



Project Documentation of the 4th Western European Model European
Parliament Luxembourg 2020

written for CertiLingua®

Student: Jonas Flöck

Tutor: Dr. Sebastiaan Okel



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¹ The intercultural focus sharpens the intercultural insights gained through the encounters which were part of the face-to-face project.

² The CertiLingua face-to-face project is conducted during the course of upper secondary education. It usually takes place abroad and comprises several days. For projects taking place at home, it must be shown how the aspect of a face-to-face intercultural encounter is duly represented. A cursory, single or very short encounter does not fulfil the criteria. Neither does a merely theoretical discussion of intercultural questions.

1. Starting point / my motivation

The project I participated in was the fourth session of the Western European Model European Parliament (WEMEP) in Luxembourg, held from January 18th to 24th, 2020.

I was nominated for it at the national session of the German MEP in Berlin one year earlier.

The MEP is obligatory at my school, the Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium Bonn, in ninth grade, so that is when my interest in the project developed because I am keen on politics and current political issues. Furthermore, I am inspired by the idea of a united Europe which is a key part of the project as it is a simulation of the European Parliament's daily work. This MEP session was my fourth one, but the first one on an international level, and as it is held in English, discussing political issues in a foreign language offers another challenge that I was willing to take.

Description of project idea and explanation of the intercultural focus of the face-to-face project

As mentioned earlier, the MEP is a simulation of the European Parliament. Young students are given the chance to slip into the role of a Member of the European Parliament and simulate the parliament's whole process of legislation discussing current political issues in topic-based committees which draft resolutions. Then these resolutions are being discussed and either accepted or denied in the General Assembly at the end of the project.

This WEMEP was organized by local teachers from Luxembourg who arranged the framework for the project. Especially the locations were nice, for example, the GA was held at the European Convention Centre Luxembourg (ECCL).

At the WEMEP, students between 15 and 19 from eleven different Western European countries meet. The delegations come from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. I was looking forward to meeting all those people, getting to know them, and making new friends.

I think that it is always nice to meet other young people who share my interest in politics as well as my fascination for Europe and to discuss current issues with them. This also allows me to improve my English skills and to train my abilities in discussing political issues and in convincing people of my opinion.

Consecutively, the MEP is great for young people who have already developed a big interest in Europe and politics in general. As many experts currently criticize the decreasing interest in a united Europe, the question I ask myself when going into this project is if the MEP can increase the fascination of Europe among young students because with Euroscepticism rising all across the continent this is more important than ever.

Personal expectations

The kickstart for my participation in this international MEP session was of course my nomination for an international MEP session at the German national session in Berlin in 2019. I was really happy when the teacher who coordinates the MEP at my school called and told me about the WEMEP in Luxembourg. Due to my big interest in this particular project and European politics in general, I did not hesitate long before accepting my nomination. Since then, my excitement was constantly rising.

Then in the autumn, the topics were revealed and I had to choose my committee between the following topics: Climate change, the new EU copyright directive, the question of a European Army, gender and sexual equality, or cryptocurrency.

As I followed the whole debate around the new copyright directive with big interest, but with concerns as well because of the consequences the directive can have for the whole digital world, I chose this topic and began my research on it.

After the topics and committees were chosen, in November 2019, the whole German delegation met in Weimar for one weekend to prepare for the upcoming WEMEP session together with two other German delegations for the MEPs in Vienna and Stockholm. In Weimar, we presented the research we did so far to inform the other German delegates about our topics. In each of the five committees were two German delegates, so in total, there were ten German delegates in Luxembourg, accompanied by one German Committee President. After the presentations, we simulated a small MEP session with committee meetings and a General Assembly at the end of the weekend, so that all of us got a refresh on the course of the project.

It was nice to meet the other German delegates, so I already know some of the people at the WEMEP and I now feel well prepared for January.

In January, it was then time for one week of debating politics, drafting resolutions, and enjoying the time with the others. I, personally, also wanted to find out if I can compete in a political discussion on an international level and if I can imagine doing a political job in the future.

Another point that makes the WEMEP so interesting is of course the intercultural context: It connects young students all over Europe and strengthens the feeling of a European unity between them. I think this is exactly what Europe and the EU need: Young people who are interested in and enthusiastic about Europe, its politics, and issues. This is the only way the union will hold together.

