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ROLE OF MEDIA IN SUPPORTING ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Anna Slatinská*

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the role of new media in supporting active European citizenship which is so discussed and debated nowadays. Our target group involves young people as they are the most active participants in online environments which can have positive but also negative effects. One of the negative impacts of communication tools is represented by misuse of media concerning the spread of ethnic prejudices and incitement to racism and xenophobia. Therefore, we also deal with the role of cultural ethics of media as well as with rights that ethnic groups can benefit from against various acts and forms of discrimination in new media environment, as they are themselves European citizens, thus enjoying the rights that European Union offers them.

Keywords: Internet media, European citizenship, participation, communication tools

Introduction

We live in an era of new information technologies, new media and new social constructs that influence our professional as well as private life. New ways of communication have come into existence. These ways are shared and popular especially, though not exclusively, among the representatives of young generation starting from the very early age. It is not only about sending of texts or e-mailing to friends or family anymore. The new ways of communication comprise e.g. blogs and bloggers and social networks which play an important role in shaping public opinion about various issues ranging from the serious or sensitive ones to those most common.

Still, more and more young people are spending their time in online environments. People, generally speaking, can do shopping or organize online conferences through digital media. Day by day we are confronted with new sources of facts, data and information that can rapidly change our opinions, contribute to creation of myths or stereotypes, strengthen our views, and

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influence our thinking in a negative or a positive way. We can communicate in such a broad context as it was possible never before. Furthermore, we can choose various forms of online communication, whether it is through social networks or writing e-mails. Thus, the tolerance and respect are also needed in every kind of communication no matter if it is in a written or oral form or if it is happening *vis-a-vis* or through Internet chats.

In our paper we are paying attention to the young generation who is the most active when concerning digital media. But are they also active citizens? The crucial question is: Which areas of media space are they the most active in? How do they express themselves? Do they understand the point of active citizenship and the happening around the issue of European citizenship? What knowledge do they have about it? Do media influence their points of view? Can media be an effective stimulus for their active citizenship? Can it help to support and promote the tolerance, cultural diversity and European citizenship as a new phenomenon of present days? Is the development and strengthening of cultural ethics necessary in shaping young peoples' attitudes towards their European citizenship?

Our dominant goal is to focus mainly on education because we assume that it plays crucial role in formation of young people and that is why we also try to answer the following questions: Can new methods used in foreign language teaching help to form European citizenship? Can it help the students to be more active citizens? If so, what kinds of methods can be used precisely in education that could have such an effect? Can development of learners' intercultural competence in foreign language teaching initiated by the teacher help foster the creation and understanding of European citizenship among young people and can it make the cultural distance between different member states smaller and more useful in general in the lesson, through performing different activities? These are just a few questions that we might be asking indirectly in our paper. However, we will try to have a look and respond to some of them directly.

We suppose that young people often lack advice and necessary information about how to become more active citizens. That is why media should play an educative role, especially nowadays, in order to install in young people the sense of belonging to Europe which takes on a kind of supranational or metaphysical role not only for them but for the majority of people too. Therefore we claim that media can help to support young European citizens in being more active thus creating the basis for active European citizenship on the condition that they will be used effectively in foreign language teaching which is also one

of the core of our contribution we will be dealing with.

We presume that if the foreign language teachers are more involved in using media in the lesson as one of the tools for strengthening and building e.g. students' intercultural competence, the sense of belonging to one supranational state, namely the European Union, might be fostered to produce students' readiness to active participation in local and global issues. Thus, we maintain that the given method should be used predominantly but not exclusively in foreign language teaching where students meet most often with the concept of cultural diversity indirectly or directly through various kinds of study material.

In our contribution we also offer a few examples of effective educative exercises using media that can have similar above mentioned effect of generating active European citizens of young people, not excluding the fostering of their intercultural competence. We also claim that young people's motivation in studying foreign languages, which knowledge is extremely indispensable nowadays, can increase significantly through the practice of intercultural communication not only in the language classes. Therefore, in our paper we give examples of a few activities or exercises that could be used effectively in the foreign language classes (but not only) while they do not practice only listening, writing, speaking or reading skills of young learners but they also practice their cultural and also interpersonal skills namely: intercultural competence, empathy, tolerance, as well as fostering their knowledge about European Union and, at the same time being a model for their active participation in different spheres of life, political, not excluding.

When talking about media we should not forget their owners. It should be also up to them to lead such a policy that would support active citizenship of young people in the European context. This is the reason why we decided to devote a few lines in our paper to this issue too. We will also deal with media content, media practices and importance of media education in the following paragraphs. One of the most important points is also to accept the difference in opinions and to try to help the young people in online environments in such a way that they will be able to look critically at various information that are flooding our society through the internet or other sources. Moreover, the role of the teacher appears to be inevitable in this respect as he/she should have the leading role in showing his/her students the difference between various information gained through different forms of new media.

