austria 6 or more years ago; 11% of all survey respondents are the newcomers (since 2019) and 10% of respondents have lived in the country for at least 3 years.

Data and figures on secondary level students aged 16-18 in general, and on mobile European students aged 16-18 living in Austria in particular, are not publicly available. The focus of the survey was mostly on students from Austrian universities, however, dissemination activities have also been made in cooperation with schools. Nevertheless, while the survey had 191 participants, there were only two secondary level respondents from Germany. Over the course of the project, further attempts will be made to collect data and information on this specific group of direct beneficiaries through additional stakeholder interviews and other project activities.

1.3 Conduct of Focus Groups

In the pre-election phase of the project, two focus groups were conducted in parallel to the survey; both were implemented in cooperation with the Erasmus Student Network Austria and took place in the international office of the University of Vienna. Focus groups were conducted on the 10th of May 2019 (FG1 henceforth) and on the 23rd of May 2019 (FG2 henceforth). The lists of participants are enclosed in Annex 4 and Annex 5, which have restrictive access due to the anonymity of the participants.

As stated in Deliverable 4.1, cooperation ties have been established with Austrian universities, public bodies, student unions, student networks, and other stakeholders. Since the key

⁴ Austrian Medical Student Association

stakeholders have direct contact to the target group, the project team used their support in drawing attention to the focus groups via e-mails and social media postings. Furthermore, because of the difficulties with the recruitment of focus group participants, the project team distributed EMY project information materials to the universities, tried to directly contact students of the target group, and invited them to participate in the focus group discussions.

The implementation of the focus groups followed the methodology provided in WP2 (D2.1). In the introductory part of the focus group, an attendance list was distributed where the participants had to indicate their names in a specifically designated spreadsheet. Each row in the spreadsheet was pre-numbered so each participant was identified in the analysis process as follows: Participant 1, Participant 2 etc. While both discussions were recorded, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. After the EMY project was introduced to the focus group participants, participants shared their experiences, background, and motivation of participating in the focus groups in a round of opening statements. A PowerPoint presentation (Annex 6) was also prepared with the lead questions which were projected on a screen in order to guide the discussion. [EMY Image Video](#) was also presented as the project introduction to participants of FG2.

The composition of the focus groups was intended to be as diverse as possible. The FG1 comprised of six degree-seeking students from five different EU member states (Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Germany). The participants were enrolled in Master's programs in Global Studies, Culture and Social Anthropology, Public Administration, Dutch Language, German Literature and Nutrition Science. The FG2 included seven degree-seeking students from four different EU member states (Germany, Finland, Sweden, Romania) All of them were enrolled in different Bachelor and Master programs in Business Administration, Economics and Political Science.

Both focus group discussions lasted for approximately 120 minutes and were run by two moderators (one main moderator and one supporting moderator).

2 Summary of Key Findings

This section presents the key findings from the pre-election survey and focus group discussions. The summary is structured along the three main topics elaborated under WP2 and presented in Deliverable 2.1. In addition to the presentation of survey figures, the summary provides direct quotes from focus group discussions conducted with the target group. A comparative analysis of the results of the mapping activities in Austria and Estonia conducted before the European Elections in May 2019 will be presented in Deliverable 2.2.

2.1 Theme 1: General Political Activism and Engagement

Article 39 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states that every citizen of the Union has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at elections to the European Parliament in the Member State in which he or she resides, under the same conditions as nationals of that State.

European Citizens with a permanent residence in Austria are entitled to vote in the EP elections, on a local level in the municipal elections, and in district elections. Since the City of Vienna is the federal capital and has the legal status of a charter city, EU citizens can only vote on a district level (Bezirksvertretungswahlen). Third-country nationals do not have the right to vote in Austria.

The procedure for voter's registration in Austria is the following: Voters in Austria must in principle vote at a polling station where they have their main residence. With a postal voting card (which can be requested online via oesterreich.gv.at or at the responsible municipality), they can cast their vote at another polling station. Under certain conditions, voters may also cast their votes by postal voting from abroad.

In nationwide elections, persons absent from their permanent residence and designated polling station are entitled to obtain a "voting card" which enables them to use any polling place in Austria to cast their vote or to employ postal voting.

