

**The Assessment of Knowledge
about Democracy
(Ocena wiedzy na temat
demokracji)**

This Assessment was created during the project DEMOcrisis: Fostering Active Citizenship in Times of Crisis co-funded with the Erasmus Plus grant and organized by Stowarzyszenie Poczucia (Warsaw, Poland) in Serock in November, 2019.

This publication was provided by:

Paweł Tempczyk – Vice President of Stowarzyszenie Poczucia (Association Senses – Warsaw, Poland)

Fanpage of the TC: www.facebook.com/Democrisistrainingcourse

Webpage of the NGO: www.poczucia.pl



**Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union**



Summary in Polish (Streszczenie w języku polskim)

O projekcie

Międzynarodowy projekt DEMOCrisis został zorganizowany przez Stowarzyszenie Poczucia oraz koordynowany przez wiceprezesa Pawła Tempczyka dzięki grantowi z programu Erasmus Plus. Podczas treningu DEMOCrisis w Serocku 21 uczestników z siedmiu krajów (Polski, Włoch, Hiszpanii, Grecji, Francji, Łotwy i Cypru) pracowało nad tematyką kryzysu wartości demokratycznych w Europie, wzrostu populizmu oraz poziomu mowy nienawiści w przestrzeni publicznej. Zajęcia dotyczyły tematu z różnych stron - poznawczej (dyskusja o mowie nienawiści oraz zamordowaniu Prezydenta Adamowicza), zmiany postaw (procesy grupowe na temat roli fake news w demokracji oraz równości głosów w głosowaniu demokratycznym), behawioralnej (jak przeciwdziałać mowie nienawiści), a także w interakcji z ekspertami (wizyta i minitrening w Amnesty International Polska w Warszawie). Z drugiej zaś strony uczestnicy mieli okazję poznać inne kraje podczas Wieczorów Międzykulturowych, okolice Zalewu Zegrzyńskiego podczas spaceru, a nawet uczestniczyć w sesji jogi śmiechu poprowadzonej przez Pawła.

Ocena wiedzy

W Ocenie wzięło udział prawie 50 osób (N=49), z czego 31% było uczestnikami projektu. 41% respondentów pochodziło z Hiszpanii, 16% z Polski, 10% z Włoch, a 12% nie podało swojego miejsca pochodzenia. Wśród respondentów była obserwowana lekka nadreprezentacja kobiet (55%) oraz osób o lewicowych poglądach politycznych – zdecydowanych (25%) oraz umiarkowanych (31%).

Poziom wiedzy nie okazał się wysoki. W przypadku pytania o definicję demokracji 35% badanych pomyliło demokrację z republiką, natomiast w przypadku pytania o największą demokrację na świecie tylko 37% poprawnie wskazało Indie, natomiast błędnych odpowiedzi było 35% (Stany Zjednoczone) oraz 27% (Francja). Aż 61% nieprawidłowo odpowiedziało, że największa reprezentacja kobiet w parlamencie jest w Szwecji (tylko 20% poprawnie wskazało Rwandę). Na pytanie o państwo z najwyższą frekwencją w ostatnich wyborach europejskich mniej niż połowa (47%) poprawnie wskazała Belgię. Natomiast najczęstszą odpowiedzią na pytanie, ile razy w ostatnich czterech wyborach europejskich frekwencja przekroczyła 50%, była błędna odpowiedź – dwa razy (33%), potem poprawna – raz (27%). W pytaniach otwartych za największe zagrożenie dla demokracji respondenci uznali ekstremizm (prawicowy, ale też lewicowy), niewiedzę i ignorancję obywateli oraz niereprezentowanie interesów obywateli przez polityków. W pytaniu o obecną sytuację polityczną w Polsce połowa badanych nie posiadała żadnej wiedzy na ten temat, natomiast pozostali wskazywali na rząd prawicowy, nacjonalizm oraz zbyt silną rolę Kościoła w polityce. Pojawiały się też głosy, że Polska jest niezależnym krajem i kraje Zachodniej Europy nie powinny na nią wpływać.

