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Mapping surveys and focus groups in Estonia before EP elections

AIT Austrian Institute of Technology

POLITIKOS – Wir müssen reden!

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Executive Summary

The objective of Deliverable 4.3 is to present the implementation process and the preliminary findings of the mapping activities undertaken before the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections in Estonia. As the project proposal prescribes, parallel and identical activities were implemented in Austria by consortium partners (see Deliverable 4.2 for overview of Austrian activities). 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 Tallinn and Tartu (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 in 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 gets information about EP elections, how they handle 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.

Hence, the pre-election survey and the focus groups were investigating 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 gives an overview of the implementation of pre-election mapping activities during April and May 2019. It describes the announcement, dissemination and response to the pre-election survey as well as presents information about the conduct of two pre-election focus-groups in May 2019.

The second section focuses on findings of conducted mapping activities: it describes the prominent figures of the pre-election survey and illustrates the arguments using evidence from the focus group discussions. The second section is divided into subsections with respect to the three topics presented above. A comparative analysis of the mapping activities undertaken in Estonia and Austria 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 of the project. 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 Estonia – first in Tartu and second in Tallinn.

1.1 Announcement of the Survey

The pre-election survey was conducted online using [Survey Monkey environment](#) during the time period between the 19th of April and the 26th of May 2019. The online survey was adaptable for completing it on mobile devices. The survey was disseminated through the key stakeholders identified in Deliverable 4.1. The invitation to participate in the survey (see Annex 1) was sent to the key stakeholders that have direct access to the contacts of the target group and manage their social media accounts. More specifically, the invitation was sent to the Study Abroad Center and Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies of Tartu University; Mobility Center of Tallinn Technical University; Academic Affairs Office, ESN International Club, School of Governance, Law and Society and Student Union of Social Studies Institute of Tallinn University. The survey was also embedded into EMY website to target as wide public as possible (see Deliverable 5.1 and 5.2 for information on communication tools of the project).

In addition, the invitation to the pre-election survey as well as the message raising the awareness about the upcoming 2019 EP elections with the link to the EU Voting Advice Application (euandi2019)¹ was sent to all eligible EU voters aged 18-29 in Estonia (Annex 2). The data and contacts were received by the e-Governance Academy from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Estonia (see confirmation letter in Estonian in Annex 3). The message included disclaimer outlining the purpose and justification for the usage of personal data.

Furthermore, the participation in the survey was regularly promoted 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 (see Annex 4).

¹ euandi2019 is a Voting Advice Application built to help citizens make an informed choice in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Available in over 20 languages, it invites users to react to 22 statements covering a wide range of contemporary policy issues and political values in European politics. The results show which parties stand closest to citizens' preferences, both in their country and across Europe.

Available at:

https://euandi2019.eu/survey/default/EN?utm_source=EMY&utm_campaign=24654b53b0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_11_22_01_13_COPY_03&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0ba8c7022b-24654b53b0-&mc_cid=24654b53b0&mc_eid=%5bUNIQID%5d_26.06.2019

To increase the response rate of the survey, all respondents were invited to take part in the lottery by providing their names and e-mail addresses at the end of the survey. The project team offered 10 event gift cards (Piletilevi²) to the winners of the lottery (each worth 50 EUR).

1.2 Response to the Survey

The mapping activities identified 2170 mobile students from the EU studying in Estonia's three main universities (Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, Tartu University) as of April 2019 (degree-seeking as well as exchange students). The actual number of all mobile students from the EU could have been slightly (but not critically) higher, if it were to include a few other Estonian universities. Overall, as many as 188 mobile students responded to the survey, with 169 completing it by answering most of the total of 37 questions offered for answering (see the list of survey questions in Annex 5). The overall response can be considered as a good one confirming the interest on the part of the mobile students in the issues raised by the survey.

The respondents represented 25 EU countries (no responses came from Luxembourg and Malta; Estonian students do not belong to the target group). More than half of the responses came from five countries, namely: Finland (19%), Germany (14%), Italy (11%), Latvia (8%) and France (8%). Mobile students aged 18 to 24 years old enrolled in the Bachelor (43%) and Master's (42%) study programmes provided 64% of all the responses. The students from the University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology and Tallinn University – Estonia's three main universities – supplied 32%, 26% and 21% of responses respectively. Approximately one-third of the respondents have been living in Estonia for at least one year (since 2018) and a significant percentage (30%) are the newcomers (since 2019). Also, it is notable, that 9% of respondents have lived in Estonia for at least 3 years while another 6% came to live in Estonia 6 or more years ago.