Equally, media can be an effective tool in education process as it was already mentioned. It can be used in different subjects ranging from primary

schools, secondary schools to universities, making use of such terms as: culture, cultural dialogue, cultural diversity, interculturalism, multiculturalism etc. These enumerated nouns play a crucial role in the newly established phenomenon of European citizenship which still has to be the subject of research in the future. Furthermore, it needs to be more defined or explained as well as cultivated and preserved in the public in order to be real and appropriately comprehended. Therefore, in our paper we will have a closer look at the following terms: active citizenship, European citizenship, active European citizenship (as the fusion of both), as well as actualizing and dutiful citizens, media, culture, cultural diversity, foreign language teaching and creation of European citizenship through the means of intercultural communication in context of media and cultural ethics of media. In the final part of our paper we will try to summarize the role of media in supporting active citizenship of young people and also to offer some tips for practice as well as for further research into this issue that could be of benefit e.g. in future education of young people not only for teachers and educators.

Young people as active European citizens

As it was mentioned before, the 21st Century triggered by the era of new processes and changes that happened so suddenly and at once has been facing the emergence of new information and communication technologies as well as new social constructs. It is inevitable to understand them for our future existence within culturally diverse Europe. One of such new social constructs is, according to Požarlik (Požarlik, 2011), European citizenship which is following Magonette (Magonette, 2007) still a frail one. The author further argues that the concept of European citizenship have started appearing in political, journalistic and other opinion talks. Many people, however, do not realize that they are acting like European citizens. According to Rouet (Rouet, 2011) *“people enjoy rights and freedoms, such as free movement of persons as well as of capital and goods (and services) connected with the opportunity to travel which was not so easily accomplished in the previous decades”*. Despite this fact for many people it still remains fragile and not well understood. The point is that European citizenship as a sense of belonging to Europe is strongly cultural concept which should be fostered and supported by all possible means, e.g. by the media that are subject of our paper, in order to become more easily understood by young generation, which we are focused on in this contribution.

We stress that young people should be educated in such a way that they could become active European citizens.

According to Official Journal of the EU (2011) “*European integration process needs to be brought closer to young people, and accordingly calls on the Member States and regions to consider – in order to familiarise pupils with the EU institutions – incorporating the EU more fully into all education curricula, focusing on the historical background, purpose and workings of the EU, and encourages them to exchange best practice in this area at EU level; believes that fully involving schools is of essential importance to EU communication policy, in order to reach out to and engage young people*”.

Young generation prefers digital media as a means of their communication and expression. The area of digital media should serve young people not only as a place for entertainment or fun but also for raising their awareness concerning the European Union and their active participation in European topics through realizing their citizenship not only on a national level towards own state but also on a supranational level towards the European Union. According to Rouet “*if citizenship is linked to the social liaisons, it is also obviously linked to the traditions, cultures, including political cultures. More importantly, it can be defined as a set of practices and institutions of citizenship. It should therefore be sought in civic practice; it cannot be legitimised exclusively by voluntary reporting among citizens*” (Rouet, 2011, p. 16). That is why the citizenship should be supported by other means, e.g. by above-mentioned media. When considering civic practice, it is inevitable to develop such media tools that would be able to promote, teach and instruct young people in digital space about Europe in effective way i.e. showing them Europe as a space for accepting and benefiting from the factor of multiculturalism, strongly accentuating the cultural diversity that is inevitable part of democracy, underlining their rights as European citizens, explaining the historical facts of creating the European Union, as well as other factors concerning their active citizenship that contribute to supporting their values and opinions being expressed mostly in various online environments.

In the process of studying foreign literature we came across the term *active citizens* used by W. L. Bennett et al. (W. L. Bennett et al., 2008) who interestingly distinguishes two kinds of citizens concerning civic learning, namely: AC (Actualizing citizens) and DC (Dutiful citizens). The first group is created predominantly by young people and the other by senior citizens, but it does not have to be the rule as many young people can be more dutiful citizens

and many senior citizens can be more actualizing citizens. What is the difference between these two terms? The author specifies actualizing citizens as predominantly young ones who are less inclined to feel the sense of duty to participate politically in conventional ways such as voting or following issues in the news, while at the same time displaying a great inclination to embrace issues that connect to their lifestyle values from moral concerns to environmental quality. On the other side, there are many senior citizens (Dutiful citizens) who have got the sense of duty to participate through civic organizations, parties and elections and continue to identify with the defining institutions (party, church, union, service organization) of fragmenting modern civil societies. Therefore, teaching process at schools should lead to interconnection of the teacher's understanding of lifestyle values of young learners and also more serious questions of their future existence in the European Union should be tackled during the class.

Furthermore, there are many other types of citizens. Krasteva (Krasteva, 2011) introduces several types of e-citizens, specifically: the hater, the simulator and the empowered. The empowered e-citizens consist of e-activists and bloggers. We are of the opinion that the final aim of media educational policy should be to incorporate young people in such a way that they will be able to express themselves openly in online environments concerning European issues through their own comments in social networks in order to make them active citizens and because it is those empowered who, according to Krasteva, make the links between the Internet and e-democracy.