About the TC

DEMOcrisis was a training course co-founded by the Erasmus Plus and that was held in Serock at the beginning of November 2019. This TC was coordinated by Paweł Tempczyk from Stowarzyszenie Poczucia and organised by the international team – Paweł from Poland, Rosanna Bellomo from Italy (Union Pro Europe) and Noa Philippon from Spain (Xuventude Verde Polo Cambio) – a group of friends that met each other in 2015 during the project „The Threshold” in Ireland and since then are working actively in the E+ field.

The background

In recent years we are observing the crisis of democratic values and switch to authoritarian systems across European countries. The rise of extremism and populism brings sense of insecurity and undermines the confidence we have in our leaders. Actions like Brexit show that politicians have no clear idea about the direction they would like to choose for the European Union. Anti-democratic leaders offer cheap and easy solutions that in the longer perspective turn out to be ineffective. So that's why we decided to lead this training course in 2019 – the year of European and many national (e.g. Polish) elections and planned Brexit.

The aim

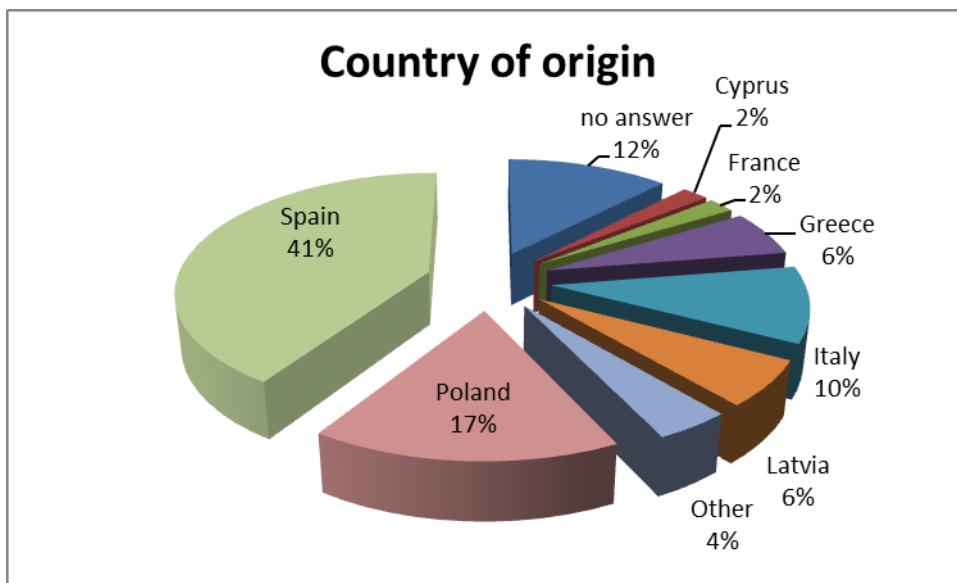
Although in the short run democratic methods may seem unprofitable in the long run they are more productive. We wanted to strengthen the faith in democracy and present practical tools how to deal with hate speech. We used different methodologies like the group process, the De Bono six thinking hats, Way of Council, and – to relax and look on the things from a different perspective – a laughter yoga session led by Paweł. We visited [Amnesty International](#) – the worldwide NGO working in the field of civil rights where we will have a presentation and discussion about the action [Free Courts](#) and attempts to influence to juridical system in Poland by politicians.