Further requirements are the minimum age of 16 years, which must be reached by the election day, the non-exclusion from the right to vote in Austria or in the respective country of origin, and voter registration by the deadline in the European voter register of an Austrian municipality (for more information on the voting process in Austria see Deliverable 4.1).

In Austria, an EU citizen can stand as a candidate for a municipal council and the European Parliament. All EU citizens with their main residence in Austria who are 18 years old on the day of the elections and who have not lost the right to vote in their Member State of origin can stand as candidates for the European Parliament.⁵ Furthermore, the person must be registered on the European electoral roll of an Austrian municipality on the reference date.

⁵ Further conditions for a candidature are that they have not been sentenced by a domestic court to a final and absolute sentence of an unqualified term of imprisonment of more than six months or a sentenced term of imprisonment of more than one year for one or more intentionally committed acts which have been prosecuted ex

This subsection of the deliverable discusses survey questions no. 7 to 9.

The survey demonstrated that 97% of all respondents were generally aware of the upcoming EP elections in May 2019 and 63% were aware of their right to vote for a candidate from Austria, while only 24% were aware of their right to stand as a candidate in Austria.

The discussions in the focus groups also demonstrated that the participants were informed about the forthcoming EP elections, but that there were barriers to exercising the right to vote (see more about the barriers to participation in the next section).

Furthermore, while almost all focus group participants were aware of the right to vote, only a very small number of participants **knew about their right to stand as a candidate**. Yanis Varoufakis' participation in the EP elections in Germany ensured that some participants were informed by chance.

*“Yanis Varoufakis runs in Germany, that’s why I know that. But otherwise no!”
(Participant 5, FG1)*

It can be seen from the statements made by the participants that the general information about the right to stand as a candidate was not clearly communicated by the competent authorities or did not reach the target group at all, and that the participants would only consider using this right in rare cases.

“If you see issues that you really want to change because all other political parties are wrong, then you want to change something, and you don’t care where. But it only makes sense if you live in a country for a long time.” (Participant 6, FG1)

The voting right is considered by all but one of the focus group participants to be very important for EU citizenship as it brings European interests to the forefront rather than national ones. When the participants were asked, whether it would make sense for them to stand as a candidate in another country, one respondent explained:

“It would make sense and would be aligned with the concept of EU citizenship. And it could strengthen the EU Parliament. It would support the European interests rather than the national interests.” (Participant 1, FG1)

officio, or by a domestic court. Source: https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/elections-abroad/european-elections/index_de.htm 1.07.2019

One of the participants added that transnational parties such as Volt Europe⁶ would simplify the election for (mobile) voters by unifying party interests.

“This new transnational party project like Volt would help, because then it wouldn’t matter where I voted.” (Participant 2, FG1)

Regarding the meaning of EU citizenship for the focus group participants, the discussions indicated that it is perceived through the opportunity to study abroad, to get involved in intercultural interactions, to travel without borders. More importantly, participants also perceived Europe as their home and related to their identity and a community of shared values.

“The most obvious thing is to be able to travel anywhere. After Erasmus Programmes and other Exchange Programmes, I began more and more to think about the EU. Being able to travel and study anywhere. And also, European values that make me think it is good to be a European.” (Participant 3, FG1).

As the participant who originally grew up in Romania, has German and Hungarian roots and came to reside in Austria after high school argued,

“I never felt Romanian, so European is a good description for me.” (Participant 5, FG2)

Another one having lived in Germany being originally from/born in Romania and now studying in Austria added,

“It is more or less the same for me with Romania. Now I have the opportunity to study and work in other EU countries, apply for scholarships. In my studies all my classmates are international, but the non-Europeans have to pay much more. They don’t have the chance to practice other languages and travel to other countries as we have. If I get asked where I am from, it is very hard for me to answer. And I just feel like saying European.” (Participant 1, FG1)

Another one explained,

⁶ Volt Europe is a pro-European and European federalist political movement that also serves as the pan-European structure for subsidiary parties in several EU member states, with candidates on a common, pan-European manifesto in eight member states at the European Parliament elections in May 2019. More information available at: <https://www.volteuropa.org/> 10.07.2019