Linking the project to the school curriculum or a school subject

The MEP is part of the political lessons in ninth grade, and it is obligatory for every student. It replaces the politics lessons in the last quarter and gives them a practical touch. In this way, you can experience political work first-hand and gain unique insights.

After the school's MEP, you can join the MEP workgroup in tenth grade. There is an invitational list of people that gave positively remarkable performances at the school's MEP, but everyone can join. The workgroup's members become Committee Presidents (CP) at the next school's MEP and three or four chosen CPs from the school's last MEP form the Presidency. I, myself, was CP in 2019 and President in 2020 after the WEMEP took place.

But more important for my journey towards the WEMEP was that eight of the members are chosen to be delegates at the national German MEP in Berlin at the beginning of each year. I was among those eight chosen ones and became a member of the CULT committee on culture and education and discussed the possible formation of a European education area.

Here I got nominated for an international MEP as a reward for my good work and was then called up for 2020's WEMEP in Luxembourg.

As the MEP is part of the Erasmus+ programme supporting political youth projects across Europe, it is being subsidized by the EU itself. This gives the project even more possibilities and helps to realize a great session.



The German delegation at the WEMEP

2. Carrying out the project

Description of the project's realization

The fourth session of the Western European Model European Parliament started on Saturday, the 18th of January in the capital Luxembourg.

As soon as everybody had arrived, we started with some games in the committees in order to get to know each other which was a lot of fun. The others seemed really nice and I was extremely excited to spend the next days with them.

In the evening, everyone went home with their host families to spend the evening with them.

On Sunday, the WEMEP officially began with the Opening Ceremony. On this occasion, the delegations presented themselves with little speeches, Luxembourgish politicians which are active in European politics shared their thoughts on the project and on the participation of young people in politics in general and finally one of the WEMEP's three presidents officially opened the fourth WEMEP session.

Afterwards, the committee meetings commenced. From now on until Tuesday midday, we delegates had to create a resolution which offers solutions to the issues of our topic together with our colleagues in the committee. First, we started with discussing the problem and elaborate on what the issues really are. Normally, this takes not so much time as the status quo is quite evident. What takes more time is finding solutions to the problems as the opinions and ideas can vary a lot. Sometimes, you hear really good points you never thought about before, but sometimes you catch yourself just shaking your head when someone mentions something which does not fit your ideas. This resulted in heated discussions, and sometimes you discuss the same point for hours because it is so hard to agree on and you want the resolution to be as good as possible. But that is what makes the MEP so interesting and also where the big challenge hides: Uniting many different opinions and ideas into one great resolution.

While working on our resolution, we got support from an expert from the Luxembourgish ministry for Economy and Foreign Trade who was able to answer some of our questions and to give us further input regarding possible solutions.

After three days of hard work and passionate discussions, our resolution was finished by Tuesday midday and we were all satisfied with our work. I think if out of 17 committee members every single one is happy with the result, you did a good job.

Meanwhile, on Monday evening, we all took part in a fishbowl discussion that focused on the Schuman declaration celebrating its 70th birthday in 2020 and whether it has been realized or not. For that, two Luxembourgish politicians which work in European politics are invited. The great feature of a fishbowl discussion is that everyone can participate as the spectators can come up on the stage and ask the experts their questions. In that manner, a really interesting and varied discussion develops.

After we finished the Committee Meetings, we were then able to take our minds a bit off politics for a bit for the rest of Tuesday, as we visited the beautiful city of Luxembourg for a bit of sightseeing and at the end of the day, we had great fun during the cultural evening in which every delegation presented common stereotypes of their county funnily and entertainingly.

Wednesday was split into two halves. First, in the morning the delegations met to study the resolutions and to ask questions about unclear parts in order to understand them the best way possible.

In the afternoon, everyone met for the lobbying. The lobbying allows you to exchange thoughts over the different resolutions with the other delegates and you can also find out to what extent others could criticize your resolution in the General Assembly (GA) coming up on the following day. Additionally, every delegate now can put in an amendment, an application to change a point in another resolution.

Then, on Thursday, the big day arrived and it was time for the event we had all been waiting for: The General Assembly. Now, everything counts. Every committee has to defend its resolution against the criticism of the others to get it passed. In my opinion, this is the most exciting part, but it can also get devastating when your resolution does not pass.