The Assessment of Knowledge about Democracy

The description of the group

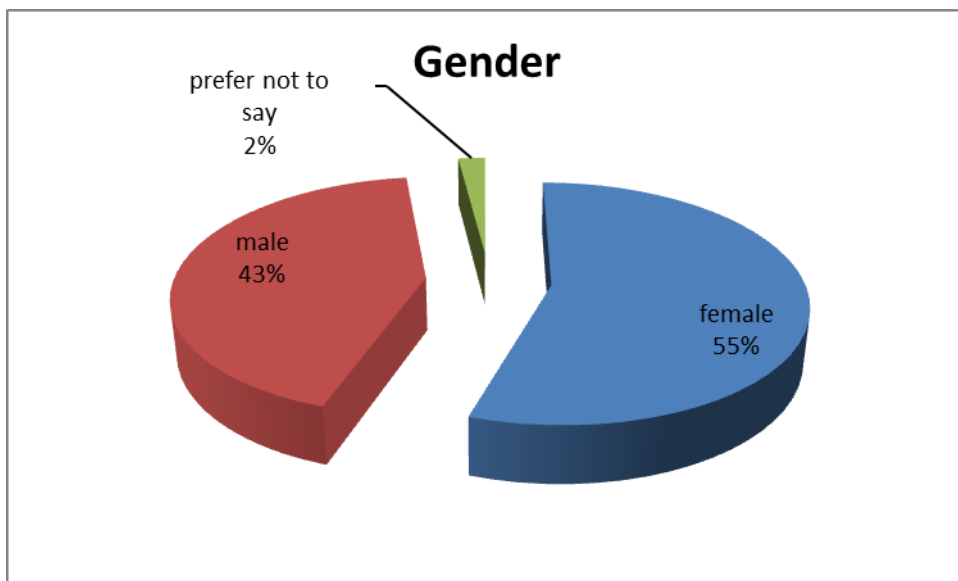
The Assessment represents the answers of almost fifty individuals (N=49) where 31% were the participants of the TC.

Respondents were mostly from Spain (41%), Poland (17%) and Italy (10%), 12% didn't answer this question. Other countries were represented by less than 10%.



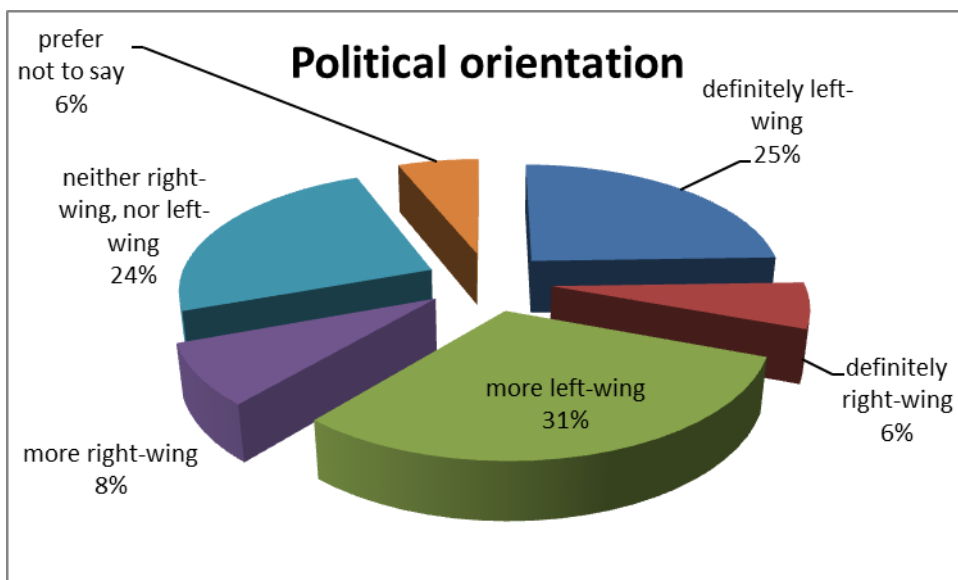
Graph 1. Country of origin of the respondents

Women were slightly overrepresented (55%), 2% of the respondents decided not indicate the gender.