“I’m already very used to being a European citizen. It is so easy to work in other countries. If you want to go outside the EU it’s much more difficult. My parents applied for work in Germany when Poland was not part of the EU yet, which was a very difficult process. We also had issues with the currency. When Poland got introduced to the EU, everything got easier. And I didn’t feel like a part of Poland anymore, just an EU citizen. I feel like I have a European identity.” (Participant 6, FG1)

Both FG1 and FG2 participants demonstrated interest in the EP elections. The students who studied Public Administration and Political Science were especially well informed and had very critical remarks, for example on current non-harmonized electoral processes. Most of the other students, although there was a basic interest as well as knowledge regarding the EU, lacked in depth understanding about the system of the EU.

2.2 Theme 2: Interest in and Attitude towards European Elections

This subsection of the deliverable discusses survey questions no. 24 to 28, 30, 31 and 33 to 37.

Even though the overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) have been involved in the electoral process at least once in their past (90% participated previously in any election), only 36% of all respondents voted in EP elections in 2014. Most of those who did vote were living in their home country at the time (82%). Others, who resided in other EU countries during the 2014 EP elections, mostly voted for their home country candidates (89%). Furthermore, among those who considered voting in EP elections 2019, had they decided to vote, 25% would have voted for an Austrian candidate and 75%, accordingly, would have opted for a home country candidate.

2.2.1 Barriers to Participation

According to current information provided by the Austrian Ministry of Interior on 28th June 2019, 38,672 EU citizens were eligible to vote in Austria. According to the Ministry of the Interior, neither the number of the EU citizens who actually voted and stood as candidates in Austria will be legally recorded nor will socio-demographic data be collected by the Ministry.

Among the barriers that prevent or make it difficult to participate in EP elections in Austria “registration procedures including deadlines” have been selected by more than half of all respondents (56%). Also, insufficient information and language were considered to be important barriers by 50% of all respondents of this question.

The survey also demonstrated that 86% of all survey respondents did not register to vote for Austrian candidates in EP elections. The discussions in the focus groups also showed that only 3 out of 13 participants were prepared to vote for the Austrian candidates in the 2019 EP elections. Although the interest in voting for Austrian candidates in the 2019 EP elections was also high among some other participants, they were hindered by language barriers, that lack of information as well as a short registration deadline.

Almost all focus group participants (with one exception) received no notification from the Ministry of the Interior or their relevant Municipal Administration with the early registration deadline (the 12th of March 2019). Hence, the participants missed the deadline. Reflections were the following,

"A friend of mine missed the registration deadline in Austria so he needed to register to vote in Germany. The local government there charged him 10€ for sending his documents. This is very expensive and not mobility-friendly." (Participant 3, FG2)

"I already received a letter of information about the registration process in March from my district. I got it very close to the deadline and not any information was given in English." (Participant 2, FG2)

"I wanted to participate, but I didn't receive any letter here, but in Germany. But I'm not in Germany anymore. I want to vote, but I want to vote in Austria." (Participant 6, FG1)

"I have to register very early on in Austria, so that's why I don't vote." (Participant 2, FG1)

"When was the deadline? The early registration deadline makes it harder to vote." (Participant 7, FG2)

The issue that was increasingly raised by participants was the non-uniform and short registration deadline (12.03.2019). This was not perceived as reasonable by participants, as the election campaign, party programs, and TV debates only start about a month before the elections. Also, there was certain level of confusion about the registration procedure. The participant who had received the letter stressed that the letter was written in German and that it would be a big problem for non-German speaking EU citizens to understand the information. Although the information is available in both German and English on all websites of the Municipal Administration and the Ministry of the Interior, according to participants finding the right subpage and information is complicated for people who do not regularly deal with these types of websites.

As already noted, out of 13 participants of both focus groups, 3 have registered to vote in Austria (Participant 1, FG2; Participant 2, FG2; Participant 3, FG2). Interestingly, during the course of discussion many participants saw their opportunity to vote in the host country as a strategic opportunity **to have a greater impact on the election result.**

"I am not very enthusiastic about the current Austrian government. That's why I would vote here." (Participant 5, FG1)

"I will vote in Austria in the EP elections as I have been living in Austria for a long time now and as the right-wing party is getting stronger here than in Germany, I want to have a say. I feel that voting in Austria has a bigger impact." (Participant 1, FG2)

Other mentioned obstacles that prevent or hinder participation in EP elections in Austria were a personal attachment to their home country and the habit of voting there. Also, they feel that the European Union is still much further away than the national politics.