1.3 Conduct of Focus Groups

The implementation of the focus groups followed the methodology provided in WP2 (Deliverable 2.1).

The pre-election mapping activities in Estonia included two focus groups in two main universities of Estonia – Tartu University (conducted 06.05.2019; FG1 henceforth) and Tallinn University (conducted 20.05.2019; FG2 henceforth). The lists of participants are enclosed in Annex 6 and Annex 7, which have restrictive access due to the anonymity of the participants.

Focus group participants were recruited firstly by disseminating the information through the university personnel and teachers of political science and international relations. School of Governance, Law and Society in Tallinn University, student union of social studies institute of Tallinn University, ESN international club of Tallinn University and Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies of Tartu University were involved in engaging the students to participate in the pre-election focus group. These stakeholders shared the invitations either directly to the e-mails of the target group or through their social media channels.

² Piletilevi is Estonia's largest on-line ticket selling network. Available at: <https://www.piletilevi.ee/eng/> 26.06.2019

Due to the encountered difficulties with the recruitment of participants for focus groups, incentives to participate have been proposed by the project team: event gift cards (Piletilevi) worth 20 EUR were offered as a reward to every participant of FG2.

In the introductory part of the focus group an attendance list was circulated where the participants had to enter 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, and so on. Both discussions were recorded; however, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. Also, the introductory part briefly presented the main focus of the EMY project and the topics to be discussed. A PowerPoint presentation (Annex 8) was also prepared with the questions projected to guide the discussion.

Both focus group discussions lasted for approximately 90 minutes and were run by two moderators (one main moderator and one supporting moderator). The composition of the focus groups was intended to be as diverse as possible. The FG1 comprised of degree-seeking students originating from Bulgaria, Croatia, and Italy (3 participants). The FG2 involved a mix of exchange and degree-seeking students from Spain, Latvia, Germany, and Slovakia (6 participants).

2 Summary of Key Findings

This section presents the key findings from both focus group discussions as well as the prominent figures based on the responses to the pre-election survey. The summary is structured along the three main topics elaborated under WP2 and to be 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 mapping activities undertaken in Austria and Estonia before the EU elections 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.

The citizens of the EU have **the right to vote** at local government council elections and the EP elections while residing in Estonia. A person must be of at least 18 years of age to be eligible to vote, except at local government council elections, where 16- and 17-year olds have been given the right to vote³. The procedure to register for voting in EP elections in Estonia has been described in detail in Deliverable 4.1. In brief, the notice is sent by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Estonia to all EU citizens who have the right to vote in Estonia. The notice includes the information letter as well as the application letter to be filled in and sent back to the Ministry. In addition to informing about the right to vote, the information letter also outlines the right to stand as candidate in EP elections, listing the legal requirements the candidate must adhere to. A citizen of the EU may also **stand as candidate** for a local government council and the European Parliament when living in Estonia. A candidate must have the right to vote and be of at least 21 years of age in order to stand as a candidate for the EP elections and 18 years of age – for local government elections⁴.

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

The survey demonstrated that 93% of all respondents were generally aware of the upcoming EP elections in May 2019 and most of them were aware of their right to vote for a candidate from Estonia (75%), while only 39% were aware of their right to stand as a candidate in Estonia. This indicates that even though the information letter sent by the Ministry does mention the right to stand as a candidate, it nevertheless does not make the majority of the target group aware of this right.

The focus group discussions showed that participants were aware of the fact of upcoming EP elections; however, concerns regarding **the importance of EP elections** as well as the

³ Official website of the Estonian National Electoral Commission. Available at <https://www.valimised.ee/en/right-vote> 26.06.2019

⁴ Official website of the Estonian National Electoral Commission. Available at <https://www.valimised.ee/en/estonian-elections-nutshell/right-stand-candidate> 26.06.2019

influence of the European Parliament in the overall system of the EU were voiced. In the words of the participants,

*“It is perceived in Italy, that the European Union is something really far [i.e. far away]”
(Participant 1, FG1)*

“But let’s be honest, it does not really matter that much... European Parliament...how much they can actually influence something. I am happy to vote for it, but I do not really believe in it.” (Participant 3, FG1)

Furthermore, the discussions indicated that **the citizenship of the European Union** is perceived by focus group participants through the opportunity to get education abroad, to have intercultural interactions or to start own business. As the participants observed,

