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

VAEIE

Values and Attitudes Education for Inclusive Europe

2019-1-BE02-KA201-060238

Topic	RULE OF LAW
Image	 Source: Elon University, Imagine the Internet Center, works under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/surveys/future-of-democracy-2020/
Title	SOURCES OF INFORMATION, DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Details:	**Purpose**: The lesson wants to draw attention to the fact that at this stage of the digital age, and even in the near future, our sources and modalities of information are very important to avoid manipulation and misinformation. Misinformed or uninformed decisions can undermine democracy and the rule of law, but also can affect our own life and personal future. The students will study a full report of research containing experts opinions regarding the media and communication in the digital era. The lesson can be organized in one or two sessions.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:
- To understand and describe the threats on democracy and personal decisions (for example medical, including vaccination) of manipulation and misinformation through internet and social media;
- To discuss knowingly about media pluralism and media freedom and independence;
- To recognise fake news and describe modalities of searching and checking the credible sources of information;
- To show or promote attitudes supporting the credible sources of information and combat misinformation and fake news.

Relevant Vocabulary:

- Digital media, social neworks, information technology, accurate information, secure sources, misinformation, fake news, informed decision, democracy, media pluralism, media freedom

How to use this lesson:	**Activities:** **1) Preparations** **Before lesson** • Preparing printed worksheets for students, containing the introduction or other relevant parts of the proposed article. **During the lesson** • Presenting the theme and the learning objectives; • Presenting the material and web resources, instruct students how to use them during the lesson, and handout the worksheets containing the main learning article; • Proposing the main learning methods: reading the article included in the worksheets and making annotations or highlights in order to support future

discussions and/or argumentation, exploration of media and e-learning resources, explanation, discussions, presentations, team working.

2) Learning activities

INTRODUCTION:

The rule of law and democracy are interconnected and should be mutually reinforcing, but this is not always the case. Lately we have been hearing more and more about violations of the rule of law in some Member States, or Candidates, risking not only ideological disputes but also loosing financial, funds important for their development (Poland and Hungary recently, or the Brexit case). We may wonder if ordinary citizens have a role to play in this as well. Let's imagine the following scenario. Citizens, following extensive and more or less correct information campaigns, elect by democratic vote their representatives who will form the legislative and executive power. When they come to power, however, they can undermine the rule of law by legislating against the independence of the press, or even the judiciary, by encouraging illiberalism and corruption. Thus, the chain closes and democracy (the „power of people") ends up undermining itself. In any case, the uninformed or misinformed decisions can undermine the rule of law, and not only electing the wrong representatives but also through ignoring or not complying with the legal provisions and the recommendations of the authorities, see for example, the trends of non-vaccination during the pandemic.

Unfortunately, the unprecedented development of the Internet and digital technologies paradoxically favors misinformation and manipulation of the public by spreading false information, especially through social networks. The following articles are the report and full credit responses of an extensive opinion research conducted by Elon University – Imaging the Internet Center and Pew Research in the USA, revealing what technology, sociology and communication specialists believe about how the media and communication will evolve in the coming years and what will be the impact on democracy and, implicitly, on the rule of law:

„Nearly 50% of experts predict that uses of technology will mostly weaken core aspects of democracy in the next decade; threats they cite include the speed and

scope of reality distortion, decline of journalism, impact of surveillance capitalism, lack of digital literacy"

(The Future of Democracy in the Digital Age - *Experts Expect People's Uses of Technology to be Mostly Harmful to Democracy, List Threats,* Elon University and Pew Research), https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/surveys/future-of-democracy-2020/

ACTIVITIES:

- The students are asked to watch, compare and comment on the stimulus learning tables, trying to answer the following question:
  - Why so many people would vote for politicians who later are proven incompentents or corrupts? How can you possibly believe in their electoral promises?
- The teacher makes the introduction or presents it on the projector and answers the students' questions;
- The teacher invites students to read the study introduction in their worksheets and to express their initial opinions, before hearing the experts opinions;
- The teacher indicates students to go online to the full report and credits and proposes that each students to choose one expert opinion and write down its own opinion regarding the subject, preparing for a short presentation;
- When students are ready, the teacher and students discuss about the experts opinions and answer the questions:
  - Which are the threats enlisted by experts?
  - Did someone feel manipulated through social media news feed, or sense and discover a fake news?
  - How the students could use their search engines to find correct information?
  - What should students do now and in the future to defend themselves against misinformation and manipulation?
- Assessing and ensuring the learning of new terms and concepts through a quick session of questions and answers.
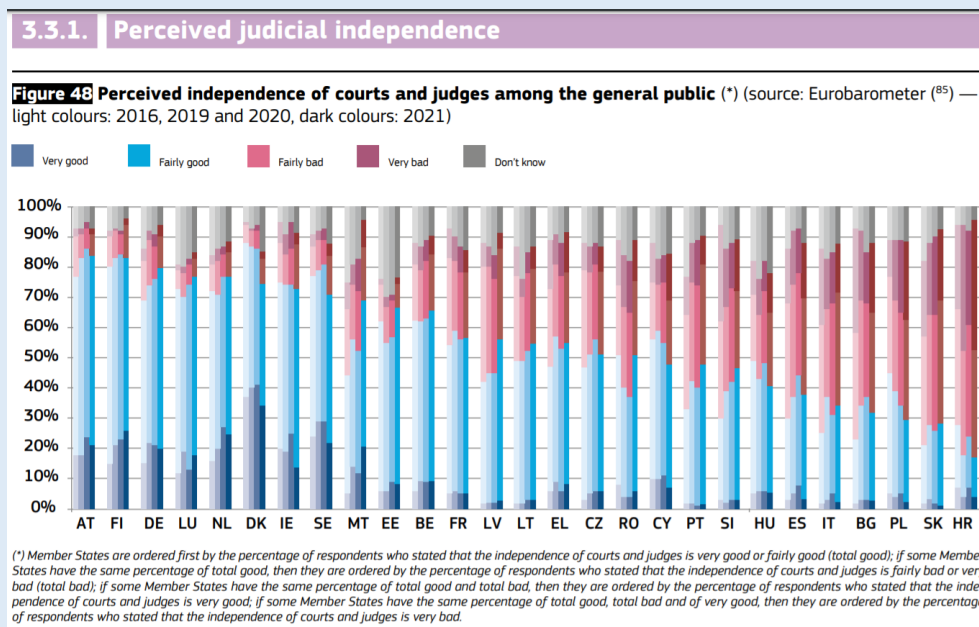
3) Ensuring retention and transfer