Graph 2. Gender of the respondents

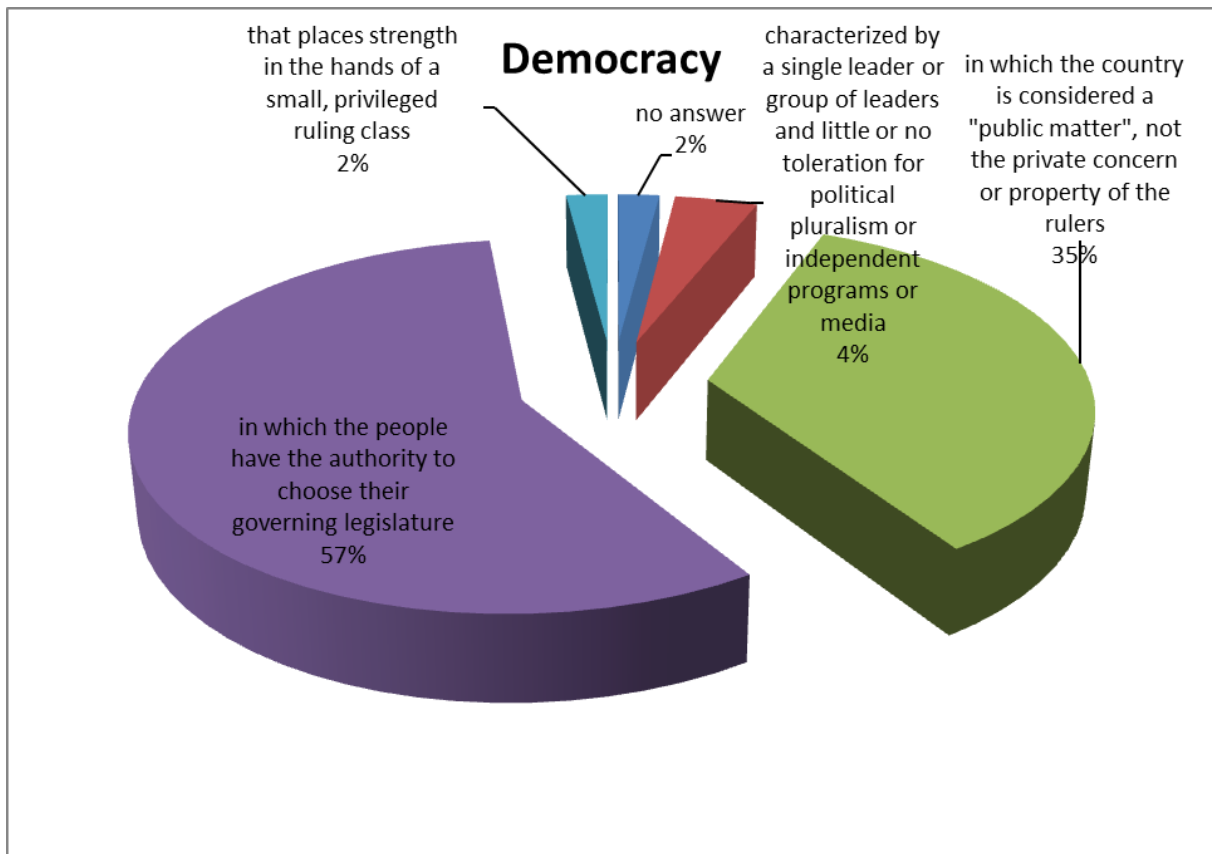
The question about the political orientation was built on a five point Likert scale. As observed below the left-wing orientation was more common among respondents, taking into consideration the definitely left-wing orientation (25%) and more left-wing orientation (31%). 6% preferred not to share their political guidance.