“For me to be a European citizen means to be free...to be free to walk across borders... [...] to travel, to learn from other cultures, other people, try to understand each other more.” (Participant 1, FG1)

*“For me it is just an education...Erasmus...I had a chance and I am here...I think this is the only place where I actually feel this [i.e. being a citizen of the EU]”
(Participant 3, FG1)*

*“I am on Erasmus, I am using my opportunities as a European Union citizen, I have been to Erasmus plus projects as well...and I feel like...hey, this is a good thing!”
(Participant 5, FG2)*

Nevertheless, views of importance of political engagement at all governance levels were also expressed. As one respondent stated,

“What I am trying to say is when we elect national governments, when we elect mayors, we elect our representatives in the EU, we are not just electing national ones, but people who will make decisions for everyone else. So, I can travel – fine, I can stay in a different country – perfect [...] but my decisions, my political choice is what make me a citizen of the European Union. I am personally responsible for what is going on in Italy, Croatia, Estonia...as we all are.” (Participant 2, FG1)

Likewise, the interconnectedness between different levels of governance (local, national, and European) and their importance was acknowledged; but, at the same time, the challenge of bringing the EU closer to its citizens and understanding **the direct influence of the EU on everyday lives** of its citizens was highlighted. In the words of participants,

“I believe it (national and European levels) cannot be separated, because European politics also influence my home country politics. It’s like one big living organism which we usually forget about [...] People think that Europe has nothing to do with Latvia or

*Estonia or any country, like it is some sort of supranational... somewhere in the clouds.”
(Participant 5, FG2)*

“The EU has the same sort of influence as our national governments have, but I think there is lack of engagement because... it is hard for us to relate to this other entity. It is similar to climate change, we know it is going on, but we cannot get the grasp of it... how it does influence our lives.” (Participant 4, FG2)

Participants of FG1 were generally politically active, demonstrating interest in the EU as well as their home country politics. The latter, however, seemed to be dominating. Political activeness ranged from being the member of the party in their home country, planning an internship in the parliament in their home country, and generally being an active citizen signing petitions and expressing interest in global and national politics. All participants of FG1 were studying political science at the master's level. Participants of FG2 were much less involved in politics apart from two degree-seeking students (studying at the bachelor's level) who expressed their interest in both national and EU political scenes.

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 an overwhelming majority of respondents had been involved in the electoral process at least once in their past (85% had participated previously in any election), only 37% of all respondents voted in EP elections in 2014. Most of those, who did vote, were living in their home country at that time (92%). Others, who resided in other EU countries during the 2014 EP elections, mostly voted for their home country candidates (75%). Furthermore, among those who considered voting in the 2019 EP elections, if they decided to vote, 24% would have voted for an Estonian candidate and 76%, accordingly, opted for a home country candidate. The survey also demonstrated that 85% of all respondents did not register to vote for Estonian candidates in the 2019 EP elections.

Focus group discussions demonstrated that 1/3 of participants was ready to vote for Estonian candidates in the 2019 EP elections (3 participants out of 9 participants of both focus groups). These are, however, respondents studying political science and living for at least a couple of years already in Estonia (degree-seeking students).

2.2.1 Barriers to Participation

According to data from the Estonian population registry (as of February 2019), there are 10561 EU citizens aged 18-29 who were eligible to vote in EP elections in May 2019⁵. As mentioned earlier, in order to be entered into the list of voters the EU citizens must fill in and send the application to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Estonia. As of April 2019, only 138 EU citizens

⁵ The Ministry of Internal Affairs considers that 3,796 of these registered EU citizens have moved out of Estonia, since the owner of their registered place of residence notified that they were not living there anymore, and they have not registered a new place of residence in Estonia (see Deliverable 4.1 for details)

aged 18-29 were entered in the list of voters of Estonia according to the data provided by Ministry of Internal Affairs⁶.

The national media reflected some of the challenges that they EU citizens encountered while trying to exercise their right at several polling stations. The article outlines that many EU citizens found on the voting day that they are unable to vote. A few cases demonstrated that not having enough information on where and when to vote is a barrier to exercising voting rights. The article states that voters should have voted at the embassies of their home country but lacked the information to do so. Furthermore, the language barrier at the polling stations was outlined – there were difficulties with providing information in English to voters at the polling stations⁷.

The pre-election survey demonstrated that among the barriers that prevent or hinder participation in EP elections in Estonia “**registration procedures including deadlines**” was selected by almost half of all survey respondents. Also, roughly 40% of all respondents considered **insufficient information and language** to be important.