Therefore, it is of crucial importance to promote active citizenship concerning young people through digital media while many of them spend hours in the digital space without realizing how many rights are given to them thanks to being citizens of the EU. If political campaigns can be launched through different means of media, promotion and strengthening the feeling of belonging to the European Union as well as creating European citizenship through multicultural or intercultural education should be also one of the partial aims of media on local level in order to fulfil the overall aim on a global level, referring to the entire space of the European Union. The other important point is that when creating Europe we should not accentuate only economic factors being distributed by media but also factors based on culture and education that could be also promoted by the means of media.

Other important fact that should be fostered together with European citizenship is also active European citizenship underlining active participation in

the specific issues crucial for Europe. Young people should be aware of the fact that they are the ones who can freely use many benefits offered by Slovak accession to the European Union. They can express freely their overall opinions, attitudes and questions regarding many European issues ranging from politics to cultural issues. The reality, however, is that they often do not use this right, e.g. in the elections. The point is to make young people more active by teaching them how to look at the news in media critically and objectively as well as to approach various contents in digital media carefully, as they can represent only one of many points of view.

The possible question arises: How can the active citizenship of young people be achieved? One of the possible solutions is proposed by Bennett *et al.* (Bennett, 2011) who identifies AC (Actualizing Citizen) civic learning styles of young people that could be taken into consideration in teaching process. They consist of interactive, project-based, peer-to-peer networked information sharing, participatory media creation, preference for democratic environments – learners participate in creating content and assessing credibility. It means that active citizenship of young people can be enhanced also by discussions at blogs in digital space and the young people's interest in politics can be achieved too by leading discussions in the classrooms or in the online environments. This and other similar methods that could be used in foreign language teaching will be discussed and exemplified later in the next chapter. Also, it is up to policy makers, educators and developers of online environments to respond better and more effectively to the political experiences of the youth. Bennett *et al.* (Bennett, 2011) also presents a very interesting table consisting of DC and AC learning goals, which the teacher should take into consideration. Some of the AC goals that could be achieved are: finding and assessing credible sources of information outside of the news (for example: participatory information sources such as Wikipedia), understanding digital media and peer information sources, learning participatory media skills (blogging, video production), learning how to use digital media to reach various audiences, knowing the roles of social networking and online communities and the reasons and bases for joining them, empowerment, trust in networks and what is most important - confidence in participatory skills.

Role of education and media in creation of active European citizenship of young people

According to Pálková (Pálková, 2009) establishing of European citizenship should come out of cultural background and be based on preferentially education system whereas the European dimension should be present on each level of educational system ranging from primary and secondary schools to universities. Hacker (Hacker, 2011) presents an interesting point of view stating that some media providers consider that it is part of their mission as a public media, or in their interests as private media, to encourage pedagogical rapprochement with the media. These pedagogic aims can be accomplished on one side by education using modern technologies and new media in the classes, and on the other side by media themselves, mainly by European-oriented policy of media owners who could create space for incorporating young people not only into political but also cultural and European issues they are mostly touched by.

According to Rouet (Rouet, 2011) in the period of digital society it is important to create out of young people the Europeans with the feeling of belonging towards European citizenship. By such means the citizenship could be experienced more in daily life of young people, so it could be more tangible not only abstract or fragile form of citizenship. However, some of these hypotheses needs to be investigated in the future research. Following Hacker (Hacker, 2011) the EU needs a progressive citizenship, advancing from civil citizenship to cultural citizenship, depending on the acquired skills, behaviour and virtues related to the European heritage.

Online environment has a great influence on young people. As we have already mentioned it can have a positive but also negative effect on the youth. It can support or undervalue their opinions and attitudes. It should be, therefore, designed and maintained strongly educational and cultural in order to support them as young European citizens to participate actively in the matters involving political, cultural, social, economic or educational issues. We suppose that if the European citizenship was supported by digital media through various blogs, foras or online environments specialized in this specific issue the number of young people participating in elections could be higher, as well as their subsequent activity concerning their political rights.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, media can have on one hand negative and on the other positive effect on young generation. Following Zayani

(Zayani, 2011) access to media can also deepen the division between people, which can make some people marginalized. We claim that especially young people are mostly prone to such divisions having a huge impact on their psychological development as they do not have much experience yet about how things work outside their homes. In our paper we will be dealing predominantly with media communication according to Zayani's division of media communication into: macromedia communication (associated with global satellites and computer networks, trans-border data flows, scientific and professional electronic mailing and commercial advertising), mesomedia communication (print, press media, audio-visual media, the film industry, news agencies) and micromedia communication (telephone, copying machines, audio and video recorders, tapes, PCs and the web), while content, media practices and media education play an important role in forming society.