Graph 3. Political orientation of the respondents

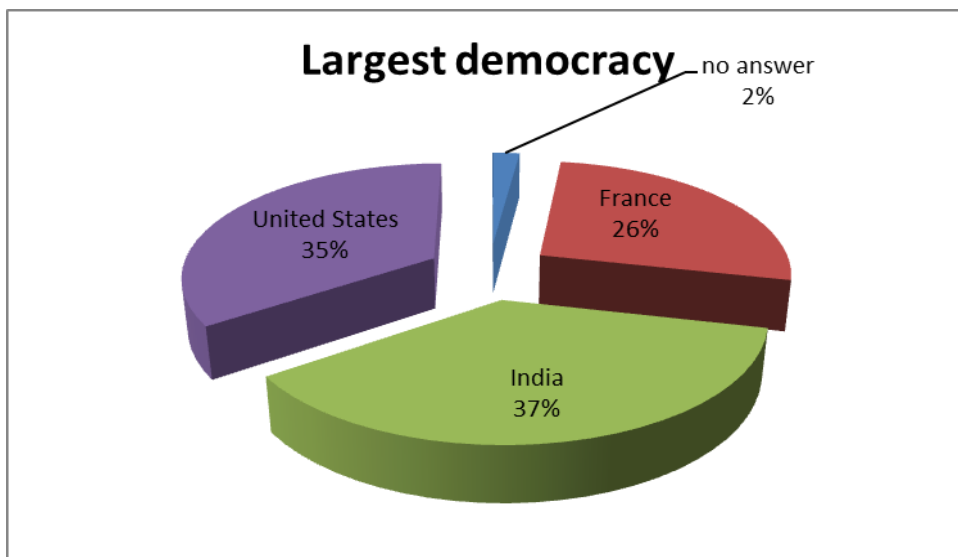
The level of knowledge

Selecting the correct definition of democracy as a political system in which civilians can select their government turned out to be easy for majority of respondents (57%). Some of them confused democracy with republicanism and state with a “public matter” –“res publica” (35%).



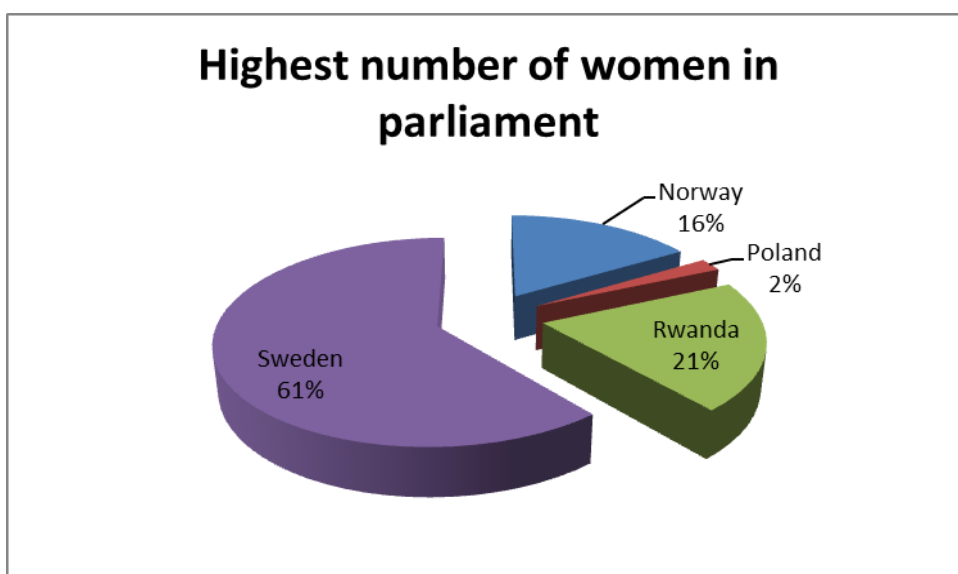
Graph 4. The definition of democracy as the government

More problems respondents had with the question about the largest democracy all over the world. There were some answers respondents had no hesitations were incorrect (Brazil and Russia – 0%), but the difference between India (37%) and the USA (35%), was very small. These two countries make top two among democratic countries taking into consideration their number of inhabitants but the real difference is huge – more than 1.3 billion of people in India and 325 million in the USA. 26% votes for France is quite disturbing since France isn't even included in the top seven ranking (<https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2017/10/20/the-worlds-7-largest-democracies-where-do-america-and-india-fit/>).