Almost all focus group participants have received the application letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (apart from two participants who are not registered in their place of residence). This procedure is likely to reach the objective of informing EU citizens about their right to vote. As one participant mentioned,

“I did not know I was allowed to vote until this document came.” (Participant 1, FG2)

On the other hand, considering that the Ministry sends the letter to all registered EU citizens, the overall proportion of those knowing about their right to vote could be expected to be higher than 75%. Furthermore, **ambiguity about registration procedure** was also evident. The participants stressed, that since the letter is in Estonian language with English translations in small letters below, Estonian grasps attention first and, hence, generates confusion. Also, respondents stated that they did not expect to get a letter on paper; rather an e-mail, which, in their view, was the usual way of communication with authorities in Estonia.

Out of 9 participants of both focus groups, 2 have registered to vote in Estonia and 1 was already present in the voters list due to previously voting in local elections (Participant 3, FG1; Participant 2, FG1; Participant 1, FG2). One respondent expressed confusion about the registration process,

“I registered to vote for European elections here...I think I registered to vote for the people running here...I am not sure, I sent this paper, but I haven't got any response yet...” (Participant 3, FG1)

⁶ These include both the EU citizens that were added to the list of voters based on their presence in the list during previous elections as well as the newly registered EU citizens.

⁷ White, A. (2019) „Over 1,600 EU citizens resident in Estonia vote in elections“ Available at: <https://news.err.ee/946012/over-1-600-eu-citizens-resident-in-estonia-vote-in-elections> 26.06.2019

On the other hand, some respondents provided positive feedback regarding the opportunity to exercise ones vote in Estonia.

“I do not have very wide comparable data from all European countries, but I lived in a few and I communicated with people... as far as I can tell...and not that I am in Estonia and I want to make a compliment, but this is by far one of the easiest places to vote. You can vote online, you have information in English and in Russian, you have debates in English. It is extremely easy to get a document. It takes no time; it comes to your post box. Forget about this in Croatia and other Balkan countries...In Germany, in Sweden, in Spain that would be impossible...in Italy probably. It would be very hard first to register, not knowing Italian [...]. In comparative plan it is one of the easies countries to exercise your vote.” (Participant 3, FG1)

Other barriers mentioned by survey respondents that hinder participation in EP elections in Estonia included personal preference and a habit to vote in their home country. Also, “personal apathy”, disinterest in politics, and the feeling of not making a difference were indicated by some survey respondents. In some instances, voting was suggested to be “fairly easy”, however, respondents did not have time nor energy to get informed about the available choices on Estonian political spectrum.

Furthermore, **language** was stressed as one of the crucial barriers that contributes to the feeling of not being able to make an informed choice.

“There is a lot of campaigning going on, but it is all in Estonian. When somehow, I managed to keep my interest on YouTube and I went to their website, I lost all interest, because it was all in Estonian still” (Participant 4, FG2)

“Regarding Estonian media...no, I do not follow them...the information is mostly from Facebook, because they appear constantly...more than Italian posts... just advertisements. I can understand they are politics related, but it is completely in Estonian, so I just skip.” (Participant 1, FG1)

“It will be a little bit more difficult [i.e. to vote], because I have been following Estonian politics more or less, but from the observer’s perspective. I was talking to people and I was observing what is happening. But now I will have to vote. So, I am in active position now. I think... the German political landscape, I have a general overview, but Estonian...I am much less pre-informed.” (Participant 1, FG2)

“Campaign is mainly in Estonian, so targets Estonian voters. There is “Estonishing evenings”⁸, organised debate with candidates in English. But I speak Estonian very

⁸ Estonishing Evenings is a new series of events in Tallinn – an English-speaking evening hosting different speakers expressing their viewpoints and experiences on hot topics and matters concerning both the locals and foreigners living in Estonia. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/EstonishingEvenings/> 08.07.2019. Events are organised in partnership with the online magazine, Estonian World. Available at: <https://estonianworld.com/about/> 08.07.2019

well, so for me it is possible to read and understand and to find information in Estonian, so I do that". (Participant 1, FG2)

Language issue is also reinforced by the fact that Estonian parties and candidates are mostly **targeting Estonian citizens**, rather than potential EU electorate as survey and focus groups respondents stressed.

On the other hand, when asked about whether they feel that Estonian parties are interested in them, one participant of FG2 stated:

"Probably more that I would expect. There is a debate in English...there is something. Probably if I compare to Croatia, probably there would be nothing like this. This kind of initiatives, like application in the post... I think there is interest..." (Participant 3, FG1)

As already noted earlier, while the participants of FG1 were generally aware of political landscape in Estonia, most of participants of FG2 had no knowledge about Estonian politics and candidates.