In some cases, respondent outlined that they have to actively seek for information in order become knowledgeable enough. The lack of information was considered a significant barrier. In the words of one participant,

"I needed to inform myself proactively, otherwise, I would not know how and where to vote." (Participant 7, FG2)

"I feel that there is lack of information about the elections in Austria." (Participant 4, FG2)

Language has been highlighted as one of the key barriers, as it plays a key role in participating in political events and discussions in the host country.

"Political debate is all in German, that's why I can't follow." (Participant 1, FG1)

"I went to a panel discussion in the university to get to know the political culture here, but it was in German." (Participant 2, FG1)

In addition to the language barrier, another important factor that is likely to influence the willingness and readiness to vote for the Austrian candidates is the duration of the stay in the host country.

"I received an information for the local election, but it didn't make any sense to me. I'm only staying a few months and the card was in German." (Participant 1, FG1)

"When people around me start talking about politics I started to care more, before that I didn't vote. If I stayed for a much longer time in Austria I would want to vote here." (Participant 4, FG1)

“So, there is always a language barrier for political discussion. I can’t follow the discussions. I’m only here for 4 months so it doesn’t matter. It wouldn’t be right for me to decide if I’m here for such a short time.” (Participant 4, FG1)

„I think if I’d live for a longer period of time in Austria, I would consider it more. Because now I think I know more about Dutch politics.” (Participant 3, FG1)

Another barrier mentioned by respondents was the fact that Austrian parties and candidates did not target the respondents and, therefore, the election campaign does not reach them. The question whether the participants of the focus groups know Austrian candidates and European lead candidates was answered in the following way,

“No - I know how they look. Especially from YouTube. The FPÖ Videos, now I know why I don’t like them. The European ones are less visible.” (Participant 5, FG1)

“In most national media, you only see the national candidates.” (Participant 2, FG1)

"It is too complicated with the candidates, there are no right explanations." (Participant 3, FG2)

Obtaining clear information about the right to vote either for candidates from the home country or the host country was an important aspect that several focus group participants were missing. However, participants from countries such as Sweden, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands were better informed about their domestic policies and processes compared to the other participants, partly because of self-interest but also because of proactive information given to citizens by the national government. A Swedish participant said that they received election information directly to their mobile phone via SMS, which greatly simplified communication. It was also discussed that the regulations and registration for the election of candidates from the host country, including deadlines, are often very confusing, which reduces the motivation to vote.

Most of focus group participants intended to vote for candidates from their home country. In the words of the participants,

“I will vote for Finish candidates. The Finish government sent a letter to my address in Finland with information about the elections there. I needed to inform myself proactively, otherwise, I would not know how and where to vote.” (Participant 7, FG2)

"I will vote for Swedish candidates. In Austria you need to be active to receive information about the EP elections." (Participant 6, FG2)

Another respondent stressed a positive example from home country,

"In my hometown, Groningen, they send out the information in Dutch and in English, because they know that there are so many foreigners living there. And that did help." (Participant 5, FG1)

Participants mentioned that although there is an interest in the European Union and its processes, the complexity does not make them understandable.

"It is so hard to understand; EU is so complex. Not necessarily the parties but the information given could be funnier. Maybe by using hashtags to go viral and using state of the art communication." (Participant 6, FG2)

"I'm taking an extra course which I'm paying for and I still don't [i.e. understand the EU]." (Participant 3, FG1)

"If one doesn't have an education about it, it is hard to understand it. That is probably why people rather leave it then. That's why campaigns should be easy to understand and funny." (Participant 5, FG2)

It has been also observed that the participants of both focus groups had very little information about applications, platforms, campaigns and other sources and materials provided by the EP (for example, such as thistimeimvoting.eu). After the introduction of several materials, participants provided very positive feedback regarding the content. It has also been discussed that the outreach of these sources should go beyond those specifically interested in the European matters.

