Educational Resource Pack

In Changing Democracies, we have collected stories from individuals who grew up in vastly different political and ideological systems in Europe and beyond. Our witnesses share their thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, and the challenges they encountered while living in authoritarian systems and living through democratic transitions across Europe. For some, this transition also carries a story about migration and what it means to find your way in a society that is different from the one you grew up in, both politically as well as culturally and linguistically.

While looking back at their lives before and during the transition, the witnesses also reflect on today's democracies. Having lived through authoritarian rule, what does democracy mean to them? What did they expect? And does democracy deliver? To what extent does democracy work for everyone? Their stories invite us to explore these questions.

The aim of the Educational Resource Pack is to encourage young people to critically reflect on the history of democratic transitions in Europe and explore their own ideas, expectations and questions about democracy and what it means to live in a democratic society.

In Changing Democracies, several partners joined forces to co-create learning activities that can be implemented in both formal and non-formal educational settings. We intentionally wanted to offer activities that you can tweak or pick and choose from so it fits your educational setting.

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All learning activities start from the testimonies of our witnesses, bringing their stories together in the form of narratives built around five questions that we would like you to dig into with your students.

1. What makes you angry about the world today?
2. Do you dare to challenge your teachers?
3. What influences you in life?
4. Do you know what your grandparents think of young people?
5. What do you expect from democracy?

Each question contains 1 up to 3 learning activities that invite young people to explore the different themes from multiple perspectives using the narratives. We believe that working with fragments of testimonies from across Europe will also enhance their understanding of the mechanisms behind authoritarian regimes and how these influence people's day-to-day lives.

In each learning activity, you will find a step-by-step approach and an indication of how much time it would take to finish the step and the activity overall. Depending on your context, you can do an activity in one lesson, or spread them out over several lessons. Whether you are a history teacher at a high school, a museum educator, a youth worker or an educator working in another educational setting, you can use the activities to dive into the history of democratic transitions, and/or focus on discussing current challenges that we are facing in our democracies.

The questions serve as starting points to give young people the space to share and discuss their thoughts, feelings, hopes, concerns and expectations with peers. Then, you can proceed by watching the Narratives that are available on the website, before moving to the activity itself.

At the end of the document, you'll find a collection of historical context sheets providing information on the political and social context of each country that is represented in the testimonies. With this background knowledge, students can develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the testimonies.

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What makes you angry about the world today?

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Learning Activity 1: Short Discussion Rounds

Elli Clerides, Carolina Santillano, Eugenie Khatschatrian
EuroClio - European Association for History Educators

The following two activities are based on and require the use of five fragments from video testimonies featuring witnesses that experienced democratic transitions. The witnesses are Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez from Cuba and Belgium, Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos from Portugal, Jeangu Macrooy from Suriname and the Netherlands, Slobodanka Moravčević from Serbia and Belgium and Željko Rogina from Croatia. In the fragments, witnesses draw from personal experiences to discuss topics such as colonialism, inequality, government, hope, protest, and rule of law. Based on the fragments, we formulated the question *What makes you angry about the world today?* to help students engage with the themes discussed by the witnesses as well as understand their own anger in today's world. The activity encourages students to, using the testimonies, critically reflect on the question and engage with guided discussions with their peers, conduct research and interview different people in their own surroundings.

To hook students' interest, you can start with asking your students the question: What makes you angry about the world today? They can share their first thoughts, ideas and feelings in plenary, individually, in pairs or in small groups. Then, you can jointly watch the Narrative.

Learning Activity: Short Discussion Rounds
Age Group: 14 - 17 years old
Duration: 2 hours
Materials: Notebook and pen, fragments and short biographies (Annex 1) of witnesses. Optional: Electronic devices (iPad, Computer, Mobile), online tools: Miro, Trello. You will find the written texts for the fragments at the end of the learning activity in Annex 2.

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Fragments:

Fragment 1: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)
Fragment 2: Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)
Fragment 3: Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)
Fragment 4: Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)
Fragment 5: Željko Rogina (Croatia)

Learning Outcomes:

Throughout this activity, students will:

- Develop a deeper understanding of how individual experiences reflect broader historical events;
- explore how the experiences of witnesses relate to current global issues;
- reflect on personal reactions to each story;
- and develop critical thinking by discussing personal thoughts about justice, democracy and other challenges in today's world.

Step 1: Preparing the activity (30 mins)

Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5 and assign each student within the group a different fragment, which they will work with for the rest of this activity. In plenary, watch all the fragments and ask each student to individually prepare 3 discussion questions on the fragment they have been assigned. Alternatively, if there is limited time, students can watch the fragments and prepare the questions as homework. Either way, students must watch all of them so they are prepared to participate in discussions about them.

Students' discussion questions should be specific to their fragment, but can also reference other fragments for the purpose of comparison. Below are some examples you can share with students of the types of questions they can

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prepare. If students choose to use them, the questions should be adapted to the students' assigned fragments:

- How did you feel after watching the fragment/after the witness said [quote from the fragment]?
- What are your thoughts after hearing this fragment/[quote from the fragment]?
- How do you interpret this fragment/[quote from the fragment]?
- How do you think [topic or quote] is relevant to today's world?

Step 2: Discussion Rounds (35 mins)

For this step, students will engage in discussions within their groups. In the previously established groups, each student should spend about 5 - 10 minutes leading a discussion using the questions they prepared. Inform the students that the discussion leader does not need to ask all three questions if the group is having a rich discussion in response to the first ones. Share the following role card with your students to give them some pointers on how to lead a discussion:

How to Be a Good Discussion Leader

- → Try to involve everyone in the discussion and give equal speaking time to all participants.
- → Use people's responses to ask follow up questions.
- → If the discussion gets off topic, try to gently steer it back to the main topic.
- → Try to avoid asking questions with yes/no answers.
- → If people are being rude, offensive, or are not listening to others, remind them that this is meant to be a safe space using the pointers below.

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How to Create a Safe Space for Discussion

- Let each other finish your sentences before you respond to one another.
- When you do not agree with someone, explain why and present counter arguments.
- You can leave the discussion (or the room) at any time when you no longer feel comfortable dealing with a specific topic or question.
- There is no space for personal attacks or hate speech of any form.

Encourage students to think critically and explore different perspectives on the issues represented in the fragments. Rather than take what the witnesses say at face value, students should try to locate the witness' statements in the relevant historical and political context to better understand the implications and to empathize with the witnesses. During the discussion rounds, keep track of time and inform students when it is time to move on to the next discussion leader.
If you would like, you can propose that each group spends a few minutes summarizing their discussion at the end. This can be done through an interactive tool for brainstorming called Trello.

Step 3: Creating Mind Maps (40 mins)

Informed by discussion rounds, each group will make a Mind Map with the question *What makes you angry about the world today?* at the centre and branches featuring concepts, such as *colonialism*, *social justice*, *environment* and *education*, from the fragments they watched. Within each branch, they can list specific concerns that the witnesses express in the fragments, real world examples and their responses to the fragments during the discussion rounds. If using electronic devices, they can use a tool like Miro to create the mind maps.

After completing their mind maps, give the groups a few minutes to prepare to present them. In a plenary session with the whole class, each group presents their mind map.

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Step 4: Conclusion (15 mins)

At the end of the mind map presentations, facilitate a plenary discussion replying to the question: *What makes you angry about the world today? And why?*

From here, you can choose from two options: continue the plenary discussion using the following guiding questions or choose the alternative activity below.

- What common themes do you think run through all of the fragments we watched?
- How do the issues discussed in the fragments influence your life or the lives of people around you?
- What steps do you think you can take to address these issues? What can those in positions of power do?
- What historical events do you think these issues might be rooted in? How do they continue to affect people today?
- How do the witnesses engage with present-day challenges in the democratic system?
- How does the historical context of each of the fragments colour the witness' perspective of current events or today's society at large?

Alternative activity: Acting Exercise (1 hour)

Each group can choose an issue that stands out from their mind map and develop a short play in which they act out how they would deal with or respond to that issue. Each play should be about 5 minutes long and should be performed in front of the class.

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Learning Activity 2: Looking at the Past and Present

Elli Clerides, Carolina Santillano, Eugenie Khatschatrian
EuroClio - European Association for History Educators

To hook students' interest, you can start with asking your students the question *What makes you angry about the world today?* They can share their first thoughts, ideas and feelings in plenary, individually, in pairs or in small groups. Then, you can jointly watch the Narrative.

Learning Activity: Looking at the Past and Present
Age Group: 14 - 17 years old
Duration: 2 hours 50 mins
Materials: Support material *How to interview?* (Annex 3), fragments and short biographies of witnesses (Annex 1), and the Narrative for the question *What makes you angry about the world today?* Optional: Electronic devices (iPad, Computer, Mobile). You will find the text of the fragments in Annex 2.

Fragments

Fragment 1: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)
Fragment 2: Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)
Fragment 3: Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)
Fragment 4: Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)
Fragment 5: Željko Rogina (Croatia)

Learning Outcomes:

Throughout this activity, students will:

- Analyse fragments, identifying emotions and concepts that relate to the student's current understanding of similar issues;

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- search new sources of information to discover how people in students' surroundings feel or respond to current issues around democracy;
- compare significant social and historical issues with viewpoints of contemporary situations by conducting interviews with people in students' lives.

Step 1: Preparing the activity (30 mins)

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 depending on the class size and assign each group one of the fragments. Instruct each group to watch its assigned fragment carefully, while each student within the group takes notes individually. Encourage students to take notes on the following aspects of the fragment:

- Emotions of the witness and of students themselves as they watch
- Main issues/themes discussed by the witness
- Historical context
- Any questions that come up while watching

Within their groups, have students share their thoughts based on the notes they took, starting a discussion and working together to analyse the fragment using these guiding questions:

- What is the witness talking about?
- What do you already know about the situation?
- How does the fragment make you feel? What emotions come up as you watch, and why?
- What questions do you have after watching it? What would you like to understand more deeply?

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Step 2: Research (40 mins)

Next, each group conducts research on social media and in the news to find similar sentiments as those being expressed in the fragment. Through this research, students should aim to:

- Find whether these situations/sentiments still exist today in their own geopolitical context. It will likely be easier to find information from their own country and in their own language.
- Compare how things were then and how they are now (in terms of what the political situation is and how people feel about it and discuss it).
- Find out if the ideas expressed in the fragments are shared by more people. This does not mean that they need to find examples of people expressing identical opinions. They should aim to find underlying similarities in people's opinions about the big-picture issues discussed in the fragments.
    - For example, Jeangu Macrooy discusses how Dutch colonialism in Suriname contributed to a large wealth disparity between the countries. Students could find examples of this issue being discussed in a different context, such as with Belgium and its former colonies.

Then, have each group prepare 3-5 interview questions based on the fragment and the outputs of their research. One of the questions should be *What makes you angry about the world today?.* To help them prepare the interview questions, you can share the *How to Interview?* document with your students (Annex 3).

Once the interview questions have been established, each student selects someone to interview. This can be an adult or a peer that they know personally. Try to make sure that no one in the class interviews the same person. The interviews will be conducted separately by each student. Once this has been decided, each group should agree on a format in which to present their work to the rest of the class. The options are to create a video, a podcast, a visual representation such as a poster or artwork or to write an essay.

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Step 3: Conducting the Interview (Homework)

Students will then individually conduct the interviews on their own time with the selected people using the questions they prepared as a group. Encourage your students to once again refer to the *How to Interview?* document for advice on how to conduct the interview.

Step 4: Preparing Presentations (50 mins; assign any unfinished work as homework)

During the next class period, the groups meet to discuss the findings from their interviews. Each student will share the main points from the interview they conducted. Then, the group will work together to analyse these main points and find common and diverging perspectives while starting to develop the content of the final product. Students then create their final product in the agreed upon format. It should compare and contrast the findings from their initial research with the findings from the interviews they conducted.

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Step 5: Presentations and Final Discussion (50 mins)

Presentations: 35 minutes
Final Discussion: 15 minutes

Students present their work to the class, with each group having 7 minutes to present (you can adjust the time depending on how many groups there are and how long the class is). Following the presentations, guide a discussion in plenary that will help students reflect on the presentations and their overall thoughts. You can use the following guiding discussion questions:

- What are the most common themes or emotions that emerged across different fragments and interviews?
- What did you learn from comparing the witness' sentiments with the feelings from the people in your surroundings?
- Have your perspectives/sentiments on the discussed topics changed after hearing other groups' presentations?
- Has your answer to the question *What makes you angry about the world today?* changed? Do you resonate with some of your classmates' answers?

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Annex 1: Short Biographies of Witnesses for Activity 1 and Activity 2

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (35) was born and raised in Cuba. As a kid she was part of the Pioneros de la Batalla de Ideas, a protest movement organised by Fidel Castro in 1999 for the return of Elián González. She has a Master in Communication from the University of Havana. In Cuba she worked for the national radio and television since the age of 10. She settled in Belgium in 2015 after leaving Cuba for the first time for a trip around the world with Up with People, an American non-profit organisation. She lives in Antwerp with her 3 children and works as a digital marketeer.

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (79) is a retired psychologist and family therapist from Portugal. From an anti-dictatorship family, she went into exile in Paris, France, in 1964, with her boyfriend, who was escaping the mandatory military recruitment for the Portuguese war in the African colonies. She returned to Portugal in 1975, a year after the democratic revolution. She fought for the rights of institutionalised young people and for women's sexual health rights in a country in transition from the conservative Catholic context of the dictatorship.

Jeangu Macrooy

Jeangu Macrooy (30) is a singer and songwriter. When he came to the Netherlands at the age of 20 in search for more freedom, he was struck by the difference in prosperity compared to his homeland Suriname, and the lack of awareness that it stems from the Dutch colonial past. He was shocked to find out that Keti Koti, the celebration of the abolition of slavery, was only celebrated by a small group of people. He represented the Netherlands at the Eurovision Song Contest with a protest song about slavery, partly sang in Sranantongo, which got mixed responses.

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Slobodanka Moravčević

Slobodanka Moravčević (47) is Serbian and Belgian. She grew up in the part of former Yugoslavia that later became the Republic of Serbia. Slobodanka stayed in Belgrade during the Yugoslav Wars. As a student she was an active member of OTPOR, a nonviolent protest movement against the Milošević-controlled Serbian authorities. After living in Mexico for some time she met her current Belgian husband in 2014 and migrated to Belgium. Slobodanka currently works as a lecturer of Serbo-Croatian language at the University of Ghent. She is an orthodox Christian.

Željko Rogina

Željko Rogina (65) grew up in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia, where he still lives. He is a retired teacher of philosophy, ethics and logic. He was admitted to the Union of Communist as a high school student, but disappointed by the conflicts within the party leadership, and the national rhetoric, he resigned in 1990 and decided not to be involved in politics anymore. During the changes in Croatia he joined the army as a volunteer and served until June 1992. When his unit was deployed to the battlefields in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he decided to return and take up his work at school.

