



## Manifest for shared values

Our shared identity project was created in 2018 because the collaborating schools from the participating countries (Romania, Turkey, Greece, Lithuania and the Netherlands) see shared values as a basis for further cooperation within Europe. However, the reality has proved more unruly in recent years: more and more countries seem to be seriously (re)considering their national identity rather than the importance of further cooperation. It seems that the next step in the European adventure is only possible if the core values of the European Union are fully endorsed by all partners. Or as we described it in the project application:

“During our two year project, we wish, that our pupils will be able to embed cultural differences in a specific ethnohistorical context. The main aim of our school-to-school exchange is to create openness and tolerance between the partners, as an example of good practice in Europe.” And furthermore: “A total of 115 pupils and 50 teachers of the countries mentioned above have the opportunity to share their traditions in an attempt to realize more social inclusion in their own schools, but especially to draw attention to the need in Europe for more tolerance instead of fear for unknown cultures.”

The challenge of internationalization is all the greater when the differences between national cultures as well as between educational practices raise

questions about the nature of European identity or the importance of European cooperation. An important objective of every school is to create an open learning climate, in which pupils from different social and cultural backgrounds can meet without prejudice. After all, what is good education without ideals?

From the start, our project was set up along two lines: on the one hand, we wanted to create an understanding of cultural differences by emphasizing historically developed core values, such as the proverbial Dutch commercial spirit or tolerance. On the other hand, we were curious to what extent those 'national' core values could be found in other cultures. Internationalization is mainly given meaning by the stay of pupils in host families and by becoming acquainted with a different school culture. Through this direct contact, students can experience first-hand what it feels like to be confronted with deviant lifestyles. 'Immersing' in the culture of another country may lead to a reassessment of one's own norms and values or at least to the realization that cultural differences are always rooted in a tradition. Every culture derives its norms (general rules of conduct) from its tradition and these are therefore not set in stone.

During Corona, our project took a new turn. We were aware of the fact that physical exchanges were particularly important for this project because it was precisely in meeting each other that the opportunity was given to experience a different culture up close. While we first hoped to be able to carry out the last physical exchanges (Crete and Brussels) at a later date, in the bridging phase during our virtual activities we focused on personal values that made it possible for each participant to understand the consequences of temporary school closures and to keep lockdowns somewhat bearable.

In all the physical exchanges, our students learned a lot from the countries visited: about culinary traditions, the political genesis of the participating countries, artistic achievements, etc. Nevertheless, for our project the home grown values turned out to be less important than personal core values that our students apparently connected in difficult times. The result of our research during the virtual exchange was clear. For example, six core values were ranked in international groups, which turned out to be most important for our students from

Romania, Turkey, Greece, Lithuania and the Netherlands in times of social isolation. The ranking was as follows: family and friendship were considered the most important (both received one third of the votes). This is followed by freedom (15%), hope (7%), courage (7%) and faith (4%).

Our virtual activities also included an online survey about the importance of well-being related to personal values; during our virtual exchange, held on three separate days, students and teachers of our schools discussed the urgency of shared values in times of social isolation. Our survey was wide-spread: finally more than 300 students from the participating schools took part in this questionnaire about corona and well-being. More than a quarter of the respondents felt mentally bad due to the consequences of the pandemic. Almost half of the respondents felt more lonely than before. It was a big surprise that more than two thirds of the respondents do not feel seen by their government. In the online survey the meaning of friendship was rated even higher than during the virtual meetings (above 40%). Online lessons during corona received a good rating: the majority of students gave three stars for the alternative lessons during lockdowns.

After a year of uncertainty about the possibility of realizing physical exchanges, luckily we were allowed to continue the conversation about the importance of shared values in Crete at the start of the new school year 2021-2022. In international working groups, the core values mentioned above were directly translated into wishes for Europe. What wishes do young people have with regard to Europe? It seemed, that their wishes did not only reflect their personal values, but in fact they were also an extrapolation of the core values needed to enhance the collaboration between all European partners.

### **Family and friends**

Never forget where you come from but show respect for others

### **Faith**

Have faith in yourself and in others

**Hope**

Europe: a place where gender, colour or sexual orientation simply do not matter anymore

**Courage**

Do not fear to resist oppression

**Freedom**

We support freedom of speech, gesture, press and expression

In our application we wrote: “The results and the impact, envisaged with this project, is social inclusion within our schools for different cultural backgrounds (for instance cultural minorities in all European countries or refugees in Turkey and Greece); hereby creating more awareness about the embedding of particular cultural expressions in diverse traditions. Most of all, we want to emphasize, that the fear for each other's cultures is a threat for shared democratic values. We firmly believe, that we must uphold the idea of a shared identity in the EU, to guarantee a living environment, in which the stability of the Union will not solely depend on political agreements, but on mutual understanding of manifold participants.”

We have become aware that in a project about shared values, the discussion about those values is at least as important as those values themselves. By thinking through the values that connect us, we can build bridges between our cultures and consolidate the values that really matter in daily life. Above wishes are meant as wishes for the future of Europe, made by young students. It seems, we should take their wishes seriously.

Turkey: how to weave a carpet (traditional artcraft)



Turkey: one of the Dutch students trying to play a traditional guitar





Romanian students ready to dance



**First day in Lithuania**



**Performing traditional dances**







Celebrating Halloween in Romania



**Preparing a Romanian dish together**



**Presidential palace in Bucharest**





Painting in 'Dutch' style



Dutch paintings in real