Role of media in supporting European citizenship in the context of cultural diversity

In this part of the paper we will try to focus on the role of media in supporting active citizenship of young people in the context of cultural diversity in the age of globalization. As it was mentioned before the main role of the media should be the support of young people's active citizenship through sound media policies respecting culture and cultural diversity. According to the resolution of the European Parliament the program called *Europe for citizens* (2006) for the years 2007-2013 was enacted. Its aim is to promote active European citizenship aiming at better awareness of citizens, more significant communication about European programs and activities resulting in fostering the process of integration and development of the feeling of togetherness and European identity. Priorities should be the following ones:

- Participating in making common Europe that is connected and enriched by cultural diversity;
- Creation of European identity based on common values, history and culture;
- Deepening of mutual understanding between the citizens of Europe, respecting and appreciating cultural diversity.

Bálintová (Bálintová, 2009) states that knowledge of one's own culture and cultural identity helps find the common dialogue with different cultures and

national culture becomes a starting point for effective communication with other cultures, but also with members of one's own culture in the horizon of own identification.

As Pálková (Pálková, 2009) argues, the international community (meaning the European Union) needs a spiritual dimension, an awareness of historical affinity of its particular members, awareness of responsibility for presence and also for future as well as for other compatible values. In the present times, when young people spend much of their time in online environments, it is of crucial importance to point to such terms as multiculturalism, interculturalism, cultural diversity, citizenship and education. The last term is connected with European Education Area which is the first area that can help to form active European citizens of young people which can make use of media too, the second is represented by the very media which we are going to discuss in this part of the paper in connection with cultural diversity that is so crucial for existence of Europe.

Zayani (Zayani, 2011) claims that fostering cultural diversity in and through the media can go a long way toward bringing a civic discourse which promotes tolerance, facilitates coexistence and enriches the human existence. It can contribute to the breaking down of cultural barriers, the initiation of cultural dialogue, the promotion of global reconciliation, the empowerment of marginalized groups, the strengthening of social cohesion, and the practice of good governance. According to this point of view media policy should aim to educate and form active citizens who are tolerant toward other cultures bearing in mind the importance of peaceful coexistence of nations in one supranational state or who are in general culturally aware, inclined to cultural dialogue in intercultural communication. Interculturalism, according to Pálková (Pálková, 2010), handles the relationships, mobility and contacts between different cultures, between different nations which are bearers of culture and so it also influences the quality of communication and cooperation in the European area. Such communication should be supported on both the local and global level because if young people start to be aware of the importance of intercultural dialogue in terms of respecting cultural diversity locally, it can have a far greater influence globally. As Zayani (Zayani, 2011) claims the global draws on the local even if it strives to distinguish itself from it.

Zayani (Zayani, 2011) further uses an interesting metaphor that media can be a double edged sword in some ways with the proclivity to be appropriated as a force of empowerment, but also the tendency to use them as means of

subjection. One side of media can go a long way towards establishing commonness and fostering solidarity, but can also induce divisions, deepen misunderstandings, reinforce prejudices and distort reality. It follows that media can be a valuable instrument in recognizing otherness, embracing difference and promoting cultural awareness but it can also have divisive effect through indifference to difference.

Further on Zayani (Zayani, 2011) concludes that media can put in perspective the diversity of groups and individuals that is in our point of view crucial for the existence of the European Union with a great deal of authenticity and frequency, and in such a way they can facilitate intercultural dialogue. On the other side, they can also act as an instrument of marginalization, dismissal and effacement, and function as a source of divisiveness, polarization and estrangement. Therefore, we have to foster in young people the feeling of togetherness towards their peers, tolerance, solidarity, and respect for their peers' backgrounds and financial conditions as to avoid further marginalization within the society. Here we would also like to accentuate the need to tackle such issues in the European Education Area through different means (including media) and through the very media cultural policy bearing in mind cultural diversity, multiculturalism, interculturalism, citizenship, education and culture in general, which should be paid the prime attention during communication in different environments (digital environment including).

New methods used in teaching of foreign languages

Teaching of foreign languages plays a crucial role in the culturally diverse European Union which can be described figuratively as a knot created by different nations which are united in diversity. Foreign language teaching and learning, therefore, is very important while the knowledge of one international language does not suffice today. This is especially true for young people who have possibilities to come in touch with different cultures and languages via media as well as education. When applying for a job the most frequent questions that young people finishing secondary schools and graduating from universities are facing and which are compulsory part of curriculum vitae are questions concerning the number and level of language knowledge they as potential future employees have. These are the questions that are also fatal for many young job applicants who either undermine their knowledge of foreign languages or overestimate them. The level of their English, French or German

(as they are the most frequent foreign languages taught in Slovakia) can be very easily discovered in many job interviews when a future employee's task is often to answer the questions of a native speaker orally or in a written form. Hence the greater attention is paid to different approaches of foreign language teaching, especially to those ones who could motivate students more to take up learning foreign languages.