"I have only heard about EKRE⁹ incident. That's everything I heard about Estonian politics." (Participant 5, FG2)

The feeling of not having **the moral right to vote** for Estonian candidates was mentioned both in the survey responses as well as during focus group discussions.

"For me personally... I am in Estonia for very short time, so I feel I do not have moral right to decide about Estonian public matters. I do not feel that this almost half a year is enough to know about those politicians, background, political parties. I only have so superficial information and I do not think this is enough to vote, at least for me. (Participant 6, FG2)

Getting clear information about **the rights to vote either for home country or host country** candidates was one of important aspect that several participants in FG2 were missing. It has also been discussed, that regulations and registration for voting for home country candidates

⁹ EKRE stands for the Conservative People's Party of Estonia. It is a national conservative and right-wing party. After 2019 Parliamentary elections in Estonia (3.03.2019), EKRE became part of new governmental coalition together with the Centre Party and Isamaa. The chairman of the Riigikogu election-winning Reform Party was not granted the authority to form a government due to the lack of support of Riigikogu (the Parliament). Available at: <https://news.err.ee/930915/riigikogu-backs-centre-ekre-isamaa-coalition-ratas-to-remain-pm> 08.07.2019 and <https://news.err.ee/930421/kaja-kallas-not-granted-authority-to-form-government> 08.07.2019

from abroad, including deadlines, are often very confusing, which decreases the motivation to exercise one's vote. Furthermore, complications with registration procedures in home country in case one is enrolled in voters list in Estonia were mentioned in focus group discussions as well as by survey respondents. One participant shared her experience,

“When I first moved in 2016 and in 2017 were German parliament elections and it was my first election after turning 18, so my first election when I was allowed to vote and really wanted to vote, and I was able to vote in Germany through letter vote, but after that... I kind of gave up my living place in my home municipality. I am not registered there, but here, that means I cannot vote in municipal elections there anymore, but I can in Estonia. And then there was municipal elections here in Estonia. At first, I was not aware that I am allowed to vote and then I realised I would have been allowed to vote, but I realised late... [...] I still feel like I should have voted.” (Participant 1, FG2)

Barriers that hinder participation in EP elections **in home country** include administrative procedures (47%), insufficient information (33%) and the absence of opportunity to vote from abroad (28%). On participant complained,

“Recently, when I wanted to vote [i.e. for Spanish local elections], I couldn't, because I was supposed to ask for documentation to vote during 5 days after the announcement of the elections...so I was too late I could not even vote...I was really disappointed.” (Participant 4, FG2)

2.2.2 Attitude towards i-Voting

In Estonia, Internet voting (i-voting)¹⁰ was first introduced during the local elections in 2005, when about 2% of all participating voters cast their ballot via the Internet. Thus far, i-voting has subsequently been used ten times in Estonia, with the number of online voters increasing each time¹¹. During the 2019 EP elections i-voters formed 46,7% of all participating voters¹². Furthermore, during the 2019 EP elections, votes were received from 109 states, while

¹⁰ Official website of the Estonian National Electoral Commission. Available at: <https://www.valimised.ee/en/internet-voting/introduction-i-voting> 08.07.2019

¹¹ For a comprehensive overview of the Estonian experience in internet voting, see Vinkel (2015). For an analysis of the relevant law-making process, see Drechsler and Madise (2004). The research on the implementation of internet voting in Estonia from a risk-management perspective can be found in Kalvet (2009). Other research on the Estonian case includes Alvarez et al. (2009); Madise and Martens (2006); Solvak and Vassil (2016). For international evaluation reports visit <https://www.valimised.ee/en/internet-voting/documents-about-internet-voting> 26.06.2019

¹² From the age perspective, citizens aged 18-24 constituted 5,5% and citizens aged 25-34 made up 18,3% of all participating i-voters.

parliament elections in March 2019 witnessed voting from 143 states¹³. Hence, i-voting had proved to be a preferable channel for exercising ones vote for mobile Estonian citizens.

87% of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to use i-voting instead of other conventional voting methods.