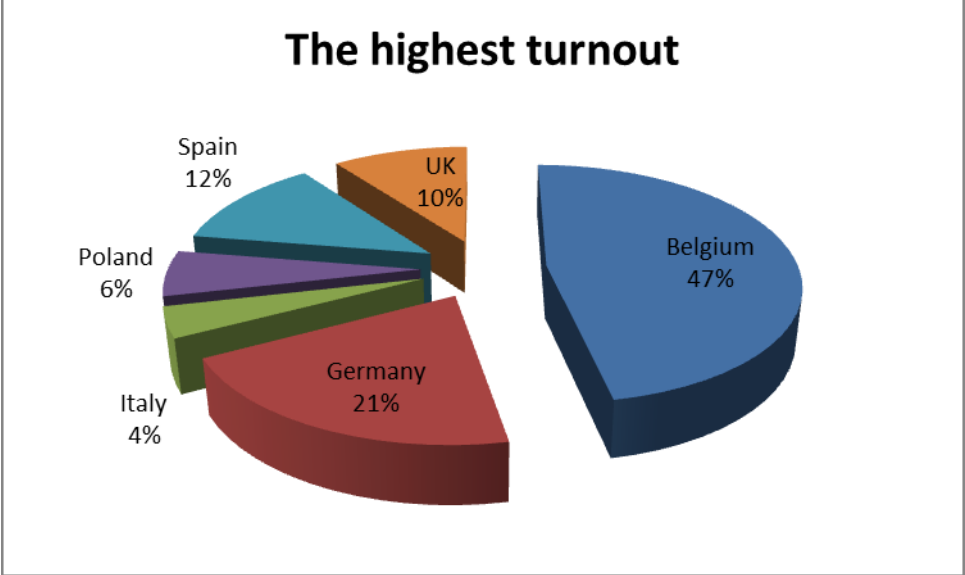
Graph 5. The biggest democracy in the world

The question about the highest representation of women in parliament shows that respondents gave answers more due to the clichés they have than basing on their real knowledge. The definitely most common answer was Sweden (61%) that is the 7th country all over the world with its 46% representation of women. But it might have been selected as a Scandinavian country (Norway was chosen as well). The correct answer selected only by 20% of respondents is Rwanda (61% of women in parliament). It is worth mentioning that the first 6 countries with the highest representation of women are not in Europe (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/chart-of-the-day-these-countries-have-the-most-women-in-parliament/>).



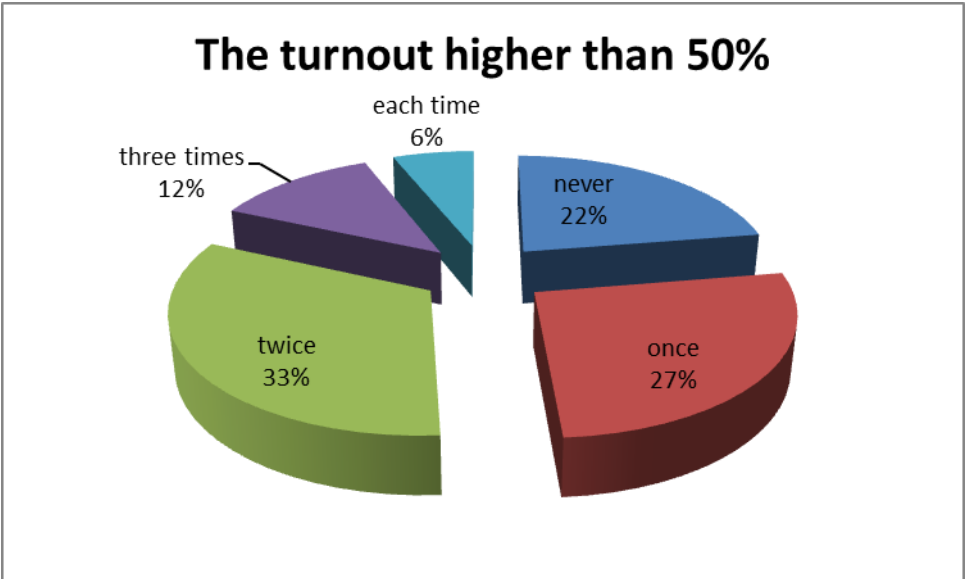
Graph 6. The biggest representation of women in parliament