Luckily, our resolution passed, so apparently, we must have done a good job when drafting it, but also during the debate.



In the evening, we celebrated our work with a farewell party in a popular nightclub in the city and the party was a lot of fun, but when we all had to leave it was quite sad. Although we just knew each other for a short time, it was hard to say goodbye.

Nevertheless, it was a great time and I am glad that I made that experience.

Linking the intercultural perspective to the course of the project

Nowadays, the EU is being criticized more than ever. The future of the union is in big danger. In many member states, populist and Eurosceptic movements rise and gain popularity among the population. The EU is criticized for being too expensive and bureaucratic. Therefore, the goal of these movements is to follow the example of Brexit and leave the EU.

The responsibility of working towards a peaceful EU rests on the shoulders of us young people as we are the future. For this challenge, Europe needs a politically interested youth to fight the upcoming tests. Sadly, many experts fear that the youth is not that much interested in Europe and politics in general anymore. Even though many young people are active in social protest movements like “Fridays for Future” or “Black Lives Matter”, the EU does not play a big role for them and many are even disappointed by certain EU policies, especially concerning its dealings with the refugees (e.g., in Lesbos, Greece) and the climate policy.

One of the MEP’s targets is to fight this negative perception. The idea behind this project is to give young people a chance to experience politics in a very concrete manner, in order to show what it is like being a Member of Parliament and to understand how the EU and its institutions work. In the WEMEP for example, over 100 young students from across Europe get a unique insight into the work of the European Parliament which shows that young people are willing to maintain Europe and its values.

Of course, it requires a certain political interest to go this far in the project as you need MEP experience to get on the international stage. But at my school, for example, it is obligatory to participate in an MEP session in ninth grade as it is part of the political lessons. In my opinion, this helps young people understand political processes as practical experiences are in most cases the easiest to remember. Obviously, not every participant will consider a political career afterwards, but I think it leads to broadening their horizons and brings them closer to politics as this is something most people just hear in the news and cannot really relate to.

Another interesting point concerning the future of Europe that came up during the MEP session was the role of the British decision to leave the EU, Brexit. The fact that a major economic power, the United Kingdom, left does not put the union in a great position and supports the point of view of Eurosceptics. But it gives hope that the British youth mostly voted in favour of staying in the EU.³ That goes hand in hand with the feedback I received from the British delegates at the WEMEP who are disappointed that their country left the EU.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/520954/brexit-votes-by-age/>

The topic was furthermore brought up through the fishbowl discussion concerning the 70th anniversary of the Schuman declaration which presented the concept of a united Europe. In this discussion, we all shared our thoughts on how the EU can fight the upcoming challenges and stay strong against external and internal attacks.

I think it is important that we remind ourselves of what the EU gave us. Without the EU there would not be peace in Europe since 1945. Trade would be much more difficult. We could not travel as freely as we can. We would not have such a diverse, multicultural continent. Our world would be totally different without the EU and we have to keep that in mind. We should be thankful for these gifts, but not take them as guaranteed and fight for them.

That is exactly what the MEP is good for. It reminds you of what the union stands for. This project can motivate young people to care more for Europe and its values, to activate their interest in European politics. This may, for example, lead to an increased turnout in European elections. Additionally, it is a unique experience to simulate a session of the European Parliament, and while doing that you make new friends. An intercultural project like this shows the great character of the EU and that is what I like so much about it.



All participants of the WEMEP

3. Reflection

Overall, the fourth WEMEP session in Luxemburg was a big success for everyone. It was very well organized and executed by the local teachers and as far as I know, all participants enjoyed it very much.

When I accepted the nomination for the WEMEP, I expected a great time with other politically interested young students who are as fascinated by Europe as I am and I was proven to be right. The insights in the parliament's daily work I got were unique and unforgettable. It was so much fun and I recommend it to everyone who is already interested in European politics, but also to the ones who do not care that much about the EU and its work, because it can raise your interest in these topics.

This MEP session, my fourth in total, reinforced my positive impressions I already had at former sessions. The discussions were on a very high level, we achieved a great result and the work with the other delegates was great as we got along very well. The harmony and the ambiance during the project were exceptional and made the WEMEP so special.