Teaching foreign languages underwent several changes through traditional approaches used in language teaching in the past to the new ones which do not try to eliminate the previous approaches, just try to improve them in many respects. As Dovedan, Seljan and Vučkovic (Dovedan et al., 2002, p. 3) state *"All nine approaches to language teaching that were used throughout the history, grammar-translation approach, direct approach, reading approach, audiolingualism, situational approach, cognitive approach and communicative approach are only brought together in multimedia and web usage"*. Therefore, teachers of foreign languages are nowadays facing not only new language materials ranging from different kinds of students' books and foreign language literature appropriate for language teaching itself but they have to be also PC literate if they want to make use of latest new information and communication technologies in their classes which seems almost inevitable nowadays. It also seems to be one of the preconditions for finding a job as a teacher. That is why the teacher of foreign language together with teachers of other subjects must head new challenges established and characteristic for 21st Century that is, e.g. promotion of teaching and learning foreign languages as one of the main goals of the policy of the European Union.

Therefore, in our contribution, we focus on using of new methods in foreign language teaching in media environment that could foster learners' intercultural competence presupposing it can help to generate more active European citizens of young people.

Teaching foreign language through media in the context of culture in interculturality

21st Century is a century of new communication and information technologies that are affecting all spheres of our life, the private life not being the exception. As it was mentioned before, young people are the ones who are most active in online environments and they even spend majority of their free time there. In short, young people and young learners like new ways of learning

foreign languages via communication with their peers especially via media communication. Therefore, we claim that foreign language teaching as well as creation of active European citizens out of young people should be fostered especially in media environment which can be highly motivating and challenging for them. It can be initiated by teaching foreign languages through different computer methods and programs, e.g. CALL. Bálintová (Bálintová, 2003) argues that CALL enables for the interconnection of classical teaching methods (i.e. students' book) and attractive and motivating methods using modern technologies (audio and video programmes). Hwang and Huang (Hwang, Huang, 2010) mention the importance of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) which can have several advantages:

1. *CALL can increase the learning effect through repeating practicing.*
2. *CALL can provide interesting elements that can enhance students' learning desire.*
3. *CALL can achieve the goal of application of English learning through simulated teaching content.*
4. *CALL is assistance that learners can help themselves to learn the lesson content.*

Teaching and learning foreign language through media or media communication should go hand in hand with culture and interculturality, as it can be valuable means for gaining sufficient knowledge of different nations and their cultures existing within the supranational European Union. To begin with, it is of crucial importance to explain the three concepts in order to avoid misunderstandings between them, namely media communication, culture, interculturality, intercultural communication and competence.

Media communication is the communication that is happening in the media environments. Nowadays the old media like television, radio, and newspapers are being supplemented by new media represented by various blogs, websites or other online environments provided via Internet services. Communication is going on not only in city cafés but also in virtual online cafés. Following Zayani (Zayani, 2011) media communication can be divided into: macromedia communication (associated with global satellites and computer networks, trans-border data flows, scientific and professional electronic mailing and commercial advertising), mesomedia communication (print, press media, audio-visual media, the film industry, news agencies) and micromedia communication (telephone, copying machines, audio and video recorders, tapes, PCs and the

web).

When speaking about communication, especially – but not exclusively – media communication, it is of great importance to stress the fact, in line with Mešková, that *“to communicate means to manage to interpret the codes that we do not know, to be open to plurality of language, cultural and other codes, to familiarize ourselves with them and be able to use them”* (Mešková, 2008, p. 142). During media communication in foreign language class students should be encouraged and advised by the teacher to pay respect to other cultures and to be interculturally competent. Quoting Mešková, culture can be described as *„a summary of ways of behaviour, thinking and feeling that are specific for certain group.”* (Mešková, 2008, p. 141) According to one of the definitions of culture that is presented above it seems inevitable to teach students the differences or similarities between their own culture and between the culture of the people whose language they are studying (e.g. English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian etc.), and to see them as positive factors in the culturally diverse or multicultural European Union. This can later show itself as an advantage not only for the students who tend to visit foreign countries thanks to scholarship programs or various work agencies but it can be of benefit for those who will work in foreign based companies as managers or businessmen as well as for holiday travellers.

In a broader view, to be culturally aware is nowadays crucial for our life within the European Union. It is important to teach pupils respect and tolerance not only towards each other in a classroom but also to other persons coming from different countries as they are too European citizens. Therefore the teacher should adopt such activities and exercises e.g. via media that will enable the students to confront their opinions with natives of the country which language they are learning. It is a kind of direct interaction and can be realized by different methods in media environments especially new media environments to which we will be paying attention in the next part of our contribution.