The question about the highest turnout in the last European elections (May, 2019) caused less problems since respondents were more connected with the topic. Almost half of the respondents indicated Belgium (47%) which is a correct answer. The wrong answers were Germany (20%), Spain (12%) and the UK (10%).



Graph7. The highest turnout in the European elections in May, 2019

The next question was checking the knowledge how many times the turnout in the four latest European elections (in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019) exceeded 50%. Respondents optimistically indicated twice (33%) – most probably as it is a half of four so the number of elections we were asking about – but the correct answer was once – this year (27%).



Graph 8. Number of times of the turnout in European elections exceeding 50%

The open questions

In the last section of the Assessment respondents were asked what is the biggest threat to democracy in Europe nowadays and what they know about the political situation in Poland. All of the answers are gathered in the Appendix 1 and 2.

As a biggest threat respondents usually indicated populism and extremism – mostly right-wing but left-wing as well. A few mentioned the raising nationalism and some Eastern Europe countries. Some of respondents focused on lack of education, knowledge and understanding how democracy works among European citizens which can lead to ignorance and feelings like anger among people. Bi partianism can be also a result of it, associated with hate speech towards political opponents, lack of dialogue, increased aggression etc. The crisis of faith in democratic values can be also dangerous since people can stop valuing democracy and decide on other political systems. It was also raised that immigration can be a threat to European democracy.

Around half of the respondents know nothing or almost nothing about the contemporary political situation in Poland. Some mentioned the very general issues like the authoritarian far-right government and the huge role of the Catholic church in Poland, some mentioned very specific issues like the death of President Lech Kaczyński in 2010 and the rise of his brother and the juridical reviews open against Poland. There were also two different voices, one saying that Poland is a democratic country and the other mentioning that the West Europe should not impose their political ideas to East Europe.

In the Evaluation led on participants after the project the answers were more deepened and the participation in the DEMOCrisis TC brought more reflection upon the political situation in Poland. Some participants mention that the government uses propaganda that is sometimes even shown on TV. Parties use hate-speech and discriminate vulnerable groups. The others see the crisis in democracy in Poland in populism that is used by the government. There is also a link between the government and the vulnerable groups in Poland. But on the other hand the percentage of citizens voting in the last elections raised due to the contemporary political situation as one of the respondents stated.

Appendix 1. The answers to the Q10 (all)

Corruption

Democracy cannot defend itself from extremist pretending to be democrats.

Economic and social inequalities, applying the democratic principle across different social groups, religions.

Extremists groups

Fascism

Firstly the lack of awareness that we are all human. Secondly the immigration and the fear to be invaded from other cultures.

Foreign interference

France, starting to behave like a new leader

Growing strength of nationalism and will to separate from other countries, lack of solidarity in international matters like migration crisis - this can be a turning point for some countries, especially those, where democracy is relatively new and unstable, like in former Eastern Block countries or Spain.

Hungary, Poland, Turkey,

I would say lack of education and knowledge. In democracy, we have the right to choose our representatives. To do so, we need to make an educated choice but when education is lacking, then the results are representative of our own carelessness, apathy and lack of knowledge.

Idiots

Ignorance

Immigration and Cultural Marxism

In my opinion one of the biggest threats to the democracy is ignorance. If ignorance begins to dominate then democracy turns into ochlocracy, and for me is one of the worst things that could happen. In fact ignorance someday will lead to supremacy, exploitation, violence.