2.2.2 Attitude towards i-Voting

68% of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to use i-voting instead of other conventional voting methods. Out of the 68% of respondents who indicated their preference for i-voting, the majority considered simplicity / easy access (94%) and speed / efficiency (77%) to be the main reasons for i-voting. Other reasons were the lower environmental impact (paper savings), money and time saving, the potentially increased turnout and the possibility to vote from abroad. As one survey respondent mentioned,

"I often don't know what country I will be in at the time of the votes. For example, in 2014 I was in Italy for the day that the vote happened in the UK, three days later the vote took place in Italy, but I was already in England." (survey response)

Out of the 32% who opted for conventional voting methods, the main reason why they did not opt for i-voting was the lack of confidence (87%). The lack of knowledge about how i-voting works was also reported by 29% of all respondents and the lack of own technology by 12%. Other reasons mentioned by survey respondents included fears that Internet voting could be hacked and fears that this would reduce awareness of voting by "just" voting by clicking. Some focus group participants also expressed concerns about the security aspects of i-voting.

Focus groups have produced mixed results in terms of the potential of i-voting to influence the political engagement of the target group. Several participants expressed their readiness and interest in this voting method. They had following reflections,

"I did an exchange in Estonia and was there when in 2017 this huge scandal with I-voting happened. Prior to elections researches confirmed to the government that the electronic IDs are hackable. There has been a problem with the technology update as the company who provided the electronic IDs has not done it properly. But still the Estonian government continued with the elections and this came out afterwards." (Participant 2, FG2)

"The future is I-voting but I would not trust i-voting today. The new generations trust more in computers, for them i-voting will be much easier and will then maybe get more people to vote." (Participant 6, FG2)

"You need proper devices for I-voting, so old people couldn't vote then. A combination of i-voting and "offline voting" would be good." (Participant 7, FG2)

"As long as it's safe. I don't know if I could trust it. Because of transparency issues and attack from the inside and outside. I think data security is also an issue." (Participant 3, FG2)

"I think you would have to create it in a functional, safe way. Maybe I'm too pessimistic, but the rule of law in some European countries is not the best for that. There is this democratic decline in some countries. That's why it is maybe not the best time to try something like this." (Participant 5, FG1)

"I trust in elections. But I don't know that much about technology." (Participant 2, FG1)

2.2.3 EU Topics and Issues

In response to the question as to which EU topics and themes should be changed and in which the participants of the focus group are interested, the following topics were addressed: Environment, education--especially EU education, youth policy, processes and decision-making, access to information, harmonization and simplification of participation in political life across the EU. Reflections of focus group participants were the following,

“More focus on environmental issues and climate change.” (Participant 4, FG1)

“Because I am a nutritionist... issues of Public Health. EU has a big influence on public health, for example through EFSA⁷, all topics concerning food security.” (Participant 6, FG1)

“Monopoly of food in different countries and health and production standards. That is a big topic in Czech Republic. There is an obvious quality difference between products in Austria and Czech. Not only food, also hygiene.” (Participant 4, FG1)

“A school subject that includes knowledge about EU and regulations, and elections should be introduced. Because education is about explaining complicated things that are important.” (Participant 1, FG2)

“How do we deal with technological companies? Facebook, Google, Amazon. That is something we have to solve on the EU level. And the EU should be active in this field.” (Participant 3, FG1)

“Parties should make faster decisions, as everybody wants to change something but nothing is really happening or very slowly.” (Participant 3, FG2)

“To have same opportunities in elections in every EU country. Because at the moment in some you can only vote if you are there, one has i-voting, others don't...” (Participant 5, FG2)

“To make it equal for anyone to go vote, to stop „anti-EU“ campaigns, to spread more positivity about the EU. The right-wing parties are getting stronger and one needs to work against this.” (Participant 6, FG2)

⁷ European Food Safety Authority

“Young people should receive more information by learning about it in school, there has to be more awareness and discussions about elections.” (Participant 7, FG2)

“Bring Brussels to the local level. Make it fun. Do more with children and make it more visible!” (Participant 2, FG1)

“Show all the people what the EU can do for them!” (Participant 1, FG1)

2.3 Theme 3: Getting and Handling Information about European Elections

This subsection of the deliverable discusses survey questions no. 10 to 20, 22 to 23, and 33 to 37.