After specifying media communication and culture it is inevitable to focus on interculturality, intercultural communication, and intercultural competence as they are mutually connected. Following Pálková *“interculturality concerns relations, mobilities and contacts among different cultures, among different nations as they are bearers of culture and therefore it specifies or determines the quality of communication and cooperation in the European space. The concept of interculturality seeks for ways of coexistence of these distinct cultures and the way of communication between them.”* (Pálková, 2010, p. 64) It

is further stated that intercultural contacts are being realized thanks to intercultural communication. (Pálková, 2010) That is why in our contribution we stress the fact that the students should be encouraged to various ways of intercultural communication via the Internet, especially via special blogs or websites as these are favourite ways of communication among young people. When communicating, e.g. via e-mails with foreign pen friends, students should communicate in such a way that would correspond with Mešková's opinion that *"if we want to communicate in a right way it is important to become aware of the difference of cultures and to gain knowledge of the culture of the nation whose representatives we meet with"* (Mešková, 2008, p. 151). Thanks to the emergence of a concept of interculturality and intercultural communication a new competence, i.e. intercultural competence also emerged, which is mutually connected with the above mentioned concepts.

According to Průcha (Průcha, 2010) intercultural competence (also cross-cultural competence, transnational competence) is a competence of an individual to carry out effective communication and cooperation with the members of other cultures with the use of adopted knowledge about the particularities of national/ethnic cultures and related skills. The basis of intercultural competence is language knowledge of an individual and respect for cultural particularities of partners. We are of the opinion that intercultural competence should be inevitable part of foreign language teaching and should be realized not only pro forma in curriculum but also in real classes because, according to Chovancová, the school *"can bring information and at the same time to teach a pupil to process them. It can teach to think (to express opinion, to build confidence in pupil's him/herself at first in the school and later in the environment of outside world), it can teach to communicate (discuss, defend pupil's own point of view, to receive individual decisions and also decisions made within a group), to act (to understand functioning of democracy, decision processes in society etc.)"* (Chovancová, 2008, p. 183). Moreover, according to Požarlik, (Požarlik, 2009) students need to learn to choose, to be critical, open, and tolerant, but also to be able to defend their point of view, to be willing and able to participate in the process of construction of the common European identity.

Specific examples of using media in foreign language teaching

In our contribution we mentioned different kinds of media communication and also the fact that young people are the most active users of the Internet. Therefore, we are paying attention to new media, including the Internet. The mentioned Internet can be a rich source of authentic material for our pupils. We can find a lot of stories, listening activities, songs and innumerable grammar exercises, as well as helping tools for students and tips for teachers how to make their foreign language classes more attractive and motivating for students. We claim that the Internet can be beneficial for foreign language learners because it not only uses traditional approaches but also provides new methods of teaching the language via modern ways of communication including e-mails, chats, blogs etc., where students can communicate with their peers as well as exchange the information about their hobbies, interests and also about traditions, customs, food, basic “do’s” and “don’ts” of a given country.

We have to stress, however, that it is up to every single teacher what kind of material or activities he/she will choose to use in the class. At first, the teacher should be the one who will inform the students about the advantages and disadvantages of using new media and teach the students to look at innumerable amount of information gained through the Internet objectively as they do not have to be always relevant or true.

As it was stated earlier in the text, a teacher has got a wide range of what material that he/she can choose for the lesson. Following Dovedan, Seljan and Vučkovic (Dovedan et al., 2002) there probably exists no teacher who would not bring to a class besides standard textbook also some additional material gained via the Internet, e.g. city maps, newspaper articles, books reviews, songs and poems etc. Teachers and students can benefit from various online libraries and find web pages that offer them a lot of educational methods and tips. They can be also a source of:

- *“Grammar exercises*
- *Comprehension reading exercises*
- *Writing of abstracts and letters*
- *Solving puzzles*
- *Vocabulary learning through recipes, fashion and sport articles*
- *Information on studying abroad*
- *Searching for jobs or for a certain product*

- *Translation between languages and many more*” (Dovedan, Seljan, Vuckovic, 2002, p. 2).

The authors also present various kinds of packages on CD-ROMs which can be helpful in foreign language teaching, as well as specific web links and websites which teachers might find beneficial.

One of the advantages of using new media in foreign language teaching is that it is suitable for each age group ranging from preschool learners to university students. In this part of our paper we would like to focus on different language skills which can be improved via media, especially the Internet. Together with fostering the intercultural competence they can also help to foster the feeling of belonging to the European Union among learners. They are best applicable with secondary and university students.

Following Kornum (Kornum, 1993), writing skills of students can be improved firstly by writing e-mails to pen pals living in a different country. In such a way the students started, according to the project that was realized in Denmark, exchanging not just trivial information but also their thoughts, ideas and opinions on all kinds of subjects in the target language(s). Secondly, Kornum (Kornum, 1993) mentions teleconferences comprising several contributions from different participants that proved to be highly improving students' reading skills.