Annex 2: Text Fragments for Activity 1 and Activity 2

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)	And we always felt, while Fidel Castro is there, then everything is going to be fine. He's going to save us. He will. But what when Fidel Castro is no longer there. He's a human being, he has to die at some point. I think for a long time we ignored that reality. Fidel Castro is going to be there all our lives. And he's going to want to fix everything because he's a very smart person. And he makes mistakes

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	sometimes, but he can correct everything, he can make everything right. And at some point he was no longer there. And then the improvisation began. And then people lost faith that everything was going to be okay. We don't have that anymore in Cuba. For me, it was very tough the last time I was there last year. I told you about the positive vibe of the Cubans, who are always cheerful. I didn't see that last time in Cuba, for the first time in so many years. And we have had even more difficult times in Cuba. In the 1990s, I would say it was even more difficult than now. But we had Fidel Castro. We had hope. And the Cubans have lost that now. They have no hope left. And you cannot live without hope, without being able to look forward. And they can't look forward anymore, it's just too hard. And because it's like this now, I feel that people are just saying: we're going to take to the streets, we're going to protest. Something has to change, now! I see it coming.
Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)	Well... I think my concerns are social rather than personal. To think that we live in a society which could be altogether different, and that laws aren't being passed to change that, it's a scandal. How come we don't have better laws? How come...How can there be such a gap between starvation wages and big money? And the gap keeps widening in Portugal. You only need look at the most expensive cars and how many we have here. And post-Covid, banking profits have increased. How come we don't have laws to stop that? And how come a socialist majority in parliament can't pass those laws? And won't? We need to fight to change our country, so that it provides a better living for all. I mean higher levels of happiness and less social inequality. Not that I think people have stopped, there are relevant fights being fought. I think democracy is also made

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	up of culture. And on that front, we need to survey what the institutions and the media are doing, so that we foster a renewed culture of political curiosity and engagement.
Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)	I don't think that is fair because my ancestors worked on the plantations. They were bleeding, because they were mistreated. Out of that soil grew crops that brought a lot of wealth. And I also sing in the second part about being here, walking around. Gold is a metaphor for prosperity and development. I am also confronted in the Netherlands with how rich and prosperous the Netherlands is, and how well things are regulated here. And knowing that much of that wealth comes from colonialism, from slave trade, from plantations in Suriname was very confronting. Also when I think about the connection between Suriname and the Netherlands. On paper, Surinamese are actually foreigners now and are treated that way when you look at the visa policy, for example.
Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)	When my rights, my human rights, were not respected enough, then I felt I had to do something. That was in November 1996, when Milošević stole the elections, but maybe he just tweaked the numbers a bit. And that was just, no, that's not right. That can't be. We had this kind of..., okay, you had TV, you had all the media, you had all the opportunities to get many votes. And still, people said no to you. And now? We had to do something. I was 18 at the time. I started university around 18, 19. I remember the first time that I heard this news. Other people heard it too...and we spontaneously wanted to go out to say 'come on it's really not

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	good'. I remember, I had a course in Old Slavic languages, that was November, the academic year in Serbia started at the end of October. That was maybe my first or second week of my studies as a first-year student. I just went out and then the professor came. He asked me: 'Where are you going my lady?' I thought that was normal for the academic world, for the people who are so ... 'Yes, I'm going to the demonstration.' 'Against whom?' 'Against Milošević'. He acted like that. This man was a member of Milošević's party and he asked me: 'What is your name'? I told him. And he: 'I'll remember'. Yes, that really...And he did it. I had so much trouble to pass my exam. I was one of 18 people who were there. Many of them later became leaders of the student movement and then politicians, like Ceda Jovanović and others. For me, it was like with Kalimero, when he says: 'this is really not correct'. I have to say, this is not correct. And since that day, I was always on the street. And my brother too. He studied medicine. He was also head of his faculty movement. Then my dad joined and he was also involved with OTPOR. Yes, as a family, we were just so busy with...demonstrations against undemocracy, against Milošević, against the war, against all those things. And for that reason, we had to pay a prize. Not just me with my exam. That was probably not so important. But my brother could never specialise. And that is of course important. And he was one of the best students. One of the first ten students with his grades. And he wanted to study surgery. But he couldn't specialise. He also couldn't stay in Belgrade. My dad couldn't work anymore. There was a kind of mafia that came. We lost so much...money and all things, because of having an opinion. But okay, our idea was that that was right.

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Željko Rogina (Croatia)	A system inspired by Nordic countries with a strong welfare state and, a progressive tax rate where the wealthiest would contribute the most to social needs, we did not get that. I also believed that we would have a rule of law. To this day, we still do not have a state governed by the rule of law, and now we are not talking about it. From countless examples it is evident that if some poor soul breaks a window and steals 5 packs of cigarettes, he will quickly end up in prison. If some businessman or minister steals millions of euros, then, of course, not only will he not end up in prison,... but he will... he might possibly be banned from politics for a while, and he will still be a respected citizen, he will open a private business.

Annex 3: How to interview?

How to Interview?

The main objective of interviews is to gather as much information as possible from the participants, but an interview is not simply asking questions and receiving answers. An interview is an elaborate research method, and you should aim to establish a conversation with the participant.

What questions to ask?

- Keep in mind that an interview script is an orientation document. It should include all the topics you need to cover during the interview and all the information you want to gather, but your participant might answer more than one question at the same time.

- To prepare for the interview, it might help to **give different priority to the questions** and **organise the questions** according to an order, for example chronologically.

- The interviewer must actively listen and engage in the conversation instead of only asking the questions.

- **Be mindful and respect boundaries.** The participant might not want to discuss specific topics or get emotional during the interview. Keep in mind that participants have the right not to answer specific questions or call off the interview if it is too hard for them.

Some **tips** on how to prepare the interview script:

1. Ask **open-ended questions**

If a question can be answered with yes/no or only one word, rephrase it in a way that requires a more detailed answer.

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2. Ask **follow-up questions.**

If the participant mentions something interesting that you did not consider in your questions, don't be scared to ask for more information and ask them to explain further what they mean. Do not be scared not to understand all their answers, and ask for explanations or more information.

3. Keep **questions brief.**

Do not draft questions longer than two lines. Make them shorter and concise, so it is clear what kind of answer you expect. Otherwise, you risk the participant beating around the bush.

4. **Rephrase a question** if the participant evades a question.

Sometimes, people do not want to talk about specific topics when asked directly. So think about how you can indirectly ask the difficult questions.

5. Politely **challenge the participant.**

If you want to know their opinion about specific controversial topics, you can challenge them to get a reaction.

6. **Embrace pauses and silence,** and allow participants to answer at their own pace.

Leave them space to think and reflect. This is not an easy topic to discuss, so they might need time to think about an answer.

7. **Take notes** during the interview.

You should write keywords for each answer and also follow-up questions.

8. **Avoid generalising.**

Some participants may be hesitant to discuss certain aspects of their experience, while others may be more willing to share. Let them share their story in their own words.

9. **Try not to make assumptions.**

Recognise that every participant has had a different experience, maybe at other points in their healing process. Try not to assume something has already taken place or that the participant may feel a certain way.

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Learning Activity 3: Maps of Anger

Hanna Zielinska and Marjolein Delvou
Evens Foundation

Learning Activity: Map of Anger
Age Group: 14 - 17 years old
Duration: 2 x 45 min (the first activity can be done independently)
Materials: Flipchart paper, markers, fragments, Narrative for the question *What makes you angry about the world today?*, text fragments (Annex 5), and short biographies of the witnesses (Annex 4).

Learning Outcomes:

Through this activity, students will:

- Reflect on the state of democracy and its influence on our lives;
- become familiar with multiple perspectives on democracy from people in different countries who experienced a systemic change;
- engage in intergenerational dialogue about democracy;
- understand the power we have to shape democracy.

Fragments

Fragment 1: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)
Fragment 2: Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)
Fragment 3: Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)
Fragment 4: Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)
Fragment 5: Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)
Fragment 6: Andrés Ruiz Grima (Spain)
Fragment 7: Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)
Fragment 8: Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)

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Fragment 9: Željko Rogina (Croatia)
Fragment 10: Željko Rogina (Croatia)
Fragment 11: Maria Filomena Manuel (Portugal)
Fragment 12: Petros Pizanias (Greece)

Step 1: Welcome (1 min)

Depending on your group, you can either start right away with the question or briefly frame the activity.

Step 2: Reflection (7 min)

Invite students to a short individual reflection moment by asking them: *What makes you angry about the world today?* Give them a few minutes to reflect and prepare their answers. Reassure your group that it can be different things, anything that comes to their minds that makes them feel angry about the world, whether it's their closest surrounding and/or more global issues (2 min).

Encourage students to share their responses, then collect main topics on a whiteboard together (5 min).

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Step 3: Listening to other voices (22 min)

Tell your students what they're about to see: a selection of fragments from witnesses of the systemic changes that happened in the recent past in parts of Europe and beyond. Before showing the Narrative for Q1, ask your students to stay focused and write down all words, ideas, images, sensations and impressions that came up while watching each fragment (10 min).

After the screening, open the sharing round and ask your students: Which fragment resonates with you/triggered you most and why (7 min)?

After the sharing round, check the whiteboard again and sum up and add issues that upset or revolted the witnesses in another colour. As a result, your board becomes a **map of anger** (5 min).

Step 4: Zooming out (15 min)

In order to get an image of what could happen if this anger or these emotions are not taken care of, invite your students to look at the map of anger and ask: What are the consequences if nothing is being done about it? For you, for your community, for your society? Students might come up with things that are already happening as well as things that might happen in the future. You can include anything. E.g. If you have "poverty" on the map of anger, consequences could be "loneliness and isolation" or "growing tensions in society." While listening to students, take notes on another board, drafting a **map of (potential) consequences.** Make sure your students notice that the map of anger and the map of consequences interplay and reinforce each other. For example, "racism" can be both a cause and consequence of anger (10 min).

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If you have another lesson together, you can just pause here to let your students stay with their feelings and impressions until you meet again.

If it's the only lesson that you have for the activity, continue with the following debrief to wrap it up:

- Briefly summarise the main take-aways from the lesson. Remind your students that you departed from a point of anger at systemic shortages (that could have different shades/manifestations) and you named their consequences.
- Now ask your students either:

    - 1) What is needed to deal with these consequences (the ones that do not serve society)? Ask each student to reply in one word and come up to another student to indicate who is sharing next.
    - OR 2) To take markers and put a red dot next to the consequence that affects them most and a green one next to one that they believe they can counteract/challenge (5 min).

Optional: Activity 4

Remind your students what you ended with last time, re-introduce the map of anger and the map of consequences.

Material: Fragments and short biographies of witnesses.

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Step 5: Channelling your anger (40 min) - group work and presentation

For this activity, ask students to choose which fragment they would like to start from (they can also choose a fragment that was not chosen in the first part of the activity). Then ask students to join their peers who picked the same fragment and form duos and/or small groups. When the groups are ready, explain the task: based on the chosen fragment, students first discuss among themselves what exactly this fragment evokes, what they are angry about and what they would highlight. Then, they design/develop/perform a small act of courage together that portrays their shared anger. They are invited to "take the floor"[1] and do something. That act will be their own expression of the problem that moved them. Explain that their act of courage might take any form they want: a micro-action, a statement, a gesture, a happening, a theatre element. For example, students could disseminate a quote in the school space in un-obvious spots or invite the rest of the class to create a silent figure of "racism" out of their bodies. Be careful and adapt to the group's needs: if your students get the instruction easily, do not use (too many) examples so as not to jeopardise their creativity. If you see that the group does not feel confident about the task, offer some examples to encourage them to think outside the box. Offer extra materials to support their work (bios of the witnesses, historical context sheets) and some hints to begin the process with, laid out below.

Tricks for starters:

When preparing your act of courage take into account the following questions. You can write them on the board or print little cards and disseminate among groups/duos.

1. What do we want to say?
2. Where do we want to say it?
3. How do we want to say it? ("how" integrates "what" and "where")

[1] This activity is based on the work of: Guimarães (S.) & Reis (R.),Take the floor. Performing with non-fictional material: Portuguese voices and words in the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

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While the duos/small groups are working, keep wandering around, offering support if needed. Important: they are not supposed to look for solutions to serious social problems that were just named, but find their way to picture/express what struck them most. The very crucial thing is that students feel empowered to speak their mind and invent an act of courage that can go beyond traditional forms of activities they are used to at school (30 min).

Make sure you have time for each small group to perform or present their act of courage (10 min).

Step 6: Debrief (5 min)

Invite students to sit in a circle and choose a question that would be the most appropriate for your group to shortly reflect on the experience. Make sure that each student who wants to share has this possibility. Pose a question and encourage your students to reply. Here are some examples:

- What was the most challenging for you in performing/planning your act of courage?
- What did performing/watching today's acts of courage give you?
- If you could take one thought/impression/feeling that came to you during today's activity - what would it be?

In the debrief you might also discuss why certain fragments were not chosen.

Suggestion for a longer project: What's the history of your anger?

If you are inspired by the questions and the activities and you have the possibility to work on it for a longer time, you could engage your students in historical research about the cause of their anger. Mind that this is not an introspective activity. It should be prepared and presented as a research project where you invite your students to explore the issue that makes them angry from a historical perspective.

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1. Locate your anger in time and space: Invite your students to identify/list moments or episodes in history when people were moved by a similar issue as the one that makes you angry.
2. Brief historical exploration: Invite your students to choose one moment or episode they would like to know more about. After identifying the episode(s) to look into, suggest using the following questions to start this historical exploration: What do I already know about this specific moment in time? What do I want to know? What did I learn (e.g. if a student is revolted by poverty, s/he could explore an episode in history that mirrors this anger, when it moved people to do something, e.g. French revolution).

Annex 4: Short Biographies of Witnesses for Activity 3

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (35) was born and raised in Cuba. As a kid she was part of the Pioneros de la Batalla de Ideas, a protest movement organised by Fidel Castro in 1999 for the return of Elián González. She has a Master in Communication from the University of Havana. In Cuba she worked for the national radio and television since the age of 10. She settled in Belgium in 2015 after leaving Cuba for the first time for a trip around the world with Up with People, an American non-profit organisation. She lives in Antwerp with her 3 children and works as a digital marketeer.

Slobodanka Moravčević

Slobodanka Moravčević (47) is Serbian and Belgian. She grew up in the part of former Yugoslavia that later became the Republic of Serbia. Slobodanka stayed in Belgrade during the Yugoslav Wars. As a student she was an active member of OTPOR, a nonviolent protest movement against the Milošević-controlled Serbian authorities. After living in Mexico for some time she met her current Belgian husband in 2014 and migrated to Belgium. Slobodanka currently works as a lecturer of Serbo-Croatian language at the University of Ghent. She is an orthodox Christian.

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Lucia Bartošová

Lucia Bartošová (50) was born in Bratislava, at that time Czechoslovakia. She was actively involved in the student protests during the autumn of 1989. She witnessed negotiations between students and the management about rules in her high school during the Velvet Revolution. She studied Pharmacy at the University of Bratislava in the early 90s. Her first experience with the West was when she worked as an au-pair in Aurich near Stuttgart in 1993. She decided to move to the Czech Republic in 1999.

Petros Pizanias

Petros Pizanias (77), Emeritus Professor at the Ionian University, was born in Athens, Greece, in the neighbourhood of Gargaretta, in 1947. During the dictatorship he carried out some acts of resistance. To be able to breathe he fled to France when he was 20 years old. In Paris he became a member of esistance groups against the Greek dictatorship. He studied Sociology and History. When he came back to Greece he was a very active member of a leftist political party. Nowadays he writes articles on the current political situation and the quality of democracy.

Andrés Ruiz Grima

Andrés Ruiz Grima from Spain (73) is retired and working occasionally as a sailboat sailor. He was imprisoned in his 20 for his activism against the Franco regime and has also been involved in Yayoflautas (Grandpas and Grandmas organisation) within the 15M-indignados movement (2011) and the Catalan independentist rise (2017). Close to anarchist ideas, he does not vote and is in favour of participatory democracy.

Željko Rogina

Željko Rogina (65) grew up in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia, where he still lives. He is a retired teacher of philosophy, ethics and logic. He was admitted to the Union of Communist as a high school student, but disappointed by the conflicts within the party leadership, and the national rhetoric, he resigned in 1990 and decided not to be involved in politics anymore. During the changes in Croatia he joined

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the army as a volunteer and served until June 1992. When his unit was deployed to the battlefields in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he decided to return and take up his work at school.

Juozas Malickas

Juozas Malickas (52), is a Lithuanian history teacher. He uses his life story to bridge Lithuania's past & present. Raised across Lithuania, he emigrated to the US for 20 years before returning to Lithuania in 2020. Juozas offers a firsthand perspective on Soviet vs. post-independence Lithuania, also highlighting the shift from a restricted small town to the dynamic Vilnius of today.

Amir Mohammadi

Amir Mohammadi (39) came to the Netherlands in 2016 as a refugee from Iran. He did not receive a residence permit, but he could not return either and therefore lived in the shadows as an undocumented person for 6 years. In the end, he did get a residence permit. Amir knows better than anyone what it is like to have no rights.

Jeangu Macrooy

Jeangu Macrooy (30) is a singer and songwriter. When he came to the Netherlands at the age of 20 in search for more freedom, he was struck by the difference in prosperity compared to his homeland Suriname, and the lack of awareness that it stems from the Dutch colonial past. He was shocked to find out that Keti Koti, the celebration of the abolition of slavery, was only celebrated by a small group of people. He represented the Netherlands at the Eurovision Song Contest with a protest song about slavery, partly sang in Sranantongo, which got mixed responses.