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 would like to try...I had kind of class about it.” (Participant 3, FG1)

“I voted like this in local elections and I am almost tempted to vote physically in EP elections just to see how it is. But depends on time, I guess. But yeah...i-voting is great, you can do it abroad, you can do it at home.” (Participant 2, FG1)

“I think for me i-voting would be something cool. [...] Ok, you can vote also by mail, but it takes time...a lot of time. You need to go to post office. But with e-voting [...] it takes some minutes and that’s it. That would be really really cool. (Participant 5, FG1)

“I would like that. It would make me feel like I have more tools, I think.” (Participant 4, FG1)

Out of 87% of respondents that indicated preference for i-voting, the majority found **the speed and time-saving features** to be predominant reasons for choosing i-voting. Other reasons included having less impact of environment, potentially increasing voter turnout, and having an opportunity to vote from abroad.

Among the 13% who opted for conventional voting methods, lack of trust was the main reason for not choosing i-voting (67%). Also, the lack of knowledge about how i-voting works was indicated by 19% of all respondents and the lack of their own technology by 14%. Other mentioned reasons also included the fear that internet voting might be hacked and the fear for surveillance due to online identity. A few participants of the focus groups also voiced their concerns regarding **the security aspects** of i-voting. As one of the participants stated,

“I am really interested in it, but kind of afraid...afraid of hackers and manipulation...probably there is no reason here...but...still...I prefer old school, on paper.” (Participant 1, FG1)

Another one was concerned about **the secrecy** of this voting method:

“I am pretty sure that here I would not use i-voting, even though I could and even though I’ve been in Estonia for quite a while and I’ve got used to everything being online, I still do not like online voting for a number of reasons. And that’s probably very German position.”

¹³ For more statistics on i-voting in Estonia, visit <https://www.valimised.ee/en/archive/statistics-about-internet-voting-estonia> 26.06.2019

The manipulation aspect from the technical side, I am not so worried [...] but no one can check who is behind the computer in certain way...and the whole family can sit behind the computer and discuss it and vote. To me it is one of the basic principles of voting, it is completely anonymous, it happens in secret. You go into your booth and its secret, it's just you and the vote.” (Participant 1, FG2)¹⁴

Furthermore, other reasons indicated by survey respondents for choosing conventional methods of voting included the value of going to vote together with friends and the positive feeling of going to the ballot; the symbolic importance of voting in person as well as **voting in a more conscious way**. The latter has also been stressed by one respondent of the focus group,

“For me there is also something about going to the polling station that makes it special. You have to think about it and...it is a certain...may be sacrifice is the wrong word but it certain thing that you do. It takes a lot of time and I want the choice I make to be conscious, so maybe it just feels more conscious, that's why. (Participant 1, FG2)

2.2.3 EU Topics and Issues

When asked about the EU topics and issues that attract attention or interest focus group participants, following themes were mentioned: **environment, migration, education, and youth policy**. Also, the issue of **fake news, disinformation and information literacy** was discussed.

Participants explained the importance of this topic to them; however, expressed concern about the possible solution to the occurred challenges,

“I think it should be addressed in some way [...] but at the same time I am not really sure how anyone would legislate that at all, how anyone would deal with this. I feel like this is an important topic. But in a certain way I feel like it is more ...may be through education, information literacy, like how to define information [...] rather than through legislating.” (Participant 1, FG2)

“I do not believe you can legislate fake news out of existence, you can only counter it with real news. There is also worrying aspect to it, where you draw the line, is it misinformation or is it just information that someone considers to be misinformation.” (Participant 3, FG1)

Others stressed the significance of education and information literacy,

¹⁴ It has to be noted that the secrecy of i-voting is guaranteed by the following underlying principles – the right to revote unlimited number of times online and the supremacy of paper voting, i.e. the paper ballot shall count, and i-vote shall be cancelled.

“For me as information specialist, it is important that the EU works on the information literacy policy and also for me, since I am young person to keep Erasmus rolling on. It is important for that the EP still keeps youth policy as a... priority.” (Participant 5, FG2)

“I generally agree, I think that a centralised regulation is absurd. I think network would make more sense, decentralised level of discussing how to counter on local level. [...] I think the solution is not to regulate news but to invest in citizens to make the difference between an obvious manipulation and an opinion.” (Participant 2, 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 – nine in ten – were aware of the EP elections, most of them (71%) **did not demonstrate a proactive interest in Estonian political affairs** that includes searching for specific information about the Estonian candidates to the European Parliament. Instead, they searched for such information pertinent to their home countries (63% of all respondents did it¹⁵). Survey responses reflected that the information channels about Estonian candidates included webpages of Estonian political parties (60%) and Estonian news media (58%), Facebook (44%) and webpages of EU parliament and other EU institutions (33%).