But I also learned a lot at the MEP. My ability to act in an intercultural context has increased a lot as well as my understanding of how the EU and its institutions (especially the parliament) work. Moreover, I got to establish and express my opinion about current political events and issues and discuss those with the other delegates, so I was able to train my debating skills and do so in a foreign language. That way I was able to improve my English, too. The language barrier made it a bit more difficult to reach compromises, but together we were able to overcome these obstacles.

Intercultural Experiences

Of course, the interculturality of the project played a big role as well. The MEP encourages cultural and social exchange as you get to know other students from all over Europe. We may be different culturally but what unites us is the passion for Europe and political debates.

Furthermore, the MEP also strengthens openness, being open towards other cultures, for new influences, and the ability to make compromises to get the best result. In my opinion, the MEP is a great example of a united modern European society that faces the upcoming challenges in cooperating and working together.

When meeting the others, I already had a good feeling and I already knew the German delegation, so I did not fear feeling alone or left out sometimes. That feeling turned out to be right. We had great harmony in the committee and I was glad to work in such a competent and positive environment. The discussions were often heated, but always respectful and constructive.

Obviously, not everything can be perfect and there are always things that could be better. For example, not each point mentioned can be included in the resolution and you are a bit disappointed when one of your points gets neglected by the others, but that is how politics work, everyone has to be on board, and in the end, together, we achieved a consensus everyone was happy with and we were proven right as our resolution passed in the General Assembly.

During the MEP I also made new friends from all over Europe and I still have contact with some of them once in a while. Especially about the current situation with the covid-19 pandemic we talk a lot as many of the others are in their last year of school like me and heading towards the final exams, so it is interesting to know how the others get along with the situation and what their plans for the future are.

Retrospective Reflection of the intercultural experiences and the course of the project

As eleven different nations are represented at the WEMEP, the interaction is not always that easy. Every nation has its peculiarities and you have to deal with them. However, it was astonishing to see how well everybody got along despite these differences. Naturally, the language quality varied between the different nations, some spoke better English than others, but I think that is normal for such an event and we found our ways to communicate.

What also was quite interesting to see, was the interaction between certain nations like for example between the delegates from the UK and from Ireland who always teased each other as their nations have a history full of conflicts, but it was never meant offensively.

Overall, the cultural differences did not affect the project's progress at all. On some points, of course, you have to adapt to someone's behaviour, see what the people are like, approach them and find compromises, but I see this more as an advantage as it extended my knowledge on the other nations and their characteristics and can be helpful for similar meetings in the future.

In addition to getting to know other cultures, one was able to observe how others reacted to the behaviour of us Germans and to become aware of cultural peculiarities. For example, we are always a little pedantic and too correct and always have to be right. In the committee meetings, when the others were already content with one point and wanted to move on, I felt compelled to perfect it, even though it was already very well thought out.

Besides, we think we are the funniest people on the planet, but we are really, really not. When we had the cultural evening, I made a joke during our performance and no one laughed as it was really bad and I wanted to explain it to make the others laugh as I thought they just did not understand it, but it became even less funny. However, I think everyone has good and bad sides, so it did not really matter.

More important was of course the work in terms of political content. I am very proud of what we achieved. That does not only include the result of our work, our resolution, but above all what we learned. In my opinion, at the MEP you can learn a lot that can be helpful in the future like skills in social interaction and political debates or general knowledge about European politics.

Regarding myself, the project also helped me decide what I want to do in the future. The great experiences I made at all of my five MEP sessions are the main reason why I want to study political science and accordingly, consider doing a job in or around politics. Not necessarily as a politician, but I can also imagine as a political advisor or a journalist. I am not so sure yet what I exactly want to do, but the MEP showed me that politics is the field in which I want to be professionally active.



4. Appendix

Sources and attachments

Statistic about the Brexit votes by age: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/520954/brexit-votes-by-age/>

My committee's resolution (attached to the mail)

Declaration of independent work

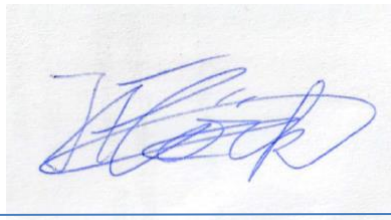
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- I hereby authorise the anonymous publication of my project documentation.
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Jonas Flöck, Bonn, March 25th, 2021