Maria Filomena Manuel

Maria Filomena Manuel (62) was born in Angola and migrated to Portugal in 1976 (two years after the democratic revolution). She witnessed the important changes in the Portuguese democratic regime. She founded a collective where she has her restaurant. “Filó" is a meeting place for migrants from African

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countries, students and people with low incomes. The Filó COCHILÓ association is a safe space, where migrants, with or without papers, coming from Angola, Mozambique or Cape Verde find a place to hang out, discuss and eat.

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (79) is a retired psychologist and family therapist from Portugal. From an anti-dictatorship family, she went into exile in Paris, France, in 1964, with her boyfriend, who was escaping the mandatory military recruitment for the Portuguese war in the African colonies. She returned to Portugal in 1975, a year after the democratic revolution. She fought for the rights of institutionalised young people and for women's sexual health rights in a country in transition from the conservative Catholic context of the dictatorship.

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Annex 5: Text Fragments for Activity 3

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)	And we always felt, while Fidel Castro is there, then everything is going to be fine. He's going to save us. He will. But what when Fidel Castro is no longer there. He's a human being, he has to die at some point. I think for a long time we ignored that reality. Fidel Castro is going to be there all our lives. And he's going to want to fix everything because he's a very smart person. And he makes mistakes sometimes, but he can correct everything, he can make everything right. And at some point he was no longer there. And then the improvisation began. And then people lost faith that everything was going to be okay. We don't have that anymore in Cuba. For me, it was very tough the last time I was there last year. I told you about the positive vibe of the Cubans, who are always cheerful. I didn't see that last time in Cuba, for the first time in so many years. And we have had even more difficult times in Cuba. In the 1990s, I would say it was even more difficult than now. But we had Fidel Castro. We had hope. And the Cubans have lost that now. They have no hope left. And you cannot live without hope, without being able to look forward. And they can't look forward anymore, it's just too hard. And because it's like this now, I feel that people are just saying: we're going to take to the streets, we're going to protest. Something has to change, now! I see it coming.

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Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)	Well... I think my concerns are social rather than personal. To think that we live in a society which could be altogether different, and that laws aren't being passed to change that, it's a scandal. How come we don't have better laws? How come...How can there be such a gap between starvation wages and big money? And the gap keeps widening in Portugal. You only need look at the most expensive cars and how many we have here. And post-Covid, banking profits have increased. How come we don't have laws to stop that? And how come a socialist majority in parliament can't pass those laws? And won't? We need to fight to change our country, so that it provides a better living for all. I mean higher levels of happiness and less social inequality. Not that I think people have stopped, there are relevant fights being fought. I think democracy is also made up of culture. And on that front, we need to survey what the institutions and the media are doing, so that we foster a renewed culture of political curiosity and engagement.

Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)	I lived in the USA for a long time. I never accepted that being homeless is okay. It always scared me to see homeless people, to see people without healthcare or losing their homes because they get sick, I can't justify that in America. It's just not right. As I understand it, if a person ends up on the street, something must have gone very wrong for them. Some say that a person lives on the street because they chose to, that they consciously decided to live that way. But if someone consciously chooses to live on the street, there is something wrong with their mind. They are not not psychologically healthy. They need help, not abandonment on the street. I myself have worked with mentally ill people from birth. And let's look at nature—even the smallest animal seeks shelter, it doesn't go to the street and

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	stay there. Our unwillingness to help, when we justify it by saying they chose this life, is really just us not wanting to help. Even seeing this in the States, I never...It was like a knife in my heart, I always noticed the problem. It wasn't like I walked past and didn't see.

Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)	I'm disappointed in the Netherlands that many undocumented people are on the street. Yes, 100% I'm disappointed. But I'm more disappointed in politics, in some of the political parties. They could see the suffering of the people in the Netherlands. They are already sleep under the bridges. 30,000 in Amsterdam, same amount of people in Rotterdam. The rest of the Netherlands, I don't know how many undocumented. They usually come in these two areas to be able to get some help. So how, as a political party, you dare to shout ‘’I'm supporting refugees’’. You left them on the street and you're opening the borders and you're bringing some new people there. You know, that has disappointed me more. I said we are struggling with the huge problem of the people are in the Netherlands and suffering, You're just ignoring them, you're banning them from all those the social services and the things they can have and just looking for and say Oh, you have to keep the border open and bring more people and these people are also getting rejected and also become undocumented. So that was a huge cheat by the political parties in 2021 that they choose. I'm happy that the government collapsed.

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Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)	I don't think that is fair because my ancestors worked on the plantations. They were bleeding, because they were mistreated. Out of that soil grew crops that brought a lot of wealth. And I also sing in the second part about being here, walking around. Gold is a metaphor for prosperity and development. I am also confronted in the Netherlands with how rich and prosperous the Netherlands is, and how well things are regulated here. And knowing that much of that wealth comes from colonialism, from slave trade, from plantations in Suriname was very confronting. Also when I think about the connection between Suriname and the Netherlands. On paper, Surinamese are actually foreigners now and are treated that way when you look at the visa policy, for example.

Andrés Ruiz Grima (Spain)	The state, the democratic state legitimizes itself through votes every x years. But then, if you want to question the policy it is doing, that has nothing to do with what they promised to win your vote., and you go out into the streets to demonstrate, then the police attacks you and criminalizes you. Not the one who has provoked that concentration or that demonstration for non-compliance with laws. Not to mention, I mean, what's happening with unemployment, what's happening with housing, what's happening with health. They are stealing everything from us in a democracy. A comrade, I remember someone once said, he says: “Everything they said that communism was going to do, capitalism is doing it and you do nothing”. "But", I would say to people: “But what do you really have?” Apart from a mortgage, what do you have?

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Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)	When my rights, my human rights, were not respected enough, then I felt I had to do something. That was in November 1996, when Milošević stole the elections, but maybe he just tweaked the numbers a bit. And that was just, no, that's not right. That can't be. We had this kind of..., okay, you had TV, you had all the media, you had all the opportunities to get many votes. And still, people said no to you. And now? We had to do something. I was 18 at the time. I started university around 18, 19. I remember the first time that I heard this news. Other people heard it too...and we spontaneously wanted to go out to say 'come on it's really not good'. I remember, I had a course in Old Slavic languages, that was November, the academic year in Serbia started at the end of October. That was maybe my first or second week of my studies as a first-year student. I just went out and then the professor came. He asked me: 'Where are you going my lady?' I thought that was normal for the academic world, for the people who are so ... 'Yes, I'm going to the demonstration.' 'Against whom?' 'Against Milošević'. He acted like that. This man was a member of Milošević's party and he asked me: 'What is your name'? I told him. And he: 'I'll remember'. Yes, that really...And he did it. I had so much trouble to pass my exam. I was one of 18 people who were there. Many of them later became leaders of the student movement and then politicians, like Ceda Jovanović and others. For me, it was like with Kalimero, when he says: 'this is really not correct'. I have to say, this is not correct. And since that day, I was always on the street. And my brother too. He studied medicine. He was also head of his faculty movement. Then my dad joined and he was also involved with OTPOR. Yes, as a family, we were just so busy with...demonstrations against undemocracy, against Milošević, against the war, against all those things. And for that reason, we had to pay a prize. Not just me with my exam. That was probably not so important. But my brother could never specialise. And that is of course important.

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	And he was one of the best students. One of the first ten students with his grades. And he wanted to study surgery. But he couldn't specialise. He also couldn't stay in Belgrade. My dad couldn't work anymore. There was a kind of mafia that came. We lost so much...money and all things, because of having an opinion. But okay, our idea was that that was right.

Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)	Well, just like from my point of view... I take it that it's exactly the people who got angry, the ordinary people, that they were fed up and they decided to make a change. People were angry because they were just beating up students and they took it personally, like if it their kids got beaten up. And in the end, they did care. They took to the streets in these cold days and they just said, well, that's not the way...

Željko Rogina (Croatia)	A system inspired by Nordic countries with a strong welfare state and, a progressive tax rate where the wealthiest would contribute the most to social needs, we did not get that. I also believed that we would have a rule of law. To this day, we still do not have a state governed by the rule of law, and now we are not talking about it. From countless examples it is evident that if some poor soul breaks a window and steals 5 packs of cigarettes, he will quickly end up in prison. If some businessman or minister steals millions of euros, then, of course, not only will he not end up in prison,... but he will... he might possibly be banned from politics for a while, and he will still be a respected citizen, he will open a private business.

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Željko Rogina (Croatia)	On the other hand, I am irritated by those who say that it was a dark age. The age of complete totalitarianism, dictatorship. We were all in the camp for a while. Interestingly, those who were in the camp or in that communist darkness...ended up finishing school, studied in that system at the expense of society, living clearly in state-owned campus homes almost for free, many had scholarships, after that they got a job, most of them got social housing, so they didn't buy them but lived at the expense of society. Perhaps to illustrate this economic equality or inequality, how situations were handled and how people were employed in the society back then, one of my close relatives, was a chronic alcoholic...in a construction company, he operated an excavator, bulldozer, quite a responsible job, then he would come drunk, and than be absent from work for 5-6 days, then they didn't know what to do with him, sometimes he would show up, sometimes not. Of course, in today's market economy, the employer would fire him immediately, and rightfully so. Back then, the workers' council, director, and supervisors would meet, then colleagues would persuade him to seek treatment, then they would send him to Vrapče to the psychiatric hospital for a month or two, then for a year he would be fine and things would start over. They didn't know what to do with him, so they just kept him there. Of course, productivity was low because of that, as he was redundant there, but he had two children at home, a wife, and how could they all of a sudden become a social case. In other words, in that system, a worker was not a commodity. What is now called labor force that can be used and discarded when not needed.

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Maria Filomena Manuel (Portugal)	Because money rules. Dishonesty rules. Not the reality of anyone who has to masquerade in order to make an impression. Is that freedom? No. People have to masquerade to make an impression... and to go about the world. We still live in a masquerade! Because nowadays you can't say black, you can't say negro... You can't... You can't say he's gay, she's a dyke, whatever...And so there are covers to serve as camouflage and people live under those covers, and you can't tell whether someone is honest or not. Just like with money. Money is money...It produces dishonesty. And people enter that farce as well. It's not as if... I can look at someone and know whether they're being honest with me. No, they're not. They're being dishonest. They look at me...I don't get that "good morning!" with a smile, only a "good morning" because they have to greet me, this woman they can't say 'is black' or offend... in any way. Deep down, when they declare that "there are rights for these folks!", "this must be done", that helps to camouflage things and we go on living a farce.

Petros Pizanias (Greece)	For the young people now, what I would have to say to them first is get angry, hit the streets, and if necessary, make noise. You are the biggest victims of the memoranda in a society that is rapidly deteriorating, and you will pay the cost either with a significant degradation of your life or with the coercion to emigrate somewhere just to live as human beings, nothing more. So get angry, get angry again, and hit the streets. There is no way to achieve anything without it. Proof from my own past, which is the past of the entire Greek society, democracy returned with the fall of the Junta, not because Karamanlis or Papandreou came here, but because millions of Greeks took to the streets. That's how it should be today.

Do you dare to challenge your teachers?

Learning Activity

Learning Activity: Comparing Testimonies

Annexes

Annex 1: Short biographies of witnesses
Annex 2: Text fragments
Annex 3: Student worksheet

Links

Fragments
Narrative for *Do you dare to challenge your teachers?*

CHANGING DEMOCRACIES
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Learning Activity
Comparing Testimonies

Bohumil Melichar and Václav Sixta

The following activity is based on a comparison between two testimonies of an eyewitness of socialist educational praxis at an ordinary school in Sejny in Poland and the Velvet Revolution at a high school in Bratislava (Czechoslovakia). Students analyse both sources and through this work, using an inquiry based method, discover the extent to which pupils of their age were able to experience democracy in a dictatorship and how much their power to influence the activities of the school changed during the revolution. In a concluding discussion, they jointly assess the extent to which the institution of the school can function democratically through a comparison of their own everyday experiences with the situation of students before and during the revolution.

Learning Activity: Comparing Testimonies
Age Group: 14 - 17 years old
Duration: 45-60 minutes
Materials: Whiteboard, student worksheet (Annex 3), projector, school smart devices or students' smartphones, fragments, Narrative, text fragments (Annex 2) and short biographies of witnesses (Annex 1).

Fragments:

Fragment 1: Krzysztof Tur (Poland)
Fragment 2: Krzysztof Tur (Poland)
Fragment 3: Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)
Fragment 4: Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)

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Learning Outcomes:

Through this activity, students will:

- Be able to describe the mechanism of ideological instrumentalization of education during the socialist dictatorship and the possibilities for students to influence teaching;
- discover how direct democracy took place in schools during the revolution;
- cultivate their historical consciousness and strengthen their competence to perceive historical change through the analysis and interpretation of testimonies;
- reflect on the degree of democratic participation in the school environment and strengthen their capacity for active citizenship;
- strengthen their ability to express complex ideas in peer discussions.

Step 1: Brainstorming (5 min)

- What situations or behavior do you imagine in relation to the phrase “challenge a teacher?”
- Can you recall any film or other work that addresses the conflict between students and teachers?

How you can organise the work

Open the activity with a question for all students: *Do you dare to challenge your teachers?* Students share different experiences and you record key messages on the board. The aim is to see what the students actually mean by "challenging a teacher". Pop culture and its images of teacher-student conflicts can also help. If a little more time can be devoted to the activity, the brainstorming session can be introduced by showing the Narrative for Q2 that presents the school experience of different witnesses who have lived through the transition between dictatorship and democracy.

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Step 2: Analyse and discuss source 1 (15 min)

Watch the witness accounts of Krzysztof Tur, read the information about schooling during socialism and the short witness biography and then answer the following questions:

- How does the witness evaluate socialist teaching? In your opinion, could a dissatisfied pupil have resisted the teaching described?
- Did the school help the witness understand how the world around him worked? What do you mean by “indoctrination”?
- What role did the teachers have in the teaching process? What do you think it means that education was controlled by the Communist Party?

Contextual information

The education of the socialist countries politically linked to the dominant Soviet Union was deliberately tied into the service of the ruling communist parties. The curriculum was designed to teach Marxist-Leninist ideology alongside academic competence and knowledge. A compulsory part of all levels of education was the teaching of the Russian language along with the geography and culture of the Soviet Union, which was intended to strengthen the belonging of Polish or Czechoslovak society to the USSR. Political topics were considered highly sensitive in teaching. Questioning them or discussing the merits of such topics between teachers and pupils was basically unthinkable.

How you can organise the work

Students can analyse the sources and answer the questions individually or in small groups. Play a recording of the witness narrative to the whole class and then allow time for students to work on their own. They may need to return to a particular fragment. We recommend handing out school mobile devices or allowing students to use their own smartphones. Provide students with a text transcript of the narrative, a short summary of the historical situation, and a biography of the witness. At the end of this step, invite students to share their answers, moderate any discussion and write the key findings on the whiteboard next to the brainstorming results.

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Step 3: Analyse and discuss source 2 (15 min)

Watch the witness accounts of Lucia Bartošová, read the information about schooling during socialism and the short witness biography and then answer the following questions:

- How did teachers' attitudes towards secondary school students change after the revolution in November 1989?
- What new rights did students gain during the autumn of 1989?
- What was the process of negotiating a greater degree of democracy in the school?
- How was such democracy to be manifested?

Contextual information

In November 1989, Lucia Bartošová was a first-year student at a grammar school in Bratislava. While the role played by university students in the early stages of the Velvet Revolution is often recalled, the activity of students in secondary schools is overshadowed. Yet these young people, used to a strongly hierarchical and undemocratic form of education, were often able to radically change the curriculum during student protests and to force the cessation of teaching unpopular subjects influenced by socialist ideology.

How you can organise the work

Organise the work in exactly the same way as for the analysis and interpretation of Source 1. We are concerned with the same operations of thinking, allowing us to compare the two sources and then describe the change in students' situation during socialism and the revolution.

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Step 4: Reflection (10 min)

Discuss the following questions:

1. Have you encountered a situation that reminds you of the situations in this lesson?
2. Is it acceptable to debate freely with a teacher in your school?
3. To what extent does the position of pupils in your school differ from the approach that witness described in Source 1?
4. To what extent does the position of pupils in your school differ from the role they acquired in Bratislava in the autumn of 1989?
5. What level of internal democracy should every school have?
6. Is it right for the curriculum to be influenced by pupils through voting?