Except for reading skills their writing skills were also improved thanks to use of various expressions and idioms that they picked up from their pen pals or native speakers. The author also stresses the importance of CD-ROM packages and videodiscs that can contribute to higher motivation of pupils as they are, unlike standard textbooks, something new for them, although what is important is exactly the proper and well-balanced combination of textbook and other educational material in media environment. What we would like to stress is the fact that the project that Kornum (Kornum, 1993) described was aimed at intercultural communication of Danish students with the students from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In this respect the above mentioned project developed the pupils' cultural awareness and also intercultural competence via exchanging not only trivial information but also ideas, opinions and information gained from two cultural environments, namely Danish and Irish one. Students also had the possibility to have a look at the information gained from their peers from both parts of Ireland, namely Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland which is a part of United Kingdom and still is a conflict-prone area. Therefore, it was an excellent example of communication between two

nations represented by pupils paying mutual respect and tolerance to each other.

So far we have seen that multimedia can be a very effective tool in foreign language teaching, improving pupils' reading, writing, and communication skills, but also fostering his/her intercultural competence. Now, we would like to focus on one activity that seems to us really interesting. The activity was proposed by Elena Gómez Parra (Gómez Parra, 2008) and aims at creation of *WebQuest* by students titled *Visit of a virtual friend*. The point is that the students' task (working in groups) is to imagine how a friend of theirs invites them for a visit to his/her native country. The parents, however, will approve the journey only on the condition that the pupil will find the relevant information about the country like the food, famous musicians, current political system, traditional dances of the given country etc. Each student's task is to try to find the relevant information on the Internet. The final phase will be about summarizing the gained information, followed by presentation.

E. Gómez Parra (Gómez Parra, 2008) sums up the activity claiming that the students should realize differences between existing cultures and their importance as well as to appreciate diversity of principal tasks present in everyday life organization that create the basis of every culture. This activity also demonstrates the effective use of multimedia, namely *WebQuest*, in fostering interest of students of other cultures in foreign language teaching. We suppose that this activity could be used with secondary students who are preparing themselves for school leaving exams and university entrance exams during their seminars, but also with university students. The overall activity was finished by presentation which improves students' communication skills while paying special attention to fluency and accuracy of their oral performance.

Similar exercises could be also used in order to teach students where to find information about protection against discrimination in various spheres of life, new media not excluding, and to help them find the information which institution to address or which document to look for if such a case or situation arises. Students could be given cards with specific web addresses and their task would be to help their virtual friend to find the ways how to protect against discrimination in media environment which is often a rich soil for spreading the ethnic prejudices and incitement to racism and xenophobia. A few of the students could be playing the role of a plaintiff and the others would be their attorneys. The final part would be realized in a form of a role play taking place in the law office, summarizing client's questions and attorney's answers, as well as

advice on a given issue.

How to avoid anxiety in foreign language teaching

Anxiety or students' fear before foreign language lesson is another topic that we would like to tackle briefly in our contribution. Hwang and Huang (Hwang, Huang, 2010) found out according to the research that learners felt less anxiety when multimedia equipment was used in foreign language teaching. As we stated before when educating young people in foreign languages we should also pay attention to their needs, hobbies, and interests, as well as to psychological aspects of learning respecting their time for break and also being emphatic to their opinions and ideas. Therefore, the use of multimedia seems to be the most appropriate as well as motivating as it enables the teacher to use innumerable amount of material attractive to learners of foreign language. Furthermore, we suppose that a future research should be done in Slovakia concerning the correlation between pupils' anxiety or fear of language class and multimedia environment and how their active participation in the lesson or generally in life can be improved, so the possible implications could be deduced. We also believe that if the anxiety in foreign language teaching could be limited through the use of media fostering students' intercultural competence, then the students could become more active European citizens participating freely without fear in important matters concerning their life in the European Union.

The role of cultural ethics of media

When talking about media it is also inevitable to pay attention to cultural ethics. Zayani (Zayani, 2011) concludes that communication empowers, but it empowers more those with greater competence and access to the means of communication. The ethical choice in communication is therefore focused on whether the communicator is aiming toward power-free understanding or systematic distortions and powerful manipulations. That is why young people should be aware of such a fact that media do not bear only positive qualities but can be also detrimental to the society. It depends only on the way of communication that they will use in digital space, again putting emphasis on interculturally sound dialogue. If such conditions are fulfilled young people would have a free way to realize that, actually, they are not only citizens of one of the Member States of the European Union but of the European Union as an

entity; an entity that comprises several different entities in one with the slogan 'united in diversity'.

As Rouet (Rouet, 2011) points out, European dimension is needed everywhere ranging from education to media that influence our life so much nowadays with millions of new information that need to be selected and many of them also critically reviewed. Let's take the Internet as an example. Young people, but not only them, are extremely influenced by various information they gain through their access to various kinds of media. The youth is very prone to being influenced by the Internet thus creating own stereotypes and myths and a lot of subjective opinions. In order to form the young generation in being more culturally aware while being in online environments, media policy and media regulation, both at the national and international level, may, according to Zayani, "enhance the media's potential to be a positive force of cultural diversity so the role of the media should be:

- a. *strengthen the cultural, the social and by extension the democratic role of media;*
- b. *design legal provisions for media practices so as to prevent monopoly, homogenization and excessive commercialization from taking hold;*
- c. *develop self-regulatory measures such as codes of conduct and codes of ethics;*
- d. *ensure the free access to information, provide regulation to safeguard the freedom of expression, and promote free, pluralistic and independent media; and more generally*
- e. *promote good media practices because only by fostering an environment that is tolerant of and conducive to cultural diversity we can uphold democracy in an age dominated by information and communication technologies" (Zayani, 2011, p. 52).*

In short, the media should show young people that communication can be and should be culturally ethical and their activities in online environments can go hand in hand with respect for the cultural diversity and their own opinions, as well as active participation in political or social issues. It is the media that can contribute to young peoples' better understanding of the process of decision-making as well as helping them penetrate into the core of various, yet perhaps abstract terms as one of European citizenship that can be fostered by only culture, aspects of multiculturalism together with interculturalism and education, as well as with above mentioned means of media. The young European citizens

should view cultural diversity as an advantage that can bring benefits in the sort of common European values and traditions respecting multiculturalism and interculturalism.

Cultural ethics, therefore, should be observed especially when talking about new technology and information media. Media should be culturally ethical in order to be a good example for, but not only, young generation, although it is often not abided. The codes of ethics are those that really matter. Therefore we suppose that the content and practices of media should be culturally ethical as they may be, and often are applied and being presented in civic education or in other different subjects. Thus it is important to distinguish between culturally unethical or ethical conduct that is being undertaken through various forms of media. The point is that young people should be educated in such a way as to be able to distinguish what is ethically correct and what is not in order to avoid aggression on Internet, abuse, partiality etc. and to support ethically correct media which aims at fostering cultural diversity.

The aim of the paper was to accentuate the importance of the role of media in forming and supporting active European citizenship of young people. As the opinions of many authors showed young people are less inclined to feel the sense of duty in conventional ways of citizen's participation like e.g. voting. According to Collard (Collard, 2010) the kinds of right embodied in European citizenship are much better translated into the actions of consumers, tourists, and crossborder workers, than into crosses in ballot boxes which is a nice metaphor used for describing the whole situation connected with people's attitudes to voting and participating in elections.

Young people are more interested in lifestyle values from moral concerns to environmental quality. They spend much time in online environments; therefore, we are of the opinion that if they are to understand the importance of European citizenship which seems more abstract and frail to many of them, but also to many senior citizens, it should be formed and supported and explained through cultural means in the space of media ranging from macromedia communication, mesomedia communication and micromedia communication (which comprises PCs, Web – that plays a dominant role in communication of young people). Online environment can serve as a stimulus or good soil for growing the feeling of European citizenship and to making of European citizens concerning the values derived from cultural diversity, multiculturalism and interculturalism. This fact can be supported by specific learning styles based on learning how to use

digital media and assess various sources of information as online environment can have a positive and also negative effect on young people. Therefore they have to select what information they will and will not take for granted and attention should be also paid to their critical assessing.

Media, in general, act as a force of empowerment but also a means of subjection that is why young people should be careful about such sensitive issues. As a good example is that media are excellent means how to promote cultural awareness, strengthen the interest in intercultural dialogue but also can have a divisive effect as an instrument of marginalization. That is why this fact should be decisive in promoting educational framework of media. Thus active citizenship of young people through media should be fostered in the context of cultural diversity in order to avoid marginalization or subjection of people. That is why our partial aim was to focus on cultural diversity as it can facilitate cultural dialogue.

We also analysed the ways how the active European citizenship could be fostered in the foreign language lessons. From the presented activities and exercises we found out that the ideal activities are those that foster, improve and develop not only learners' reading, writing and listening skills concerning grammar but also higher skills and competencies, namely: intercultural and interpersonal competence towards people of different nations paying attention and respect to cultural diversity of European Union that can help raise the awareness of young people concerning local and global issues related to their lives. Apart from describing the activities that could be used effectively in the FLT we also focused on the fear or stress which students have in the foreign language classes and we found out from the studied material that these obstacles can be efficiently limited or removed through teaching in multimedia environment. However, a future research into this issue needs to be done in Slovakia.

To conclude, media should strengthen cultural, social and democratic values, to prevent monopoly, excessive commercialization, and develop codes of ethics as well as to be culturally ethical and educational as it was mentioned in the last part of our paper. To sum up, the media influence the way young people view the world around themselves and the newly developed European issues concerning European citizenship, and they can also play as an effective stimulus in reinforcing the active European citizenship in young people as they spend much time in online environments while expressing themselves through various digital means. It can change their views and help to see the newly

arisen concepts or social constructs as more tangible and not so frail or abstract realizing that they are using the rights of European citizens. Media can also contribute to broadening their knowledge about Europe and European matters, so the influence of media can be really effective and positive in the context of cultural diversity connected with multiculturalism, interculturalism accentuating the need to tackle these issues in education through and in media. By using various forms of media (the Internet, new media) in education students' interest in the given subject could be also increased to a larger extent.

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