- Encouraging students to study the extra reading materials and consider to enroll in the VAEIE ecourses;
- Giving students homework to prepare more detailed, explicative and attractive digital presentations related to the subject.

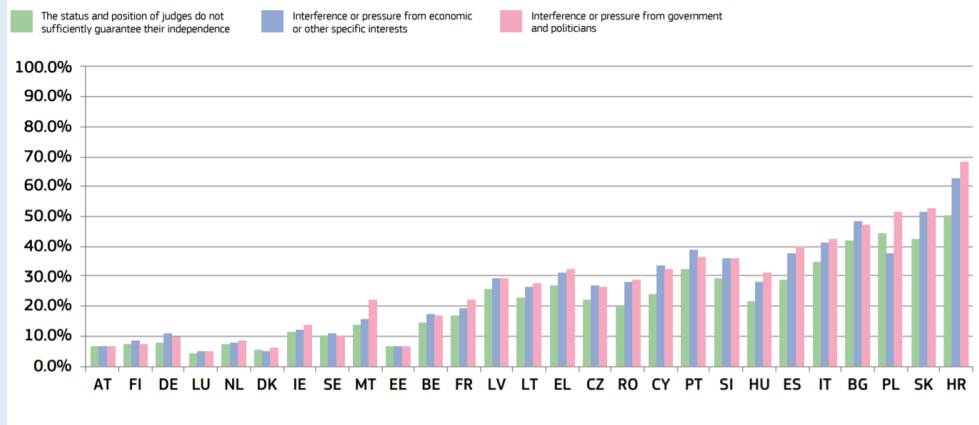| Materials:	**1) Media materials (stimulus of learning)** - Compare and comment the following tables

3.3.1. Perceived judicial independence

Figure 48 Perceived independence of courts and judges among the general public (*) (source: Eurobarometer ([85]) — light colours: 2016, 2019 and 2020, dark colours: 2021)

Legend: Very good — Fairly good — Fairly bad — Very bad — Don't know

(*) Member States are ordered first by the percentage of respondents who stated that the independence of courts and judges is very good or fairly good (total good); if some Member States have the same percentage of total good, then they are ordered by the percentage of respondents who stated that the independence of courts and judges is fairly bad or very bad (total bad); if some Member States have the same percentage of total good and total bad, then they are ordered by the percentage of respondents who stated that the independence of courts and judges is very good; if some Member States have the same percentage of total good, total bad and of very good, then they are ordered by the percentage of respondents who stated that the independence of courts and judges is very bad.

[Judicial independence (1) / EU Justice Scoreboard 2021](#)

Figure 49 shows the main reasons given by respondents for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges. Respondents among the general public, who rated the independence of the justice system as being 'fairly bad' or 'very bad,' could choose between three reasons to explain their rating. The Member States are listed in the same order as in Figure 48.

Figure 49 Main reasons among the general public for the perceived lack of independence (share of all respondents — higher value means more influence) (source: Eurobarometer ([86]))

The status and position of judges do not sufficiently guarantee their independence ■ *Interference or pressure from economic or other specific interests* ■ *Interference or pressure from government and politicians*

[Judicial independence (2) / EU Justice Scoreboard 2021](#)
Source: THE 2021 EU JUSTICE SCOREBOARD
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_justice_scoreboard_2021.pdf

2) Reading materials (learning resources)*

(*) For translating entire websites or documents, please follow the link:
https://support.google.com/translate/answer/2534559?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop#

- Elon-Pew Future of Democracy, Pew Reasearch, Many Tech Experts Say Digital Disruption Will Hurt Democracy, https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/wp-content/uploads/sites/964/2020/02/Elon-Pew-Future-of-Democracy-2-21-20.pdf
- Full Credited Responses: The Future of Democracy in the Digital Age, Elon University, Imaging the Internet Center, https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/surveys/future-of-democracy-2020/credit/

More readings
- VAEIE Courses, Rule of Law https://vaeie.eu/ecourses/course/view.php?id=15

6

	• Survey XII 2021: Experts' Share Insights About Digital Life in the Wake of the COVID Pandemic and About Progress Toward Ethical AI by 2030, Elon University, Imaging the Internet Center https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/surveys/xii-2021/ • EU 2020 Justice Scoreboard https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/eu-justice-scoreboard-2021 **3) Students' worksheets containing the Introduction or other relevant parts of the proposed article, chart paper and markers, smartphones, projector**
Category	Interchangeably (classroom / online / e-learning)
Main target group	16-18 years old / secondary school students
Related school topics:	English, Ethics, Citizenship Education, European Studies, English as a Second Language, Human Sciences