How you can organise the work

The activity will end with a discussion based on a comparison of the situations of today's pupils and the two witnesses. This comparison will allow students to reflect on the limits of democracy and its role in the daily running of their school. The limited time of only ten minutes will probably not allow you to answer and discuss all six questions, so select a few of them. We recommend including questions 5 and 6 to engage the pupils in a discussion about the possibility of a democratic way of teaching. Ask the pupils or small teams to answer the questions you have chosen and give them some time to work on it. Then, moderate the discussion, having pupils answer in front of the whole class. Do not be afraid to let the students respond to each other. It is definitely worth inviting others to support their classmates' positions with further arguments or to try to refute them if they see things differently. Write any strong statements on the board and then conclude the discussion by summarizing the results of the debate. Ideally, you should reach a variety of opinions over the extent to which students can influence the teaching in school and where the boundaries of dictatorship and democracy lie on this particular issue.

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Annex 1: Short Biographies of Witnesses

Krzysztof Tur

Krzysztof Tur (57) is a Polish teacher and activist, member of the local government. Born in Sejny, on the Polish- Lithuanian borderland, left to study in Poznań and on the wave of changes came back to his hometown and started grassroots educational work in the diverse local community. As a teacher and school principal he raised the first generations of youngsters growing up in the new system and he continues to do so till today.

Lucia Bartošová

Lucia Bartošová (50) was born in Bratislava, at that time Czechoslovakia. She was actively involved in the student protests during the autumn of 1989. She witnessed negotiations between students and the management about rules in her high school during the Velvet Revolution. She studied Pharmacy at the University of Bratislava in the early 90s. Her first experience with the West was when she worked as an au-pair in Aurich near Stuttgart in 1993. She decided to move to the Czech Republic in 1999.

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Annex 2: Text fragments

Krzysztof Tur (Poland)	You asked about the world of birth, and I immediately contrast it with the colourful world that I knew, from those colourful, geographical magazines, which were the only ones available to me. And in there was no social-political world for a long, long time. It was an iron curtain literally, in everything. There was no environment that would open our eyes to it, us kids back then. And in school, as it is in school, yes, there was indoctrination, that's what you have to call it, and it was intense, like an academy, celebrations, of the October Revolution, May Day parades, and such brainwashing for children. Of course, I also took part. because I was pretty good at recitations, but rather subconsciously, you could feel a stiffness and some falseness in it. I think, I don't have some nice memories left in me from those events.

Krzysztof Tur (Poland)	These are the beginnings, where the school indoctrinated, the school falsified. I remember, when in the fifth grade Russian language became mandatory, there were teachers, lady teachers, who also had such Russian-sounding surnames. I don't know if they were of Russian origin, but it must have been as if everything was politically directed at the school level, that's what I think. I will keep those names in secret, because of course I remember, but I respect those old teachers of mine. Those Russian ladies didn't do anything bad to me, I owe them that I still somewhat understand Russian today, but it was unfortunately one of the tools of that indoctrination and falsification of the world.

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Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)	In 1989, I was 15, so I was actually starting high school. For the first three months of high school, it was still socialist, then there was a really rapid change after the revolution, after the November revolution. So everything changed at school. Simply the teachers' approach to us, what we wanted to learn, we could somehow influence it, they talked to us, there was actually a dialogue, as the principal, although ironically, he told us that we should have a dialogue if we wanted. But it was definitely everything better for me. Studying became more interesting, school was just great, we enjoyed it. We could even argue with the teachers, we could have disagreements like in the good way, we were not afraid of the teachers.

Lucia Bartošová (Czech Republic)	Yes. So mainly we were on strike, so there was no teaching. That was the first positive thing. The kids were absolutely thrilled that we actually went to school and in the cafeteria we were striking. We simply demanded dialogue, that we wanted to talk to the teachers. But it's true that mostly it was led by fourth graders, third graders, I was a first grader, so we were there as spectators, just watching what was happening, but it was fine. Actually, the principal was not afraid of the mass of children, he came there face to face and said that we should tell him what we wanted from him. And he tried to fulfill that. And he did. To change the curriculum, to make it more interesting, not to teach what nobody is interested in. For example, in geography, blind maps of the Soviet Union. We had to know how to sketch out where to excavate some raw materials and stuff, it was just bullshit. And Russian was optional, so actually different optional subjects started to be added. According to me, they started to add more optional subjects based on what each person wants to study at university, so they started to add more optional subjects.

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Annex 3: Student Worksheet

1) What do you think it means to "challenge your teachers"? You are currently sharing different opinions on this question in class. Record the most interesting observations. You can draw a mind map.

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2) Watch the witness account, read the information about schooling during socialism and a short bio of the witness and then answer the following questions.

How does the witness evaluate socialist teaching? In your opinion, could a dissatisfied pupil have resisted the teaching described?

Did the school help the witness understand how the world around him worked? What do you mean by “indoctrination”?

What role did the teachers have in the teaching process? What do you think it means that education was controlled by the Communist Party?

Return to witness record

Fragments

Who did we just hear?

Krzysztof Tur is a Polish teacher and activist, member of the local government. Born in Sejny, on the Polish- Lithuanian borderland, left to study in Poznań and on the wave of changes came back to his home town and started a grassroots educational work in the diverse local community. As a teacher and school principal he raised the first generations of youngsters growing up in the new system and he continues to do so till today.

Information on socialist education

The education of the socialist countries politically linked to the dominant Soviet Union was deliberately tied into the service of the ruling communist parties. The curriculum was designed to teach. A compulsory part of all levels of education was the teaching of the Russian language along with the geography and culture of the Soviet Union, which was intended to strengthen the belonging of Polish or Czechoslovak society to the USSR. Questioning this or discussing the merits of such topics between teachers and pupils was basically unthinkable.

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3) Watch the witness account, read the information about schooling during socialism and a short bio of the witness and then answer the following questions.

How did teachers' attitudes towards secondary school students change after the revolution in November 1989?

What new rights did students gain during the autumn of 1989?

What was the process of negotiating a greater degree of democracy in the school?

How was such democracy to be manifested?

Return to witness record

Fragments

Who did we just hear?
Lucia Bartošová was born in 1974 in Bratislava. She was actively involved in student protests during the autumn of 1989. She witnessed negotiations between students and management about rules in her high school during the velvet revolution. She studied Pharmacy at university in Bratislava in the early 90s. Her first experience with the Western was her work as an au-pair in Aurich near Stuttgart in 1993. She decided to move to the Czech Republic in 1999.

Highschoolers during the velvet revolution
In November 1989, Lucia Bartošová was a first-year student at a grammar school in Bratislava. While the role played by university students in the early stages of the Velvet Revolution is often recalled, the activity of students in secondary schools is overshadowed. Yet these young people, used to a strongly hierarchical and undemocratic form of education, were often able to radically change the curriculum during student protests and to force the cessation of teaching unpopular subjects influenced by socialist ideology.

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4) What does it mean to have a democratic school? Think about the following questions and discuss them with your classmates.

Have you encountered a situation that reminds you of the situations in this lesson?

Is it acceptable to debate freely with a teacher in your school?

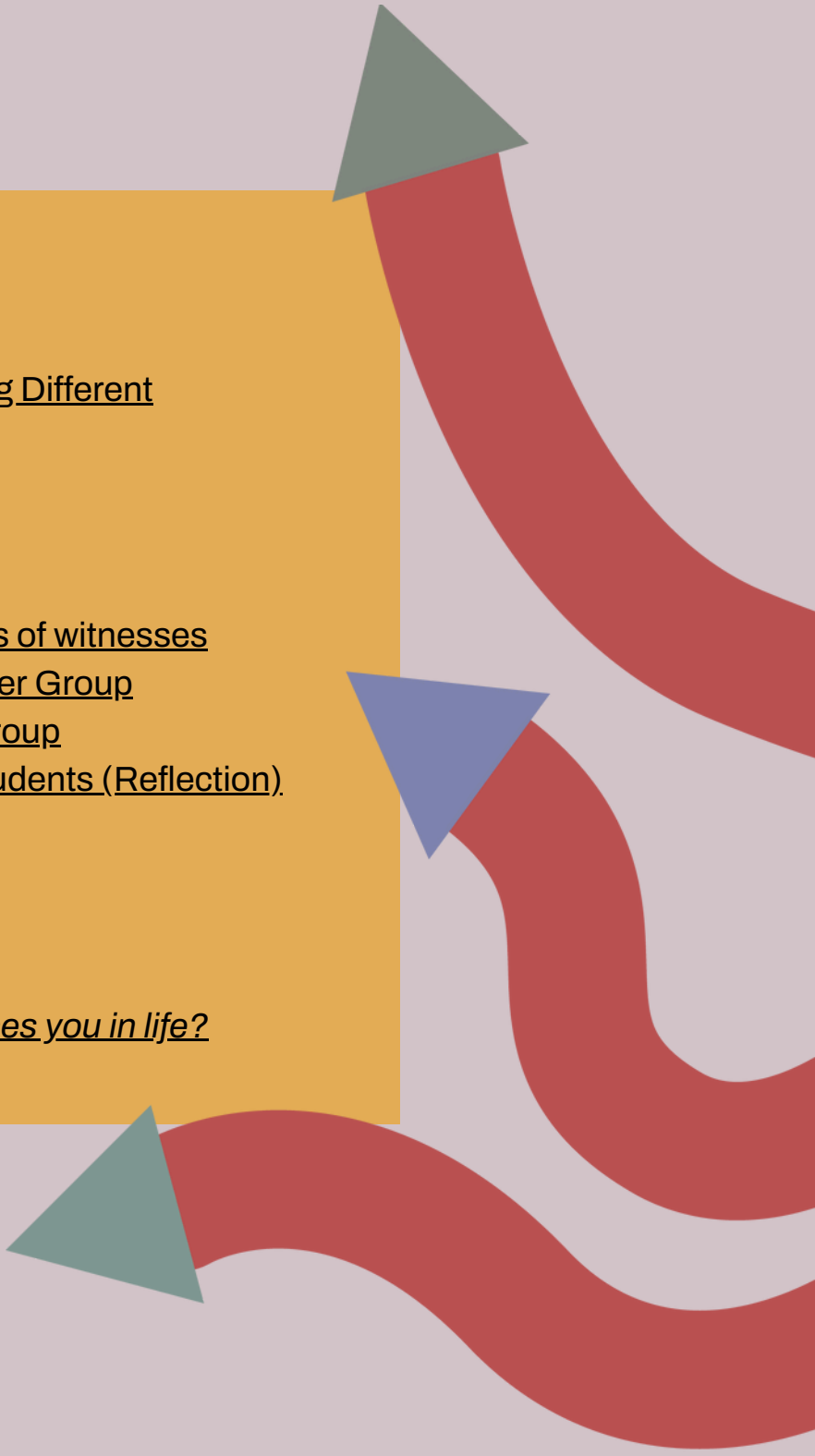
To what extent does the position of pupils in your school differ from the approach that witness described in Source 1?

To what extent does the position of pupils in your school differ from the role they acquired in Bratislava in the autumn of 1989?

What level of internal democracy should every school have?

Is it right for the curriculum to be influenced by pupils through voting?

What influences you in life?



Learning Activity

Learning Activity: Exploring Different Perspectives

Annexes

Annex 1: Short biographies of witnesses
Annex 2: Text fragments per Group
Annex 3: Questions per Group
Annex 4: Exit Ticket for Students (Reflection)

Links

Fragments
Narrative for *What influences you in life?*

Learning Activity
Exploring Different Perspectives

Diana-Maria Beldiman

This learning activity proposes some didactic activities that can be used in order to talk to students about democracy versus totalitarian/authoritarian regimes during the 20th Century. The materials are testimonies provided by persons that lived both during totalitarian or authoritarian regimes and democracy. The activities can be used to answer the question: *What influences you in life?* You can use the video testimonies, but you will also find the written version of each fragment at the end of the learning activity. Each group of fragments also comes with its own worksheet that you can use for the working groups to be organised in class.

To hook students' interest, you can start with asking your students the question: *What influences you in life?* They can share their first thoughts, ideas and feelings in plenary, individually, in pairs or in small groups. Then, you can jointly watch the Narrative.

Learning Activity: Exploring Different Perspectives
Age Group: students between 16 - 18 years old
Duration: 90 minutes
Materials: Mentimeter question *What influences you in life?* or sticky notes, short biographies of witnesses (Annex 1), fragments, Narrative, text fragments (Annex 2) and questions for students (Annex 3), reflection sheet for students (Annex 4), headphones to watch the videos connected to students' phones or to digital devices available for each group, A2 or bigger paper for group mind maps, crayons.

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Fragments:

Fragment 1 : Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)
Fragment 2: Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)
Fragment 3: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)
Fragment 4: Petros Pizanias (Greece)
Fragment 5: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)
Fragment 6: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)
Fragment 7: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)
Fragment 8: Ivan Florian (Romania)
Fragment 9: Armandina Soares (Portugal)
Fragment 10: Vladimir Davydov (Lithuania)
Fragment 11: Vladimir Davydov (Lithuania)
Fragment 12: Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)
Fragment 13: Milice Ribeiro Do Santos (Portugal)
Fragment 14: Michaela Bedrníková (Czech Republic)
Fragment 15: Andres Ruiz Grima (Spain)

Learning Outcomes:

Throughout this activity, students will:

- Identify which environments influence people in life;
- reflect on the factors that influence people's development during a democratic regime or a totalitarian one;
- analyse how living in a totalitarian regime can influence people's perspectives on various everyday subjects;
- synthesize information regarding the factors that influence people's lives both in democratic and totalitarian regimes;
- value human rights and rule of law specific to a democratic regime.

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Step 1: Lead-in (10 min)

Announce the theme of the lesson and ask students what influences them in life. A Mentimeter question can be used or you can provide sticky notes on which students write their answers and post them on a board. A whole class conclusion is discussed after all students have posted their answers.

Step 2: Hooking students' interest (10 min)

Divide students into four groups and assign each group some fragments to watch (see Annex 2). If it is not possible for the groups to watch the videos, you can have them read the transcripts from Annex 2. In their groups, students reflect on the fragments, trying to answer the following questions:

- Who are the people in the fragments?
- What are they talking about?
- How were they influenced in their lives and why?

In plenary, have students share their answers to these questions and discuss any similarities or differences.

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Step 3: Identifying perspectives in small groups (25 min)

In the same four groups, ask students to read the texts of their assigned fragments in Annex 2 and to identify what they think the perspective of each witness is. To discuss the perspectives, students should identify the main and secondary ideas of the texts. The questions included in Annex 3 can be used to guide them in discovering these ideas. Ask the students to debate about their answers in their groups and to organize them in mind maps. The mind maps should answer the question: “What influenced witnesses’ lives?”.

Step 4: Shared reflection (30 min)

Each group presents their mind map in front of the whole class. The presentations should take about 2 minutes per group. Ask the students who are listening to take notes on similarities and differences among groups’ findings.

After the four groups have finished presenting, lead a plenary discussion about the similarities and differences that they have identified and reflect on the way in which witnesses responded to the influences that they received during the periods mentioned in the interviews. You can use these guiding questions:

- To what extent were they affected and how?
- How did they feel about those influences? What were their emotions, feelings, and thoughts when they lived through the period? How do they feel now?
- What are their perspectives regarding certain events in their lives?

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Step 5: Homework assignment (5 min)

To deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of infringement of civil rights and liberties, ask the students to write a short reflective essay (300 words) on how totalitarian regimes may impact personal lives and people's freedoms. The structure of the essay could provide answers to the following questions:

- What was the historical context in which the civil rights and liberties were infringed upon?
- What kinds of measures were taken to limit human rights?
- How might people have felt about that?

Step 6: Exit ticket (10 min)

Ask students to individually fill in Annex 4, which is an exit ticket that highlights students' achievements during the lesson.