While almost all the surveyed students (97%) were aware of the European elections, most of them (66%) did not demonstrate a proactive interest in Austrian political affairs that includes searching for specific information about the Austrian candidates to the European Parliament. Instead, they searched for information pertinent to their home countries (66% of all respondents did so). Focus group discussions provided following views,

“I am following more the German news, but actually I would have wanted to vote in Austria because I think that it is more important. But somehow, I never got information to vote in Austria, instead I informed myself about voting in Germany.” (Participant 4, FG2)

“I am more informed about what is happening in Romania and I never looked for information about what is happening in Austria. Maybe I even ignored it, so it’s my fault.” (Participant 5, FG2)

The survey results also indicate that 16% of all respondents did not discuss EP elections with anyone, while 40% discussed them in any way with colleagues or students from other EU countries. Other communication circles included colleagues and students from Austria (43%) and friends from other EU countries (56%). Insights of focus group participants were diverse,

“I discuss EU politics with my colleagues at the university.” (Participant 3, FG1)

“I heard about it outside. Friends of mine also went to the podium discussion, and I also discussed the “practical stuff” about elections with my Swedish friends here - to go together... One does not receive much information in class or lectures, there was only

one teacher who recommended some TV shows, but they are only in German. And in newspapers one can read more about the current scandals than the elections itself.” (Participant 6, FG2)

“My source is mostly social media, in class there has been no discussion about it. The Erasmus group at the university promotes elections and tells us to go vote. I do not have much information about campaigns. When comparing the national and EU elections - the EU elections are less intense. I think in Austria the campaigns are not very present.” (Participant 5, FG2)

Nevertheless, about half of the survey respondents (60%) indicated that they would be interested in participating in events organized in Austria to discuss the 2019 EP elections.

One-third of all survey participants have never followed Austrian media. Instead, their focus is political news from home country--38% follow it daily and 37% weekly.

When it comes specifically to the 2019 EP elections, only 34% searched for any information about Austrian political parties and candidates. The majority found the information they wanted from the following channels: webpages of Austrian political parties (43%), Austrian news media (68%), Facebook (30%), webpages of EU Parliament and other EU institutions (17%), and applications dedicated to the European elections (e.g. voting advisors) (17%).

More than half of the respondents (66%) were searching for information about their home country political parties' messages and candidates for the EP elections 2019 and found this information in the following channels: webpages of home/country's political parties (62%) and home country news media (80%), Facebook (38%), webpages of the European Parliament and other EU institutions (22%), applications dedicated to the European elections (e.g. voting advisors) (23%). The reflections of focus group participants on this issue were the following,

“Google, Websites. I searched it online. I connected with the campaign, „This time I'm voting“ and friends on Facebook. My feed is full of it. Not too much on Instagram. The official website from German government and the Austrian. I wanted to vote in Austria but I missed the deadline. I knew there was this other option, if it was less of an obstacle I would have voted in Austria.” (Participant 2, FG1)

“My preferred channel is Instagram, also Facebook but I have not seen that the elections are being discussed there. I am following some candidates and people on Instagram who are sharing their EU elections experiences and they are motivating others to vote. I also feel that the scandals get more space on media and news than the elections. In Finland there are lots of ads on the streets and flyers. In Austria the EU elections and ÖH elections are at the same time, so I don't always know which information about which election is.” (Participant 7, FG2)

“Facebook, online newspaper, and “this time I’m Voting” (Participant 1, FG1)

“Also, sometimes I’m reading some blogs for inspiration. Facebook is the main one for politics.” (Participant 1, FG1)

“I use the voting calculator. Which is very common. But you have to be careful because it not always speaks for the party. And I watch TV. I follow journalists on Twitter for the information. It’s very different from Facebook which is more about fun.” (Participant 4, FG1)

“On Instagram there is a campaign called „going to vote proposal”, where one instagramer challenges another one to go to vote etc. The idea is good.” (Participant 4, FG2)

“One can’t miss that there is EU elections! But parties need to underline why to vote and find a purpose for it. They need to change people’s way of thinking by constantly keeping it in mind.” (Participant 6, FG2)

Also, in the course of the interviews with student union representatives and the international offices of the universities (see Deliverable 4.1 for details), it has been observed that, despite their role as contact points for students, they do not have a major role to play in the political integration of mobile students, since they themselves do not receive any information from the responsible authorities in order to be able to pass this on to the target group.