Several focus group respondents outlined that they do not know, where to look for information. In their words,

“I do not know how to find information about the parties that are running ...I wish I could” (Participant 4, FG2)

“I do not really know where I can get access to Estonian news. I only know the media here which is in Estonian”. (Participant 2, FG2)

When it comes to following the Estonian media as a source of information, 1/3 of all survey participants have never followed Estonian media. Instead, political news from the home country is the focus – 47% are following daily and 3% weekly. This has also been confirmed by the discussion in focus groups.

Participants of FG1 mentioned that they are knowledgeable about the Estonian public broadcasting news portal (*ERR*¹⁶) as well as one of the main Estonian newspapers that has

¹⁵ Respondents found this information in the following channels: home country news media (80%) and webpages of political parties (70%), Facebook (48%), webpages of the European Parliament and other EU institutions (24%), applications dedicated to the European elections (e.g. voting advisors) (20%).

¹⁶ Available at: <https://news.err.ee> 09.07.2019

different linguistic versions (*Postimees*). Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and online news portals were mentioned as the most preferable channels by participants of FG2.

Different views were expressed regarding how **the media in Estonia** provided information for foreigners.

“I have to say...I came for different reasons, I did not come to introduction week at the university, I came for my voluntary service and I lived here for a year, so I have a different introduction, mainly by Estonians, I did not get into this international bubble. So, I was aware of ERR and stuff. And in the beginning, I was really trying to read... But I compared to German news that I usually follow or the international news that I usually follow, I did not find it very good...I gave up reading it as the main news, because I felt like I wasn't getting the main information, I was looking for... so about Estonia it is good, and it helps to stay informed about Estonia, but I felt like it didn't really inform on any world politics at all, which for me is...I want to have both aspects, what is happening globally and in Estonia. So, even though I was aware, I was not very satisfied.” (Participants 1, FG2)

On the other hand, positive reflections were expressed,

“I think Estonia is one of the most transparent countries in terms of its political life. Russian is spoken as a second language [...] Estonian news are closely targeted in English speaking channels, I personally do not know any other country that has such transparent political process. [...] Many people know Spanish and this is why Spain is transparent, Britain is transparent, France is transparent, but when it comes to smaller countries, I think Estonia is perhaps even more transparent than other Scandinavian countries. Because of the Russian interest...” (Participant 2, FG1)

Most FG participants **did not discuss** EP elections with other peers apart from those studying political science. As one participant mentioned,

“I should say no [i.e. did not discuss]...except during classes that we normally have during our courses...I should say this is not the hot topic among friends, but yes, I spoke to couple of them about European Parliament [...] but mostly with international rather than Estonians. (Participant 1, FG1)

The survey results also indicate that 1/5 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 Estonia (31%) and friends from other EU countries (58%). Also, about half of the respondents (54%) indicated that they would be interested in participating in events organised in Estonia to discuss the 2019 EP elections.

Conducted focus groups demonstrated that there is the general **lack of social integration**, which is naturally a basis for political involvement and interest in Estonian politics. All participants of both focus groups confirmed they mostly communicate within international circles. A few participants stressed the importance of sport and cultural activities through which social integration is likely to be improved. The following reflections were voiced:

“It is not easy to get out of this Erasmus bubble, because I tried to get out of this bubble and for me it was a little bit easier because I joined the sports club here, so I have a lot of contact to Estonian people as well, but without the sport club it wouldn’t have happened.” (Participant 2, FG2)

“I have the same experience being in a bubble with Erasmus students, but actually I came here to get to know Estonians and that’s sad, because I barely know any. I had this lucky coincidence that through the Latvian community here I got to know Estonian choir in which I am singing now. That is so amazing.” (Participant 5, FG2)

Moreover, due to longer period of studies, degree-seeking students have more potential to get socially integrated

“I think there is a difference between Erasmus and non-Erasmus, because, I have basically no contact with Erasmus students and a full-time student, we have a few Estonians in our course. So, I think the full-time student bubble is a little less bubble...which makes sense there is more time.” (Participants 1, FG2)

Participants were also not satisfied with introductory parts upon their arrival in Estonia.

“We also had the opportunity to get a mentor to show us around and I have to say I was a little bit disappointed when I found out that she is an international student. From Italy. I thought that I would get an Estonian. I think most of the tutors were also exchange students” (Participant 2, FG2).