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Annex 1: Short Biographies of the Witnesses

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (35) was born and raised in Cuba. As a kid she was part of the Pioneros de la Batalla de Ideas, a protest movement organised by Fidel Castro in 1999 for the return of Elián González. She has a Master in Communication from the University of Havana. In Cuba she worked for the national radio and television since the age of 10. She settled in Belgium in 2015 after leaving Cuba for the first time for a trip around the world with Up with People, an American non-profit organisation. She lives in Antwerp with her 3 children and works as a digital marketeer.

Michaela Bedrníková

Michaela Bedrníková (56) is a pharmacy expert from the Czech Republic. She was a member of the pioneer communist movement in her early childhood. As a high school student, she became an active Christian. She was a member of different semi-illegal evangelical youth groups. Her friends were dissidents, kids of dissident parents, and relatives of political prisoners. She took part in unofficial religious activities and in the student protests in the autumn of 1989.

Nikos Vatopoulos

Nikos Vatopoulos (64) from Greece is a journalist in the Kathimerini newspaper, a writer and photographer, specialised in urban culture and Athens urbanology. He was raised in a conservative bourgeois family. His political awakening happened under the influence of the Athens Polytechnic School uprising during the dictatorship, when he discovered as a young teenager that not everyone protesting was a “communist” or hostile to the essence of the state. He did not take part in any resistance activities but was aware of what the need for democracy meant. He believes in inclusive and citizenship education.

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Petros Pizanias

Petros Pizanias (77), Emeritus Professor at the Ionian University, was born in Athens, Greece, in the neighbourhood of Gargaretta, in 1947. During the dictatorship he carried out some acts of resistance. To be able to breathe he fled to France when he was 20 years old. In Paris he became a member of resistance groups against the Greek dictatorship. He studied Sociology and History. When he came back to Greece he was a very active member of a leftist political party. Nowadays he writes articles on the current political situation and the quality of democracy.

Andrés Ruiz Grima

Andrés Ruiz Grima from Spain (73) is retired and working occasionally as a sailboat sailor. He was imprisoned in his 20 for his activism against the Franco regime and has also been involved in Yayoflautas (Grandpas and Grandmas organisation) within the 15M-indignados movement (2011) and the Catalan independentist rise (2017). Close to anarchist ideas, he does not vote and is in favour of participatory democracy.

Juozas Malickas

Juozas Malickas (52), is a Lithuanian history teacher. He uses his life story to bridge Lithuania's past & present. Raised across Lithuania, he emigrated to the US for 20 years before returning to Lithuania in 2020. Juozas offers a firsthand perspective on Soviet vs. post-independence Lithuania, also highlighting the shift from a restricted small town to the dynamic Vilnius of today.

Vladimir Davydov

Vladimir Davydov (63), a lifelong Vilnius resident and business consultant, only discovered the truth about Soviet crimes, dissidents, and Lithuanian history after the independence in 1990. Raised in a regime loyalist family, independence brought him a double-edged sword: fear for the future of Lithuanian Russians like himself, coupled with an identity crisis. Yet, it also gave him open borders and a chance to learn the truth, to travel, and to choose his own path.

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Amir Mohammadi

Amir Mohammadi (39) came to the Netherlands in 2016 as a refugee from Iran. He did not receive a residence permit, but he could not return either and therefore lived in the shadows as an undocumented person for 6 years. In the end, he did get a residence permit. Amir knows better than anyone what it is like to have no rights.

Armandina Soares

Armandina Soares (80) is a retired Portuguese public school teacher. In 1974, she lived in Angola where she witnessed April 25 and the end of the colonial war. In Angola, as a teacher, she was an anti-colonial and pro-decolonization activist, fighting for independence. Back in Portugal, she was a very committed teacher in the fields of what was called "multicultural" education in the 90s and at the beginning of the millennium, always fighting for access to equal rights for Roma communities.

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (79) is a retired psychologist and family therapist from Portugal. From an anti-dictatorship family, she went into exile in Paris, France, in 1964, with her boyfriend, who was escaping the mandatory military recruitment for the Portuguese war in the African colonies. She returned to Portugal in 1975, a year after the democratic revolution. She fought for the rights of institutionalised young people and for women's sexual health rights in a country in transition from the conservative Catholic context of the dictatorship.

Ivan Florian

Ivan Florian (52), born in Romania, was a soldier at the time of the Anti Communist Revolution in 1989. From 1997 onwards he worked at the Bucharest public transport company. From 2010 he was a whistleblower within the company, where he exposed several management frauds. In the next decade, approximately 20 individuals became integrity whistleblowers under his mentorship, forming a network at national level. He complained to Brussels and submitted petitions about a whistleblower law, returning the law to the Romanian Parliament to be revised.

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Annex 2: Text Fragments per Group

Group 1

Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)	Well, the idea of life abroad was shaped for me by Soviet propaganda, which was very consistent. It explained very consistently and evenly what the West was—that it was evil, that it was an ideologically incorrect society, even though economically it might not seem so, because they dress better and have more variety. But, in terms of humanity, I vividly remember that the news showed homeless people in American streets, showed people being beaten up in the streets during demonstrations. The news was shaping the opinion that they, America, wanted to conquer us.
Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)	My mother's vision of the West was also negative—that it was a socially unjust society that allowed people to be homeless, that allowed people to starve. For her, these were the points of reference to say, ""This is why our society is better."" And I shared the same perception.
Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)	And later, when I grew up, I always stayed with my parents. In Cuba it's like, when you grow up, you stay with your parents. So, I've kind of had the same habits all my life because I didn't leave the house. And uh, that's nice too. Sometimes in a house you see three or four generations living together. Because financially it is also not possible to go find your own place. So, you're there your whole life and you're surrounded by all this love and warmth of your family. I never asked myself what the world would look like outside. I didn't have the need to know what the world looked like outside of Cuba. Because for me that was my comfort zone, my safe

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	place. And I just didn't feel the need for it. We were also living in a social system where not much was allowed to come in from the outside. Mainly through the media, television and radio because everything is coming from the government, there is no private media, you also don't get that many images of what life is like outside of Cuba. And if you don't know that, you shouldn't look for that either. So for me that was: we are happy here. And I thought: everybody outside of Cuba lives more or less in the same way. That was my little fantasy world when I was little. For me there was a before and after in 2013 when I did a big trip around the world for the first time. Then I was able to see with my own eyes what happens outside of Cuba and how different it is in other countries.
Petros Pizanias (Greece)	From the age of 16-17, I felt the need to leave, to open up. 16-17 means around 1963-1964, a period when the country was experiencing significant, intense political upheavals, and two people introduced me to these. let's say, individuals. One of them was my brother, who was a leftist from a very young age, a communist even, a member of the Lambrakis youth, and he guided me by the hand, also telling me what I should read, something I didn't want to hear, but I did it because my older brother imposed it on me. Also, he took me to the cinema to watch important movies, which I didn't prefer, I preferred Westerns, adventures with wars and such. Cinema was very important for the whole family. We went to the cinema a lot and my parents separately went to the theatre without us. and reading, newspapers, etc. The second process, let's say, the group in a way politicized me, made me understand that politics is something important, were the discussions that took place every Sunday morning at our house, with my father's friends, where all his friends, except himself, were leftists. And they discussed, brought newspapers, read, talked, and my mother made snacks, coffee, and such, and I was there and I was listening to them.

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Group 2

Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)	Generally, I was a child who read a lot and although in 1967 we didn't have a television at home, we got one in 1968 and maybe we'll talk about that later I had a contact, I think an above average contact, about what was happening outside Greece. First of all, my father, who was English-speaking, was a subscriber to Time Magazine, the American Time Magazine, and I remember, we received the magazine at home every week. My father would read it, he would give it to me , although I was very young, and I would leaf through it. And I always remember, I would cut out pictures or try to understand some things. I say this because from a very early age, the image had impressed me that there are so many interesting things far away from what is happening at home. This helped me a lot, I think, and that's why I mention it, and the pictures and the sounds in general, the music we listened to at home, because my father liked very much music and he sang well, something he didn't pass on to his children, I mean, the different types of music we listened to, the variety of music, the foreign news, as much as I could understand as a young child, had created in me a curiosity and a sense that many things agree that I can't understand, that I may not be able to see, but it's definitely something that awaits me.

Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)	And on the other hand, it was very interesting because each digestion was its opposite. How were the beloved pirate radio stations born at that time, illegal of course and pirate, and how did foreign rock musicians spread and all the progressive music movements through underground channels, but they were also generalized and how huge influence they had on the discography. All the progressive foreign music, not only the pop music which of course was and is and will always be popular

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	concerns everyone, but a more sophisticated musical genre, which was certainly politicized from England, from America, which had found channels of communication with Greek youth.

Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)	So, the memory of the transition, as I described it and how it was sealed within me and now that I am provoking. which means that it was something that had shocked me. Perhaps I had experienced it more silently, but nevertheless it had a very intense impact. It had definitively shaped me. Therefore, I consider that this transition, from the dictatorship regime to the free democratic regime, I think it has this rupture, but also this opening. At least, in my generation, it defined me it a very strong way.

Ivan Florian (Romania)	The rest of the world only reached us through pirated tapes, both audio for the cassette player and video to watch a movie. At one time, there were even certain structures that managed to rent a room somewhere to play video, as they used to say. That is to say, it had a colour television, a video camera and you went and paid to see the film. And I remember there was a theatre on Lipscani street and I went and stood in line for a long time to see "E.T.". It was the first movie I saw on video. After that "Rocky" was famous, and I remember that we started training with our friends from the neighbourhood, and we used to go to the Polytechnic, we used to run on the stairs, we felt like "Rocky". It was kind of our escape from that situation. And automatically we used to look at Coca-Cola or Pepsi with yearning, what we saw in those commercials or in those movies and imagine what was going on there, how good it was.

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Group 3

Armandina Soares (Portugal)	With regard to the situation in the country, we always hoped that Salazar would vanish from the face of the earth. So we did aspire to a different life in Portugal. We had some information about what was going on... because some of us listened to that radio broadcast... I can't remember its name... that clandestine broadcast. So we knew what was going on. We had access to reading, for example, Sartre was a reference for all of us, as was Simone de Beauvoir... So we had some idea of what was going on in the world. For instance, I myself and a group of friends, we used to go to a bookshop, I've told you about it... I think it was called Divulgação, and they always had forbidden books stashed away. They knew who we were. So we could buy these books. I had a lot of banned books. In fact, it's one of the things I've always had. At my house, this will be a problem when I'm gone... what will happen to all of those books? There's no easy answer. How did you do that? Buy forbidden books? We'd go there and ask. We already knew more or less what they had stocked... We wanted these books, no problem...They'd deliver. We'd pay and that was that. And they already knew who we were... We went there often because, fortunately, books weren't censored beforehand. Books were only censored once they had been printed and distributed to bookshops. They were taken away from the bookshops.

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Vladimir Davydov (Lithuania)	During the Soviet times, our country was closed, and it was difficult to travel abroad, it was considered almost like a special case. People could only travel to socialist countries, but to capitalist ones, not so much, but we traveled a lot around the Soviet Union. I've been to Crimea, my sister studied in Saint Petersburg, so I visited Saint Petersburg, and Moscow and other cities. And later, during my studies, my passion was traveling and sports tourism. So I've visited the Caucasus, Tien Shan, Pamir, and various regions across different parts of the union. I had the opportunity to travel a lot and see how country looked like, but in terms of going abroad, we didn't really dream about it. For us going abroad, let's say to capitalist countries, was almost the same as dreaming of going to the moon now, so we didn't have high hopes of seeing the world very broadly. Since we didn't know what was out there, there might not have been much need for it. We didn't even have the opportunity to travel. So, we didn't have great illusions about democracy, we understood that there were practically no elections, as sometimes only one candidate participated. And this happened often. And that candidate was proposed, for example, by the party authorities. And well, he was practically appointed. And the voting was just a formality, because the result was over 90% of votes for one candidate and the only candidate, then it is clear that there was not really an election at all. But there was another thing. There was a certain trust in the government. There was indoctrination, propaganda, and a learning process both in school and at work. This situation was seen as normal, let's put it that way. Although, on the other hand, we understood that, in reality we understood that it was not elections, but practically an appointment. Well, I think there was an official opinion that was indoctrinated, and many residents held that opinion, let's put it that way. Of course, we heard that there were dissidents, that there were people who were protesting, but these people were

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	very few, and in the end, we didn't really understand the protests and the reasons behind them.

Vladimir Davydov (Lithuania)	When I served in the army, I joined the Communist Party for convenience, let's say. If you wanted to make a career in the Soviet Union, you had to be a party member.

Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)	In some countries, especially the country I'm coming from, Iran, the smallest things in life are mixed with politics. You cannot stay away from politics because politics can go over you. They are deciding about every part of your life and every decision they make has consequences for you. So automatically, people are choosing two ways. Or they get away from everything and they're just focusing on their own life ignoring the reality or they decide to fight and participate to make changes.

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Group 4

Milice Ribeiro Do Santos (Portugal)	But I was also born into a family, a welcoming family who were in the opposition, as they used to say. And we had a way of being as a family which was very different from that of the surrounding environment - a mixture of “keep your head down”, repression, absence of well-being, and a set of values opposite to those of my family. This created an atmosphere... My parents...My father was a doctor, a book collector, a lover of the arts. My mother was a stay-at-home mom, but they created an atmosphere which was warm and welcoming. All of my male and female friends enjoyed coming to our house and freely discussing matters, with my parents as well, and expressing their ideas. It was a very healthy atmosphere. People could only discuss matters at home, of course! Meetings were forbidden. Even chatting on street, loving kisses on the street, that was forbidden. Therefore, my house was actually a sort of refuge for a group of people, it’s true.

Michaela Bedrníková (Czech Republic)	I remember once, when I was in second grade, I came home from school completely excited because they were showing a beautiful film about Lenin, very emotionally powerful, I excitedly told my mom about it, she was cooking, stirring something in a pan, and didn't even look at me, which was unusual for her, when I was talking about it, she didn't look at me at all. And then she just made a comment about it. So that was my first experience, growing up in that environment, but from that moment on, I also received a fundamental lesson, that actually parents don't consider that regime to be right and that they simply disagree with what's happening.

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Andres Ruiz Grima (Spain)	In connection with some friends, we were discussing things and starting to read things. And I had a critical attitude. We were greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution, obviously, but we had our reservations. We would say, when you start to spin things together, and say: Well, OK, the Revolution is made for the people, and it is done in the name of the people, but then the power is taken away from the people. It's the central committee of the party. And that didn't quite made sense for me. And already with Stalinism and everything we saw in '68 as well, in Prague and previously in Hungary in '56, these things squeaked a little bit. If this is a revolution... And of course, when you read that in Russia, there was a beginning of revolution that the Bolsheviks appropriated from, which was all power to the soviets, then it wasn't all power to the soviets, the power went to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. that didn't make sense to me, although I've had...communism as such, as an ideology, has many variations and could be a solution for humanity. But either it refines the issue of who has the power, or we are not going anywhere. All revolutions fail, look at China or Russia, if that's a revolution. I realized, my libertarian tendency or my tendency because people told me. The first contact with people from the Communist Party or Workers' Commissions and such, when I nuanced some things they told me in some semi-clandestine bar and such, without any influence from anarchism or the CNT [Anarchyst party] or anything, well I nuanced things. “Wow, then you're, then you're an anarchist. You are a utopian”. I say, "well, maybe I'm utopian, maybe I'm an anarchist, I don't know". I've never sold dogma or ideology, never. Never, not even on social media today, I don't do it, never. I don't wave a flag, I don't promote an ideology, I give my opinion and contrast and seek information, but I never sell an ideology as a solution for humanity. I believe that either power is horizontal, or there's no

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	worthwhile revolution. There will always be a clique of whoever, whether you call it capitalist oligarchs or party oligarchs, will always seize revolutions. Always.

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Annex 3: Questions per Group

Group 1

Fragment: Juozas Malickas (Lithuania)

1. What role did Soviet propaganda play in shaping public perceptions of the West according to Juozas Malickas?
2. How did the Soviet portrayal of the West contrast with Western ideals, and why might this be significant from a historical perspective?
3. How did Juozas's mother's view of the West align with the Soviet government's stance?
4. What does this account suggest about the isolationist policies of the Soviet Union in terms of their impact on individual perceptions of the West?