Is miss feeling of loyalty of the people to the European Union

IT technologies, artificial intelligence

Lack of real dialogue

Nationalism

People coming from countries with dictatorship or without much freedom - suddenly get lot of freedom and can't handle this -

People will be fed up with democracy

Political group in the government creating laws to reduce participation of citizens, punish the expression in freedom, be against diversity

Political situation in the world

populism

Populism

Populism, both right and left wing

Poverty.

Sovranism

Terrorism

That the ones in charge don't really care about doing what is right but care only about doing what's easier, what's more convenient

The assimilation of the immigration and the challenge of the globalization and the consequences that will have in Europe

The extreme right

The extreme right people

The hate for the other political side

The ignorance, especially concerning the youth, and the bipartisanship powered by people's anger.

The lack of critical approach to political issues

The main problem is that democracy doesn't really represent the people. People vote for representatives but don't get to make actual decisions. Almost no one feels represented by the ruling class.

The power of the extremist right-wing parties, the xenophobia, the police brutality and the loss of workers' rights.

The rise of extreme right wing parties

The turnout because it is like you don't care about the future of your country

To regulate the price of rental

Young people don't have enough knowledge about politics, so it is hard to make important decisions

Appendix 2. The answers to the Q10 (all)

A lot but not enough

Afraid of lack of dialogue

After the death of its president and the rise of his brother, the country has a big lack of leadership

Almost nothing

Almost nothing. (not proud of this)

authoritarian government with a huge role of the Catholic church

Concerning the latest events, the judiciary faces problems due to the political interference of the authorities and unfair disciplinary proceedings, leading to general political upheaval.

Far-right wing party in office and lack of division of powers between executive and judicial.

Honestly I don't know a lot about political situation in Poland, except that far right is ruling. I'm into civil rights and I know it's a really hard time.

I am interested in political life in Poland, I think I know a lot of things

I don't know

I know about the judicial reviews open against Poland

I think that right-wing is really strong now in Poland, but I need to analyze more information before stating something about the political situation in this country.

I'm quite familiar with it, as Polish citizen and resident - currently we have right-wing government with really high support beneath voters. For the last 4 years there has been a lot of conflicts about court system the government is changing and social matters, like access to abortion or their recent support for the idea of restricting sex ed in schools. The opposition is constantly reforming, right now with 2 main branches in Polish Parliament (KO and Lewica) and couple smaller political powers (like PSL or Konfederacja).

It's complicated

just general stuff

No idea. But too much Nazis.

Not much

Not much! I'd be glad to know more.

Nothing

Nothing, but I'd like to learn

Nothing, honestly.

Nothing. I don't know a lot about politics in general, but that's why I'm taking this training course

Poland has generally very conservative parties ruling, and they reject to take part in their obligations regarding refugees with the EU

Poland is ruled by a nationalist right wing party since 2015 that has won two consecutive legislative presidential elections. On one hand, the government is carrying out a very popular economic policy, distributing wealth more evenly among the population and increasing salaries and pensions. On the other hand, as a nationalist party is focusing on national ideals and traditions. Polarizing the society. In international politics it is closer to USA and more equidistant to the EU

Poland just had their elections, it is a democratic country

Recently the Polish parliamentary election happened. While travelling through Poland during the time of the elections, I saw a lot of political posters hung up everywhere, agitating people to vote for particular political parties and candidates.

Stable but government is giving money away to people just like in western countries like France, Belgium etc. "social security" and people becoming too lazy to work. They should lower taxes not give money... Not give fish_ give fishing rod!

The main news

The Poles elected once again the candidate from Law and Justice. The EU institutions weren't happy about it. West Europe should not impose their political ideas to East Europe.

The ultraconservatives have won the elections

There are some nationalism which is growing more and more like everywhere in Europe.