3 Conclusions

Deliverable 4.2 presented the implementation process and the summary results of the mapping activities carried out in Austria before the EP elections of 2019. It described the implementation of the pre-election survey and two focus groups with the direct beneficiaries of the project. In addition, this report provided insights into the summarized results of the survey and the focus groups and clarified the important statements and arguments.

The summary of the results is divided into the three main themes of WP2: 1) general political activism and engagement of the target group; 2) the voting experience, interest in and attitudes towards European elections among the target group, and 3) the use of communication channels in getting and handling the information about European elections.

The first theme aimed at highlighting concerns about the importance of EP elections for the target group, the importance of EU citizenship, its general political activism and the level of awareness of their EU citizenship rights. The key findings made in the context of this theme were the following: Both the survey and the results of the focus groups showed that there was awareness of both the 2019 EP elections and the possibility of electing a candidate in the host country. There was little or no information available on the possibility of standing as a candidate both in the home country and in the host country. As the survey demonstrated, 63% of respondents were aware of the right to vote for a candidate from Austria and only 24% were aware of their right to stand as a candidate in Austria at the 2019 EP elections.

The second theme focused on the interest and attitudes of the target group towards EP elections, obstacles to participation, attitudes towards i-voting and highlighted some of the EU issues that were attractive to the target group. The majority of survey respondents that considered voting in EP elections, had they decided to vote, would have voted for a home country candidate; 25% would have opted for an Austrian candidate. The main obstacles identified by respondents to the survey and focus groups were the different registration procedures in each EU Member State, non-uniform registration deadlines, lack of notification by the responsible authorities, existing information that is not provided to the target group in the right language to participate in political decisions in the host country and make an informed decision, and the language barrier in the host country, as all events, promotions, appearances, etc. take place only in that language, and finally, the lack of information about elections. It was also observed that despite the participants' interest in the EU, there is a lack of a deeper understanding of the complex system of the European Union, which creates uncertainty and confusion in the short term and disinterest in the long term. Adding to this, it was found that applications, tools, platforms, and campaigns of the European Union can only reach people if they proactively involve themselves through different channels (EU relevant communities and social media channels). EU issues and themes of priority or high interest to the participants were the environment, education (EU education), youth policy, processes and decision making, access to information, harmonization, and simplification of participation in political life across the EU. With regard to i-voting, this voting channel addresses the target group as a whole, but concerns about secrecy, security and awareness of the target group's decisions should not be neglected. Furthermore, it has to be noted that no precise election data (e.g. sociodemographic data, percentage of mobile young people who actually made use of their

active and passive right to vote, etc.) in Austria is legally recorded by the Ministry of the Interior or other statistical institutes.

The last theme looked at the communication channels and ways that the target group uses to get information about EP elections in Austria. While a large proportion did not show any proactive interest in the Austrian political landscape, more than half indicated that they were interested in events related to the European elections in Austria. The results also showed that participants tended to look for election information about candidates from their home country rather than from their host country. The channels that were particularly highlighted included (in the sequence of importance): the official websites of the parties, the media of the respective host/home country, and the social media platform Facebook. Among the social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram stood out for their ability to gather information and be kept up to date on these topics. Also, student unions do not seem to play a major role in the political integration of mobile students.

During forthcoming project activities, barriers and opportunities of engagement identified in Deliverables 4.2 and 4.3 will be further analyzed and recommendations for improvements will be provided. A comparative analysis of the mapping activities undertaken in Estonia and Austria will be presented in Deliverable 2.2.

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5 Annexes

Annex 1. Invitation letter to take part in the survey

Annex 2. Invitation letter to take part in the survey and in the focus group

Annex 3. Data from the survey (pdf)

Annex 4. Participant list of FG 1 in Vienna (restrictive access)

Annex 5. Participant list of FG 2 in Vienna (restrictive access)

Annex 6. Focus group questions (ppt)