Fragment: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)

1. How did living with extended family shape Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez's worldview and her perceptions of life outside Cuba?
2. What role did media control by the Cuban government play in shaping Lisbeth's understanding of life beyond Cuba?
3. How did Lisbeth's experiences growing up in Cuba change her perspective on the sense of security provided by the state system?
4. What impact did Lisbeth's 2013 trip around the world have on her understanding of life outside Cuba?

Fragment: Petros Pizanias (Greece)

1. How did the political climate in Greece during the early 1960s influence the witness's interest in politics?
2. In what ways did family and social gatherings serve as a means of political education for the witness?
3. What influence did the witness's brother and his cultural preferences have on his early political awareness?
4. How did art and culture (especially cinema and literature) influence the political views in mid-20th century Greece?

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Group 2

Fragment: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)

1. How did access to Time magazine and foreign music influence the witness's curiosity about life outside Greece?
2. What was the significance of "pirate" radio stations and underground music channels in 1960s Greece, according to the witness?
3. In what ways does the witness suggest that the experience of living under a dictatorship influenced Greek youth culture?
4. What does the witness mean by "the transition" and how does he describe its impact on him and his generation in terms of emotional and social effects?
5. How does the witness's account provide insight into the role of cultural exposure (like music and magazines) as a form of resistance or mental escape?
6. Why does the witness believe that the political and cultural changes of his youth had a lasting impact on him?

Fragment: Ivan Florian (Romania)

1. How did pirated tapes and rented video rooms serve as a connection to the outside world for the witness and others in their community?
2. Why was watching a film like E.T. or Rocky a memorable experience for the witness, and how did these films influence the activities of local youth?
3. What role did consumer products like Coca-Cola or Pepsi play in shaping the witness's view of life outside their country? Were they symbols for an idealized lifestyle?
4. How does the witness's experience illustrate the cultural impact of Western media in countries where foreign content was restricted?
5. What does the act of standing in line for hours to see a pirated movie reveal about the social and cultural environment in the witness's country at that time?
6. In what ways did engaging with foreign media and music serve as both a form of resistance and a personal "escape" for the witness?

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Group 3

Fragment: Armandina Soares (Portugal)

1. How did clandestine radio broadcasts and banned literature help shape the witness's understanding of life beyond Portugal during Salazar's rule?
2. What role did writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir play in the intellectual lives of the witness and their friends?
3. How did the witness and their friends manage to access forbidden books, and what does this tell us about the system of censorship in Portugal?
4. How does the witness's experience with forbidden books and information reflect resistance to Salazar's regime?
5. What does this account reveal about the cultural climate in Portugal under Salazar, particularly regarding the accessibility and censorship of ideas?

Fragment: Vladimir Davydov (Lithuania)

1. How did the witness's experiences traveling within the Soviet Union influence his view of the world beyond its borders?
2. What challenges or barriers prevented Soviet citizens from traveling abroad, and how did this shape their perspective on foreign countries?
3. How does the witness describe Soviet elections, and what does this reveal about the political climate in the Soviet Union?
4. Why does the witness believe there was trust in the Soviet government despite a lack of genuine elections? Was there a political practice that acted in order to reinforce loyalty to the government?
5. What were the motivations behind joining the Communist Party, according to the witness, and how does this reflect career dynamics in the Soviet Union?
6. How does the witness's perspective on dissidents and protests reflect the broader social attitude towards political dissent in the Soviet Union?

Fragment: Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)

1. What does Amir mean when he says that "the smallest thing in your life is mixed with politics" in Iran?
2. How does Amir describe the two main approaches Iranians take towards politics: some people might choose to withdraw from politics, while others decide to actively resist?
3. What insight does Amir's perspective offer into the broader social challenges faced by people living under politically restrictive regimes?

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Group 4

Fragment: Milice Ribeiro Do Santos (Portugal)

1. How did Milice's family environment differ from the general social atmosphere under an oppressive regime, and what role did their home play for friends and visitors?
2. In what ways did Milice's home serve as a "refuge" for open discussion, and why was this significant under the political conditions they lived in?
3. What values did Milice's parents instill in their household, and how did these values contrast with those promoted by the surrounding political environment?
4. Why might Milice's experience reflect broader social dynamics for people in opposition to oppressive regimes?

Fragment: Michaela Bedrníková (Czech Republic)

1. What did Michaela's mother's reaction to her enthusiasm for the Lenin film reveal about her family's position towards the political regime?
2. How did this experience shape Michaela's understanding of her family's views on the government?
3. What significance does Michaela's story hold regarding the influence of state-sponsored propaganda on young children?
4. How does Michaela's account illustrate the generational divide in responses to government propaganda in Soviet-influenced countries?

Fragment: Andres Ruiz Grima (Spain)

1. How does the witness describe their initial admiration for the Russian Revolution, and what led to their eventual disillusionment?
2. What specific events, such as those in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, contributed to the witness's doubts about the success of communist revolutions?
3. What does the witness mean by a "horizontal" power structure, and why do they believe it is essential for a valid revolution?
4. How did the witness's interactions with Communist Party members and Workers' Commissions shape their understanding of political labels like "anarchist" or "utopian"?

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Annex 4: Exit Ticket for Students (Reflection)

EXIT TICKET

1. **Young people living in countries with totalitarian regimes were influenced by (mention at least three positive or negative influences):**

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. **Somebody living under a totalitarian regime considered that living in a democratic country was**

_____
_____
_____

3. **Among the aspects that we consider beneficial for a person living in a democratic country are:**

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. **After today's activity, I consider that living in a democratic country is**

_____
_____
_____

5. **Today's activity in one WORD:**

_____

Do you know what your grandparents think of young people?

Learning Activity

Learning Activity: Transgenerational Dialogue

Annexes

Annex 1: Short biographies of witnesses
Annex 2: Text fragments
Annex 3: What does democracy mean for a citizen?
Annex 4: What are the expectations from young people today?
Annex 5: What does it mean to live in a totalitarian society?
Annex 6: Documentary Theatre Overview

Links

Fragments
Narrative for *Do you know what your grandparents think of young people?*

Learning Activity
Transgenerational Dialogue

Denis Detling and Vassiliki Sakka
Museum of Slavonia and Association for History Education in Greece (AHEG)

This learning activity, *Do You Know What Your Grandparents Think of Young People?* is designed for students aged 16-18 and focuses on exploring democracy through historical and generational perspectives. Over 90 minutes, students will reflect on life under totalitarian regimes, understand democratic principles, and analyse the societal expectations placed on young people. Through discussions, group activities, multimedia resources, and intergenerational dialogue, the lesson fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and empathy. It concludes with students brainstorming actionable ways they can contribute to shaping democracy, encouraging active civic engagement and responsibility.

Learning Activity: Transgenerational Dialogue
Age Group: 16 - 18 years old
Duration: 90 minutes
Materials: Post-its, markers, short biographies of witnesses (Annex 1), video fragments, text fragments (Annex 2), Narrative, Annex 3: What does democracy mean to a citizen?, Annex 4: What are the expectations from young people? and Annex 5: What does it mean to live in a totalitarian society?

Fragments:

Fragment 1: Ovidia Sanchez Raquenes (Spain)
Fragment 2: Petros Pizanias (Greece)
Fragment 3: Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)
Fragment 4: Norbert Ngila (Belgium)
Fragment 5: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)
Fragment 6: Željko Rogina (Croatia)
Fragment 7: Rasa Kaušakienė (Lithuania)
Fragment 8: Joanna Miłosz-Piekarska (Poland)

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Learning Outcomes:

Through this activity, students will:

- Understand life under totalitarian regimes in the 20th century;
- recognise the roles and rights of citizens in a democratic society;
- practice collaborative discussion and presentation skills;
- foster self-reflection on the importance of civic responsibility and active participation in democracy;
- improve empathy, appreciate generational differences and learn from past experiences;
- evaluate expectations for democracy and compare them with historical and generational perspectives.

Step 1: Introduction (10 mins)

Objective: Introduction

Short discussion with the students with the help of a few guiding questions: What do you think your parents and grandparents think about you (students or youth in general) nowadays, your lifestyle, way of living? What do they tell you? Do you know what your grandparents lives' were like before the democratic changes? Do they tell you about it?

During the discussion, take notes on what it was like to live before democratic changes. Annex 3 can help you enrich students' answers.

After the discussion, you can proceed with watching the Narrative and briefly reflect on who the witnesses are, and what they are sharing.

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Step 2: Discussion About Democracy (15 mins)

Objective: Explore students' perceptions of democracy.

Divide the students into small groups and ask them to brainstorm answers to the question: *What does democracy mean to you?* Students write their ideas on post-its and stick them on a designated "Democracy Wall." In a plenary discussion, review and compare student ideas with key democratic principles outlined in Annex 3. To help guide the discussion, you could ask these questions:

- Which rights do you feel are most important?
- Are any of these rights taken for granted today?

Step 3: Expectations for Youth (15 mins)

Objective: Analyse what society expects from young people.

Divide the students into small groups and ask them to brainstorm answers to the question: *What is expected from young people in today's society?* Students write their ideas on post-its and stick them on a designated "Expectations Wall." Next, use Annex 4 as a reference to inspire a whole class discussion. Have students write their ideas on post-its and add them to the "Expectations Wall."

Optional Extension: When there is time, you can also ask students to categorise their expectations by level of importance or based on how challenging they find the expectations.

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Step 4: Multimedia Exploration (10 mins)

Objective: Gain insight into generational perspectives on democracy.

As a class, watch the fragments from testimonies where grandparents or older generations share their views on youth and democracy. In small groups, have students reflect on these videos by providing them with the historical context sheets and the following questions:

- What are the witnesses referring to?
- How do these perspectives compare to our own ideas? To our Democracy and Expectations wall?

As a whole class, students should each share one surprising or thought-provoking comment they heard.

Step 5: Intergenerational Discussion (15 mins)

Objective: Foster dialogue between students and society.

Guide the entire class in a discussion using the following questions:

- Do you have the rights and responsibilities you need in democracy?
- Do the grandparents have rights?
- What do you think could improve in our democratic systems now, which our parents did not have?

Based on this discussion, students can revisit their post-its on the "Expectations Wall," modify them, or add new ones.

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Optional Homework (results could be shared in the next classes):
Assign students to interview a family member or older relative that they can ask:

- What does democracy mean to you?
- What do you expect from younger generations in a democratic society?
- What expectations did you have from your own parents or grandparents?

Step 6: Final - Future Action (15 mins)

Objective: Synthesise ideas and discuss how youth can actively shape democracy.

As a class, discuss the question: *What role can young people play in creating positive changes?* Together, brainstorm small actions students can take to contribute to democracy (e.g., participating in community projects, voting when eligible, environmental initiatives). Write these ideas on a new "Action Wall."

As an alternative, you can also opt for the following activity (90 mins).

Alternative Activity[1]: Use of Documentary Theatre drama techniques (90 mins)

Documentary Theatre[2]: theatre overlapping with public space: reality, life.

"*Wake the audience from its sleep of aesthetic serenity*" -Milo Rau

[1] This is a drama technique usually incorporated in documentary theatre projects - But it can be used isolated like this example.Building documentary theater demands more sessions but is is broadly used and suitable when dealing oral testimonies.
[2] For the history of Documentary Theater see the pp on "Documentary Theatre and School".

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Documentary Theatre at school[3]

Setting up a documentary theatre at school requires research by students (f.i. students take testimonies - oral history), participation of experts, documenting students' research and discussing the topic (live or recorded), using art (images, posters, music, film extracts), posing questions on the topic and using drama techniques. See Annex 6 for more information and examples of documentary theatre.

How do we prepare a documentary theatre on the topic?

The preparation work consists of the following steps: processing the material, expressing and revealing feelings (fear, shame, anger, humiliation, pride, frustration, disappointment etc.), researching for and discovering or creating new material on the topic (for example new interviews with relatives, parents, grandparents, immigrants etc.), placing historical background, finding axes/ lines suitable for the case. Mind that locality, gender synthesis and class population and the needs and interests of pupils play an important role.

Dramatization is a key element and is performed in a new play written by students. Basic lines derive from the existing material, while drama techniques are used, such as monologue, corridor of consciousness, acting etc. Dialogue and debate are documented and accompanied by multimedia (music, videos etc.).

[3] Based on the work Natasha Merkouri (AHEG) implemented and performed by 15 year old pupils for Changing Democracies program. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaQED-j7GqI

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In other words, documentary theatre is a combination of reality and acting (with an element of surprise).

Important elements

Posing questions is a very important factor as well as discussing (and debating on) findings, asking the experts (historian, sociologist/anthropologist/film maker etc.) and commending on sources: films, pictures, testimonies, art etc. Performance is certainly necessary; pupils seek answers and new questions to arise. As a matter of fact, you create the documentary theater (originality is important).

A possible suggestion

Students together start commending upon the phrase: “Is my democracy your democracy?” What does democracy mean to you? How and why people put up a fight for democracy?” At this point it is very important to study the historical frame- and use a map and images for documentation.

An expert/historian speaks (on video or in person) for a few minutes about 1989 and the dissolve of communist regimes, as well as/or for the fall of dictatorships in Greece, Spain, Portugal and the migration flow in 2015 etc. You choose where to focus.

New questions are subsequently raised, such as “What were the conditions while entering the countries for people coming from other places/countries?” 4-5 students perform: experiences, feelings, determination, probably with gender approach. Extracts of a film on the topic play in the background without sound. At this point a sociologist can intervene, as an expert, on video or in person.

The performance also could include the expectations, the dreams, the aspiration, the failures, the frustration by a monologue or dialogue expressing thoughts and feelings, identity issues and feelings of belonging or questions like “What went wrong, if any?”

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The following is a paradigm: Second generation migrants re-approach their country of origin. Proud of their names, their culture: music, theatre, non material culture, pop culture. As a case study we can use those of Albanian origin migrants and other (like Asian, African origin) in Greece and /or other countries. We can watch the testimony of Niko, a Greek-Nigerian young man: https://www.istorima.org/sign-in ("Black and Greek"). In the context of the original question "Is my democracy your democracy?", we compare it with migrant origin witnesses' interviews in Changing Democracies project.

Finally, we move on performing the conclusion: few answers, more questions, a lot to think and process.

The Thematic categories/topics

Possible thematic categories could be: 1. Resistance-Fight-Fear-Joy-Hope: aspiring democracy, 2. The transition phase, 3. The expectations, the aspirations, the frustration, 4. Post-democracy[4], inclusion, human rights and "second class citizens", fake news, control over media etc., 5. Youths and Elders, 6. What can we do?

Parallel Activities for Students/Pupils

Here are some suggestions for creative activities, which activate students and can be reflective, such as:

1. Write down your thoughts and feelings.
2. Choose a person (literary or real life) and imagine his/her daily life before the transition and after. Or a youngster after 10 years.
3. Locate on a map the place, the names and routes of the persons mentioned.
4. Discuss with your classmates from other countries and compare their experiences and memories from their family history with those of the witnesses. Conduct an interview with members of their family.
5. Capture the distillation of your study through art (poem, free text, painting, drama, etc.).

[4] Crouch's definition:"A post-democratic society is one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite."Crouch states that we are not "living in a post-democratic society, but that we were moving towards such a condition" (Colin Crouch, 2004. Post Democracy , Cambridge: Polity Press).

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An example: An imaginary discussion/debate between a grandparent/grandmother and a youngster

Points made by elder vs Points made by youngster

We suggest that they choose their arguments and debate. Their arguments should be based on selected representative fragments and presented like role playing, in a quick and staccato mode[5]. For instance:

G. We did not have freedom–you do not understand what freedom means. You do not understand what it means not to have the essentials (food, clothing, traveling). We fought for all these.
Y. We have freedom but no opportunities. You were not unemployed as we are now.
G . We fought for basic human and political rights.
Y. Today rights are not for everyone again. See the minorities and the excluded…
G. You have free access to information while we had censorship.
Y. There is an abundance of fake news…Plurality is not exactly freedom.
G. You care about material life; new cars, new technology , expensive clothes…
Y. You think that youth are a homogeneous group? There are a lot of differences. Not everyone is interested in those.
G. You spend endless time on social media.
Y. It is a means of communication. It is difficult for you to understand…
G. What about growing racism, etc? You are indifferent and inactive.
Y. No, we are not; we are a more inclusive and tolerant generation, fighting with different means.
G. I do not think you are fighting; you have to get out in the streets more often, more determined.
Y. We fight for things your generation destroyed: environment, more human rights, etc.
G. You take things for granted; democracy, freedom, voting.
Y. Have you really discussed with us about today's problems? Will you listen to what we have to say?
G. I would like to listen to whatever you feel like saying to me. How do you feel about your life in 20 years? About your country? About democracy?