Even though focus group participants stated that they have representatives in the student union of their university, **student unions** as an institution do not seem to play significant role in either social or political integration of mobile students. The language barrier seems to be one of the crucial aspects. Comparable results have been demonstrated by the stakeholder interviews (see Deliverable 4.1), indicating that even though the student unions are viewed as the closest supporting structure to the student, this does not seem to apply to international students. In the words of focus group participants,

“I think we are considered more like passers-by, we do not have enough time to get engaged, to get elected, to establish ourselves in those structures, we are more like extended Erasmus students.” (Participant 2, FG1)

“I am somewhat associated with the student union; I happen to be in one of the clubs. But it is again the language difficulty, so I think and the international students might be interested but don’t really have access because all the sessions are primarily in Estonian.” (Participant 1, FG2)

3 Conclusions

Deliverable 4.3 presented the implementation process and the findings of the mapping activities undertaken before the 2019 EP elections in Estonia. It described the conduct of the pre-election survey and two focus groups with the direct beneficiaries of the project. Also, the report at hand provided insights from the findings from the survey and the focus groups highlighting the important statements and arguments. A comparative analysis of the mapping activities undertaken in Estonia and Austria will be presented in Deliverable 2.2.

The summary of preliminary findings is structured along the three main topics elaborated under 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 highlighted concerns about the importance of EP elections in the eyes of the target group, their general political activism, and the level of awareness regarding their EU citizenship rights. Most of survey respondents were aware of the right to vote for a candidate from Estonia (75%) and 39% of all respondents were aware of their right to stand as a candidate in Estonia at the 2019 EP elections. Furthermore, as focus group participants stated the citizenship of the EU is mostly perceived through practical issues, such as travel and education abroad; the importance of political engagement was mentioned to a much lesser extent. Also, the significance of understanding the direct influence of the EU on everyday lives of its citizens was highlighted.

The second theme focused on the interest and attitudes of the target group towards EP elections, on the barriers of political participation and attitude to possibilities of i-voting; it also highlighted some of the EU topics that the target group found attractive. The majority of survey respondents that considered voting in the 2019 EP elections, if had decided to vote, would have voted for a home country candidate and 24% would have opted for an Estonian candidate. Focus group discussions demonstrated similar results, indicating the home country candidates are still preferable choice. Most significant barriers to participation in EP elections in Estonia indicated by survey and focus group respondents included registration procedure (selected by almost half of all survey respondents), insufficient information in order to make an informed choice and not knowing the Estonian language (the two latter are likely to be interconnected). Even though almost all the focus group participants received the application letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, they expressed uncertainty about certain aspects of the registration procedure. Further project activities will examine the issue and provide potential recommendations for improvement of registration for voting in Estonia. Likewise, barriers and puzzling experiences with registration procedure for voting for home country candidates and the lack of clear information about the right to vote either for home or host country candidates were stressed. Language was emphasised as one of the crucial barriers to political engagement, as it is necessary to receive information to make an informed electoral choice. When it comes to internet voting, overall, it is likely to appeal to the target group. However, the concerns regarding the secrecy, security, and consciousness of the choice expressed by the target group should not be neglected. Environment, migration, education, youth policy, fake news, and information literacy were among the EU topics that interested the focus group participants. Forthcoming mapping and interactions activities of the project will

further investigate the policies and issues of the EU that the target group finds attention-grabbing.

The last theme looked at the communication channels and ways that the target group is using to get information about EP elections in Estonia. While a large proportion did not demonstrate a proactive interest in searching for information about Estonian candidates, more than half of all survey respondents indicated they would be interested in participating in events about EP elections in Estonia. Apart from those studying political science and living for a few years in Estonia, the focus group participants were not informed about political landscape of Estonia. Social media channels (such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), as well as online news portals, were indicated as preferable channels to get information about Estonian events. Also, target group is not likely to discuss much EP elections among themselves, and if they do, their communication circle is mostly international. The challenges of social integration (getting out of the international bubble) and the relatively low importance of student unions in the political and social integration of the target group has also been stressed.

During forthcoming project activities, barriers and opportunities of engagement identified in Deliverables 4.2 and 4.3 will be further analysed 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 and informative message for all eligible EU voters aged 18-29

Annex 3. Confirmation letter from the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs

Annex 4. Invitation letter to take part in the survey and in the focus group

Annex 5. Data from the survey (pdf)

Annex 6. Participant list of FG in Tartu (restrictive access)

Annex 7. Participant list of FG in Tallinn (restrictive access)

Annex 8. Focus group questions (pdf)