[5] This is something exemplary and imaginary, expected to be created by students.

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You can select images to enrich arguments: demonstrations, clashes, young people scrolling on their smartphones, fancy cars, etc. When this debate is enacted, the images run behind the students' scene in silence.

1. Select a couple of fragments from the testimonies (Annex 2) and build an argument contradicting the witness (Petros Pizanias, Ovidia Sanchez Raquena, Slobodanka Moravčević, Norbert Ngila).
2. Read the fragment by Nikos Vatopoulos (Annex 2) and answer the questions he poses to young people ("I would very much like to listen ...")
3. When reading the fragments, ask students if they can identify any differences or similarities between the countries which bear different experiences from several political regimes? How do people feel about youngsters? What do they expect from them?
4. Listen to the song "Ode to Georgios Karaiskakis" written during the dictatorship in Greece by Dionysis Savvopoulos (1968–inspired by the May of 1968 events when he was in Paris). It is an ode to resisting youth but camouflaged by the name of a hero of the Greek Revolution (1821) while it was for Che Guevara. So it avoided censorship and was extremely popular! He even put folk music in the introduction.
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIlSrilFbos&t=22s

The same person is critical towards radical youngsters, now that he is 80 years old! Do you have similar cases in your country?

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Annex 1: Short Biographies of Witnesses

Slobodanka Moravčević

Slobodanka Moravčević (47) is Serbian and Belgian. She grew up in the part of former Yugoslavia that later became the Republic of Serbia. Slobodanka stayed in Belgrade during the Yugoslav Wars. As a student she was an active member of OTPOR, a nonviolent protest movement against the Milošević-controlled Serbian authorities. After living in Mexico for some time she met her current Belgian husband in 2014 and migrated to Belgium. Slobodanka currently works as a lecturer of Serbo-Croatian language at the University of Ghent. She is an orthodox Christian.

Nikos Vatopoulos

Nikos Vatopoulos (64) from Greece is a journalist in the Kathimerini newspaper, a writer and photographer, specialised in urban culture and Athens urbanology. He was raised in a conservative bourgeois family. His political awakening happened under the influence of the Athens Polytechnic School uprising during the dictatorship, when he discovered as a young teenager that not everyone protesting was a “communist” or hostile to the essence of the state. He did not take part in any resistance activities but was aware of what the need for democracy meant. He believes in inclusive and citizenship education.

Norbert Ngila

Norbert Ngila (66) is Congolese and Belgian. The first 28 years of his life he lived in Congo, at that time ‘Zaïre’, where Mobutu installed his totalitarian regime. After earning his diploma in Geography at the University of Kinshasa he started working as a teacher. He was granted a scholarship to study in Belgium in 1986. Although his plan was to return and live in Congo, he stayed in Belgium because of the uncertainty of the regime in his home country. He works for Sankaa, an umbrella organisation for African Associations. He lives in Antwerp with his wife and 2 daughters.

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Petros Pizanias

Petros Pizanias (77), Emeritus Professor at the Ionian University, was born in Athens, Greece, in the neighbourhood of Gargaretta, in 1947. During the dictatorship he carried out some acts of resistance. To be able to breathe he fled to France when he was 20 years old. In Paris he became a member of resistance groups against the Greek dictatorship. He studied Sociology and History. When he came back to Greece he was a very active member of a leftist political party. Nowadays he writes articles on the current political situation and the quality of democracy.

Ovidia Sanchez Raquena

Ovidia Sanchez Raquena (76) has been involved in community organisations during many years of the transition in Spain. She was born in Andalusia and migrated internally to different cities to escape from poverty. When she arrived to Sabadell (city near Barcelona) she got involved in the neighbourhood's movement (Associació de Veïns Torre-Romeu), to get access to basic rights (water pipelines, etc.).

Željko Rogina

Željko Rogina (65) grew up in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia, where he still lives. He is a retired teacher of philosophy, ethics and logic. He was admitted to the Union of Communist as a high school student, but disappointed by the conflicts within the party leadership, and the national rhetoric, he resigned in 1990 and decided not to be involved in politics anymore. During the changes in Croatia he joined the army as a volunteer and served until June 1992. When his unit was deployed to the battlefields in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he decided to return and take up his work at school.

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Rasa Kaušakienė

Rasa Kaušakienė (55) is a history teacher from Lithuania. Rasa lived through the period of Lithuania's independence in the 1990s and saw it from different perspectives and positions. As a fifth-year university student at that time, she faced significant uncertainty about the future. Her experience reflects the challenges faced by many young people and students as well as young mothers during this period. They often felt lost, pressured, and divided amidst the rapid changes.

Joanna Miłosz-Piekarska

Joanna Miłosz-Piekarska (69) is a Polish poet and writer, niece of Czesław Miłosz (Polish dissident banned by communist government, Nobel Prize Winner in Literature). Born in Warsaw, as a teenager left Poland for Great Britain and then Australia. In her writings she explores the themes of youth in the times of Polish communism, Australian emigration and longing for the homeland, as well as the hardships and joys of fate suspended between two different realities. She currently lives in Melbourne, where she runs an acting agency.

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Annex 2: Text fragments

Olivia Sanchez Raquenes (Spain)	They don't want to. We tell them and they say: “Oh this is a matter for grannies and grandparents”, they say: “not me”. And you see them out there doing nothing, they are just in the parks smoking or drinking beer or whatever. No, I don't see that they want to follow our footsteps. I want to retire from the cultural center, you know? I want to retire up there, from the neighbourhood association, and we can't find anyone who wants to get involved. And thank goodness that the girlfriend of one of my sons comes to give us a hand with the commission, because she does many things for us, so that I can be here and there, because she gives us a hand. We pay her, we pay her for the hours she's there. But we don’t get paid. We've never earned a penny, and we don't want to either, because we're volunteers. No, we don't get into one of these places to make money, on the contrary, we put some. That's why I'm telling you that people don't want to. People don't want anything but to have nice cars, uh, money in their pockets to spend it.
Petros Pizanias (Greece)	for the young people now, what I would have to say to them first is get angry, hit the streets, and if necessary, make noise. You are the biggest victims of the memoranda in a society that is rapidly deteriorating, and you will pay the cost either with a significant degradation of your life or with the coercion to emigrate somewhere just to live as human beings, nothing more. So get angry, get angry again, and hit the streets. There is no way to achieve anything without it. Proof from my own past,

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	which is the past of the entire Greek society, democracy returned with the fall of the Junta, not because Karamanlis or Papandreou came here, but because millions of Greeks took to the streets. That's how it should be today.

Slobodanka Moravčević (Belgium)	But you are young. You don't realise. You see such strange things. And I told you that I grew up in a kind of fairy tale. And I really couldn't see all those things very precisely. But later I had to understand. I was also a journalist and worked at Radio Belgrade. I really wanted to understand what was going on. I did many interviews with people who came to Serbia from other countries. With people who have been through such terrible things. For example, I had an interview with a man who had been in some kind of war prison. That was so very important for me to understand. That's maybe, sort of, like you're awake, but only slowly, slowly you realise that all these people around you and close to you have been through so much. And then of course I was really busy with my political protests. I thought to do something good, for everybody, not just for myself, I thought that was just mandatory for every human being. Euh, I like that, when you are young, you have to feel like that. And I think it's a shame that young people today, not only here, but also in Serbia and everywhere else, are just doing basic things, unimportant things, Tiktok things? They don't have ideals. I think that is also a big problem for our society. That kind of fire, that has to come from young people. And our young people are asleep. Or they have depression. Or they just have no idea where to start. Maybe they will discover reality like me, twenty years afterwards, they have used me and so on. But we still did something right, you understand. That we stopped Milosevic was a kind of democracy, a kind of freedom. Never fully, but one step is better than none.

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Norbert Ngila (Belgium)	Which I regret, because I've been in this sector for almost 20 years, I've always tried to pull young people up a bit, to talk about democracy, to do this and that, but I just feel a kind of resistance, a resistance. But I don't know where that comes from, I don't know. [...] So that's very difficult. They have no interest, they are interested in other things, like music, like sports, like this and that and so on, but little interest in democracy, how does the system work, what is the role of young people there, what can African young people do in this society to improve their situation. Those have very little interest in that, but that is a big problem I think.

Norbert Ngila (Belgium)	It's very important to talk to young people about that, because this is a democratic country, Belgium is a democratic country. If you are outside the system, your life will always be difficult. To get something, you have to be inside the system. So you have to exercise democracy as well. How can you do that? You have to learn the system, you have to learn democracy. You have to hear. But if you say: yes, I'm outside the system, I just want music, I'm not going to participate in debates about democracy, I don't want to be behind a political party, I'm neutral. That's not a good way to achieve emancipation.

Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)	I don't like giving advice because I believe that a person will do what they want to do and should do what they want to do regardless of what others say. You give advice. Because what is important to you may not be as important to someone else. But I would really like to discuss with a new person, who has done it of course, but let's say hypothetically that I had a conversation partner who was twenty years old, who would have been born in the 21st century. I would really, really, really like to listen, not

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	to tell them, to listen. Because I am sure that even in these children there is a strong romanticism. that might surprise us in the future. But I am sure there is a tremendous sense. And as I said before that there is a feverish technocratic perception, that there is a distance from historical consciousness, it may be true, because this is also the general climate. But, feverish, I would like to listen and automatically I would definitely make some comparisons. I would mainly like to hear about their life in 20 years. How they would like to live. Let them think about this achievement. How they would like. Or how they think about Greece. Or if something moves them that also moves me and we discuss things that may be very powerful for me. For me, it moves me a lot, let's say, the idea of Greece with a sense of the primary simplicity of the idea of Greece. What we call looking at a cliff and saying here is Greece to say. To be something of your own, to be your own homeland, this concept. If this is how it works. It will definitely work in a way. But how. These are the things that I would be interested to explore and not just to hear. I wouldn't be so interested in just saying. If someone asks me to convey an experience, yes, I think it makes sense. Just as I ask older people, to hear an experience and I will interpret it myself. This makes sense if there is interest. But I think the key is, as we said before, the interaction and being able to take something from the other, not to be parallel generations, to have what is very interesting and fertile.

Rasa Kaušakienė (Lithuania)	Well, for me, I guess democracy is not to be afraid, not to be afraid to say, not to be afraid that you will say something and someone will misunderstand, that you might get hurt. Freedom of speech, that if you don't offend anyone, you can criticise. And I say about Lithuania that we are a democratic country, when we allow ourselves to make fun of our president, of a high official, only citizens of a

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	democratic country are allowed to do that. And it is important for young people to know that it was not always the case that you could say whatever you wanted, go wherever you wanted, have whatever you wanted, and that many areas of life and activity were restricted by the state, and that this is practically non-existent now. They are very free and have a much broader range of activities, choices, ways of going out, travelling and seeing the world than Soviet children. It's just that they have so many opportunities: participation in different organisations, volunteering. Just go and do it and our aim is simply to encourage them not to stop, not to slow down. So for those who do not vote or who criticise, I always just say, and I can repeat it, that if you have not voted, if you have not contributed anything to democracy, you simply do not have the right to criticise, because you have deprived yourself of that opportunity.
Željko Rogina (Croatia)	When you say young people, it is assumed that young people are a homogeneous group, however, that is not the case. Those who throw bananas in the stadium when they see a dark-skinned player or those who measure the height of corn, I wouldn't say anything to them. They are lost cases and I fear there will be more of them. Likewise, there is nothing to say to those who walk down the street or ride a bike or drive a car while looking at their phone, inspired and preoccupied with the trivialities of social media.
Joanna Miłosz-Piekarska (Poland)	My attitude to democracy is very simple. Democracy is not something you get as a gift. And this cannot be taken for granted. And I, I would like to repeat it endlessly to the younger generation, who, well, I look at it that way a little bit, a little bit as if they have become disenchanted with this sense of freedom

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	and... Or even not disenchanted, because they have already been born into it. But they take it absolutely for granted. That this is the way it is and what it's all about. And that the elderly are getting on with something, well, you have to think wisely, you have to think wisely about the elections, and you have to watch. We need to keep an eye on those we have elected, and we need to keep an eye on those who are not elected but pushing themselves. Because freedom can be taken away from a person like this [snap gesture]. We have many examples of this around the world.

Annex 3: What does democracy mean for a citizen?

- Right to vote – the ability to participate in electing representatives and making important decisions.
- Freedom of expression – the right to freely express opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints.
- Right to assemble – the possibility to organize and participate in peaceful protests and gatherings.
- Right to information – free access to information and transparency in government actions.
- Protection of human rights – respect for the basic rights and freedoms of all citizens.
- Equality (by the law) – all citizens are equal by the law, regardless of social status, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.
- Participation in law-making – through elected representatives, citizens influence the creation of laws.
- Responsibility of government – the government is responsible to the citizens and must answer for its actions.
- Right to justice and legal remedy – the ability to seek legal protection in case of rights violations.

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- Right to education – enabling informed decision-making and critical thinking.
- Social rights – the right to basic social services such as healthcare, education, and social security.
- Encouragement for civic engagement – motivation to participate in social and political processes for the common good.

Annex 4: What are the expectations from young people today?

- Active participation in society – engaging in the community through volunteer work, initiatives, or civic involvement.
- Education and self-improvement – commitment to learning and acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies for future challenges.
- Responsibility – taking responsibility for their own actions and decisions.
- Respect for diversity – openness towards different cultures, beliefs, and people.
- Environmental awareness – caring for the environment and actively participating in sustainable practices.
- Developing critical thinking – reflecting on information, social norms, and political issues.
- Innovation and adaptability – readiness to embrace change and adapt to new technologies and working conditions.
- Advocacy for human rights – promoting equality, respecting, and protecting the rights of all people.
- Building independence – gradually developing financial and emotional independence.
- Constructive expression of opinions – participating in discussions in a positive and productive way.
- Solidarity and empathy – showing concern for others and the community, and understanding others' needs.
- Initiative – the courage to take initiative in solving problems and creating positive changes in society (agency)

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Annex 5: What does it mean to live in a totalitarian society?

- One-party system – governance controlled by a single political party (e.g., communist parties in Poland and Czechoslovakia, or fascist regimes in Spain and Portugal and dictatorship in Greece).
- Authoritarian leader – dominance of a single individual, such as Francisco Franco in Spain, António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal, or Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia (in the context of socialist Croatia).
- Political repression – persecution of opposition parties and individuals, including mass arrests, torture, exile and executions.
- Media control – complete state control over the press, radio, and television to disseminate propaganda.
- Censorship and bans – suppression of literature, art (cinema, theatre, music) and scientific research that contradicted the regime's ideology.
- Restricted access to education – education systems were subordinated to ideological indoctrination (particularly prominent in communist and fascist regimes).
- Nationalist propaganda – glorification of the nation, state, or ruling ideology (e.g., fascist nationalism in Spain and Portugal, Greece).
- Cult of personality – elevation of the leader to an untouchable status, idolized through public ceremonies and propaganda.
- Restrictions on religious freedoms – in communist regimes like Poland and Lithuania, the Church faced constant pressure or persecution (while in fascist regimes, religions were often instrumentalized and the Church usually coordinated with the authorities).
- Forced collectivization – especially in communist states like Poland and Lithuania, where agricultural properties were forcibly nationalized.

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- Forced emigration – many were compelled to emigrate due to political persecution or economic restrictions (especially brain drain: scientists, politicians, artists).
- Surveillance and repression: Establishment of militias or secret police for surveillance and repression (e.g., PIDE in Portugal, Guardia Civil in Spain, UDBA in Yugoslavia (Croatia), Securitate in Romania).
- Economic inequality and privileges – political loyalists enjoyed privileges, while ordinary citizens often lived in poverty.
- Distrust and informants – regimes encouraged people to report neighbours and family members to the authorities.
- Isolation from the world – limited international relations, particularly evident in fascist Portugal and Spain before democratic reforms.

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Annex 6: Documentary Theatre Overview

Is my Democracy your Democracy?

A documentary Theatre approach

Association for History Education in Greece (A.H.E.G)

Υπόθεση Λάραμι, Tectonic Theatre Project (2020)

Documentary Theater: theatre overlapping with public space: reality, life

" Wake the audience from its sleep of aesthetic serenity "

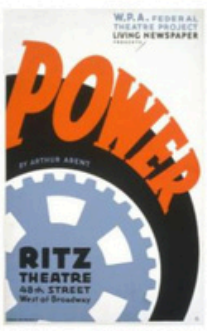
History of Documentary Theater

- Russian Revolution : "living newspapers", performing the news: propaganda
- USA- Great Britain: added the concept of subjectivity
- *"Theater is not an information medium, and it's not an educational medium, it's a medium for the present or rather presenting the present"* Milo Rau, director
- Rimini Protocol collective, Milo Rau, Yael Ronen, (since '80s): *"take a closer look at the theatricality of everyday-life"*

➢ Reenactment

Workers of 'Sovkino' (Soviet cinema) 'live' newspaper

Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents of St. Petersburg



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"This is how Rimini Protokoll not only creates theatrically sharpened copies of findings, but also re-conquers public space. Apart from the research-based projects there are numerous activities that leave the safety-zone of the theatre. […]
Under Rimini Protokoll's direction everything becomes equally real and suspicious. It is not a given dramaturgy that secures the differentiation between art and reality, but the observer himself becomes the specialist, who has to follow the traces of authenticity and theatricality. […]
Rimini Protokoll's credo can be summarised as: the best art is reality itself: copied, re-assembled, mirrored upon itself, presented to an audience to be observed. "Theatre is a medium within contents can transport". That easy, that modest, that radical is the starting point of Rimini Protokoll. […] If it's all about life, then we're all specialists".

Rimini Protocol, "Unboxing the Past", 2021

https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/text/everyone-s-a-specialist
Milo Rau, *Everyone's a Specialist. Rimini Protokoll and the reconstruction of reality, 2004*

Rimini Protokoll, *Ο Αγών μου* (2016)

Rimini Protocol, 2016
Mein Kampf
(Neonazism)

"Farmakonisi case: the Law of the Water"
National Theatre of Greece
(Drowning of migrants)

Υπόθεση Φαρμακονήσι ή το Δίκαιο του νερού, Εθνικό Θέατρο (2015)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGSCtKhBZO0
"The Dark Ages", Milo Rau. Shaubine, 2015
Leibach: "Every man kills what he loves"

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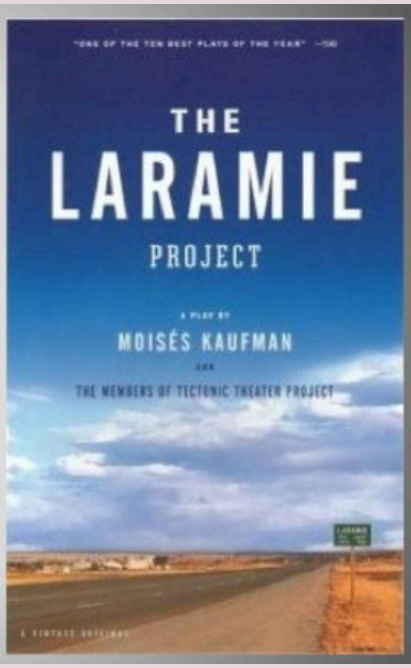
Υπόθεση Λάραμι, Tectonic Theatre Project (2020)



The experience of migrant workers from various background, working as cleaners. Their personal testimonies are the core of the play-actually written by them. Original characters-not actresses.

***"Clean City":* Onassis Stegi Grammaton kai Technon**

Η καθαρή πόλη, Στέγη Γραμμάτων (2020)

A poem:
Marleno:
"Valpona"
(In praise of immigrant cleaners…)

- All the toilets in Athens are clean thanks to my mommy
- …
- Her hands are hard and full of sores from the bleach
- Her face is hard and full of sores from the bleach from all the bleaches of all Athens
- My mother has so much bleach on her that the image of her in my mind fades
- …
- Our mothers all clean the toilets of Greece
- And their names are bitter in the mouth
- Cleanliness makes them unpresentable
- No one calls them by name
- But my mother's name is a river name
- A river of tears and a river of bleach
- And it comes down from above with a rush
- To cleanse to cleanse to cleanse

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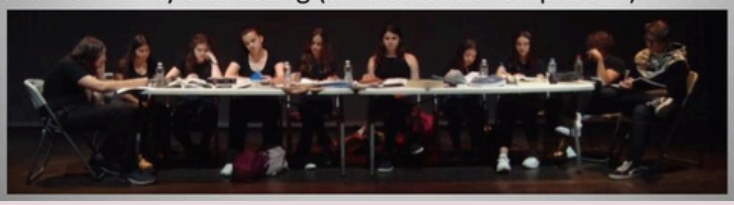
Documentary Theater at school

Natasha Merkouri, Philologist & drama expert, AHEG

- Theatrical condition : a class
- Research by students-oral history (testimonies)
- Participation of experts, documenting students' research and discussing the topic (live or recorded)
- Art (images, posters, music, film extracts)
- Questions on the topic
- Drama techniques

How do we prepare a documentary theater on the topic?

- Preparation work: processing the material
- Expressing and revealing feelings (fear, shame, anger, humiliation, pride, frustration, dissappointment…)
- Researching for and discovering/creating new material on the topic (f.i. new interviews). Place historical background
- Finding axes/ lines suitable for the case (locality, gender synthesis and class population, needs, interests)
- Dramatization: a new play written by students; basic lines on the material; drama techniques such as monologue, corridor of consciousness, acting; dialogue and debate documented and accompanied by multimedia (music, videos etc)
- A combination of reality and acting (an element of surprise…)



- Posing questions
- Discussing findings
- Debate
- Asking the experts
- Commending on sources: films, pictures, testimonies, art etc
- Performing
- Answers or more questions?
- **You** create the documentary theater

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A possible suggestion

- Students together start commending upon the phrase: "is my democracy your democracy?"What does democracy mean to you?
- How and why people put up a fight for democracy? (Historical frame- a map and images for documentation). An expert/historian speaks (video or in person) about 1989 and the dissolve of communist regimes, as well a for the fall of dictatorships in Greece, Spain, Portugal and the migration flow in 2015 etc.
- What were the conditions while entering the countries for people coming from other places/countries? 4-5 students perform: experiences, feelings, determination. Gender approach. Extracts of a film on the topic play in the background without sound. Anthopologist/sociologist expert intervenes (video or in person).

A possible suggestion

- The expectations, the dreams, the aspiration, the failures, the frustration: a monologue or dialogue expressing thoughts and feelings. Identity and belonging. What went wrong, if any?
- Second generation: re-approaching the country of origin. Proud of their names, their culture: music , theatre, non material culture, pop culture.
- Albanian origin migrants and the others (Asian, African origin). Testimony of Nico a Greek-Nigerian young man: https://www.istorima.org/sign-in ("Black and Greek *). Is my democracy your democracy?
- Performing the conclusion: few answers, more questions, a lot to think and process.

* *D. Trump: "I am more Greek than Giannis" (the Greek Freak).* Commend on identity issues…

The thematic categories

1. Resistance-Fight-Fear-Joy
2. The transition phase
3. The expectations, the aspirations
4. Meta-democracy: inclusion, human rights and "second class citizens", fake news, control over media etc
5. Youths and Elders
6. What can we do?

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Activities for the students

1. Write down your thoughts and feelings.
2. Choose a person (literary or real life) and imagine his/her daily life before the transition and after. Or a youngster after 10 years.
3. Locate on a map the place, the names and routes of the persons mentioned.
4. Discuss with your classmates from other countries and compare their experiences and memories from their family history with those of the witnesses.
5. Capture the distillation of your study through art (poem, free text, painting, drama, etc.).

What do you expect from democracy?

Learning Activity

Learning Activity: Discussing Democracy

Annexes

Annex 1: Short biographies of witnesses
Annex 2: Text fragments
Annex 3: What democracy means to a citizen and expectations from youth
Annex 4: ''Is your Democracy my Democracy?''
Examples of public discussion related to democracy

Links

Fragments
Narrative for *What do you expect from democracy?*

Learning Activity
Discussing Democracy

Vassiliki Sakka
Association of History Education in Greece (AHEG)

The core aim of this learning activity is to foster students' critical thinking and invite them to think about and discuss perceptions of democracy and the problems of democracy today. Students aged 16-18 years are expected to build a responsible civic consciousness and comprehend the importance of being active citizens. The activity also aims to enhance historical consciousness by knowing and reflecting on the recent past and current situation in Europe and elsewhere, while defining expectations of democracy for their life in the world they are living in.

To hook students' interest, you can start with asking your students the question: *What do you expect from democracy?* They can share their first thoughts, ideas and feelings in plenary, individually, in pairs or in small groups. Then, you can jointly watch the Narrative.

Learning Activity: Discussing Democracy
Age Group: 16 - 18 years old
Duration: 90 minutes
Materials: Fragments, short biographies of witnesses (Annex 1), text fragments (Annex 2), Narrative, "What Do You Expect from Democracy" sheet (Annex 3), and "Is your Democracy, my Democracy?" sheet (Annex 4).

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Fragments:

Fragment 1: Željko Rogina (Croatia)
Fragment 2: Željko Rogina (Croatia)
Fragment 3: Andrés Ruiz Grima (Spain)
Fragment 4: Michaela Bedrníková (Czech Republic)
Fragment 5: Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)
Fragment 6: Chee-Han Kartosen-Wong (The Netherlands)
Fragment 7: Michaela Roman (Romania)
Fragment 8: Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)
Fragment 9: Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)
Fragment 10: Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)
Fragment 11: Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)
Fragment 12: Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)

Learning Outcomes:

Through this learning activity, students will:

- Understand how fragile democracy is, reflecting on life under totalitarian regimes in the 20th century;
- recognize the role and rights of citizens in a democratic society, acknowledging that new needs redefine them;
- understand the dangers and backlashes of post-democracy;
- develop critical thinking by comparing generational perspectives on democracy and societal expectations;
- practice collaborative discussion and communication skills;
- reflect on the importance of civic responsibility and active participation in democracy;
- improve empathy, appreciate generational differences and learn from past experiences;
- evaluate expectations for democracy and align them with historical and generational perspectives;
- personal and social learning (metacognitive).

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Introduction (10 mins)

Objective: Set the context for exploring life in contemporary democratic societies.

Start off by briefly introducing the concept of democracy using Annex 3. Highlight key features that are associated with democracy such as human rights, freedom of speech, free elections vs authoritarian leadership, censorship, and limited freedoms.

Use a map of Europe (or a world map) to showcase the different origin and experience of the witnesses. Use basic historical context in order to explain the different circumstances.

Step 1: What does democracy mean? (15 mins)

Objective: Explore witnesses' perceptions of democracy, according to their testimonies.

Provide students with context stories or short case studies of people experiencing a transition from totalitarian regimes to democracy, choosing different geographical regions and backgrounds: Eastern European countries, South European and people with migrant backgrounds in Belgium and The Netherlands. Have students work in pairs or small groups to work on the context stories. They should use the selected fragments to discuss the following questions:

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- What were the expectations from democracy according to different witnesses? What went wrong?
- Who was the “enemy” to democracy for different countries according to the experience of witnesses? What did they miss when under authoritarian regimes?

Step 2: Group Activity (20 mins)

Depending on the size of your class, students can work in small groups to read the fragments (Annex 2). Ask students to try to find similarities and/or differences in the ways the witnesses define the concept of democracy. Each group colours in a map of Europe with a different colour based on the country of origin of the witnesses. Each group then discusses and compares their findings on different perspectives on democracy based on the witnesses’ backgrounds (ex-communist countries, South Europe, migrants from different backgrounds). Guide a discussion in which the whole class compares and discusses the conclusions.

Step 3: Group Activity (20 mins)

Objective: Reflect on the problems of Democracy today

Have the groups brainstorm answers to these questions: *What are the problems of democracy nowadays according to the testimonies? Is there anything else you want to add?* Students will be taking notes and can also write the main outcomes on the board (this could be digital, using Mentimeter).

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Then, students will watch an excerpt from “Is my Democracy your Democracy” Documentary Theater, which shows the answers of the pupils to the question: “What does democracy mean to you?” (00.43.31 - 00.44.34). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaQED-j7GqI&t=13s. Ask your students to share their thoughts on the video and what the pupils are saying.

They can follow up with group discussions (4 groups) about some recent case studies of public debates that you can find in Annex 4: (1) “Your body, my choice”, which went viral right before and after the US presidential elections in 2024; (2) “there is no bigger violence than unemployment and poverty”; (3) After Elon Musk bought Twitter (now X) he reactivated profiles defending conspiracy theories, hate and racist speech in the name of “freedom of speech”; (4) *“Black lives matter”* and *“Dikeosyni”*: two cases (black people, Roma people) related to police brutality and violation of human rights.

Step 4: Whole-Class Discussion (15 mins)

Prior to the plenary discussion, define, explain and discuss the concept of post-democracy[1].

Have students discuss their ideas and compare them with the key democratic principles outlined in Annex 3. You can use the following guiding discussion questions:

- Which rights do you feel are most important for democracy?
- Are any of these rights taken for granted today? Are some rights neglected or underestimated?
- Why do people choose to democratically elect politicians bearing non-democratic ideas?
- What do you expect from democracy today and what are you willing to contribute for its quality?

[1] C.Crouch's definition: "A post-democratic society is one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite." Crouch states that “we are not living in a post-democratic society, but that we were moving towards such a condition”. Colin Crouch, 2004. Post Democracy, Cambridge: Polity Press.

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Extra activity

If time allows, students can also be tasked with making a small film based on the answers given by them and their peers to the question: *What do you expect from democracy today?* It can be enriched with images and music. In addition, their thoughts and ideas can be captured through works of art such as poems, free text, paintings and drama. Suggest ways to question and enhance democracy.

A Note on Assessment

Communicative and language skills can be assessed. Cognitive and comprehensive too.

Metacognitive skills are difficult to measure. Nevertheless, attitudes and beliefs, reflection and performed activism could be a way to assess.

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Annex 1: Short Biographies of Witnesses

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez

Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (35) was born and raised in Cuba. As a kid she was part of the Pioneros de la Batalla de Ideas, a protest movement organised by Fidel Castro in 1999 for the return of Elián González. She has a Master in Communication from the University of Havana. In Cuba she worked for the national radio and television since the age of 10. She settled in Belgium in 2015 after leaving Cuba for the first time for a trip around the world with Up with People, an American non-profit organisation. She lives in Antwerp with her 3 children and works as a digital marketeer.

Michaela Bedrníková

Michaela Bedrníková (56) is a pharmacy expert from the Czech Republic. She was a member of the pioneer communist movement in her early childhood. As a high school student, she became an active Christian. She was a member of different semi-illegal evangelical youth groups. Her friends were dissidents, kids of dissident parents, and relatives of political prisoners. She took part in unofficial religious activities and in the student protests in the autumn of 1989.

Nikos Vatopoulos

Nikos Vatopoulos (64) from Greece is a journalist in the Kathimerini newspaper, a writer and photographer, specialised in urban culture and Athens urbanology. He was raised in a conservative bourgeois family. His political awakening happened under the influence of the Athens Polytechnic School uprising during the dictatorship, when he discovered as a young teenager that not everyone protesting was a “communist” or hostile to the essence of the state. He did not take part in any resistance activities but was aware of what the need for democracy meant. He believes in inclusive and citizenship education.

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Andrés Ruiz Grima

Andrés Ruiz Grima from Spain (73) is retired and working occasionally as a sailboat sailor. He was imprisoned in his 20 for his activism against the Franco regime and has also been involved in Yayoflautas (Grandpas and Grandmas organisation) within the 15M-indignados movement (2011) and the Catalan independentist rise (2017). Close to anarchist ideas, he does not vote and is in favour of participatory democracy.

Amir Mohammadi

Amir Mohammadi (39) came to the Netherlands in 2016 as a refugee from Iran. He did not receive a residence permit, but he could not return either and therefore lived in the shadows as an undocumented person for 6 years. In the end, he did get a residence permit. Amir knows better than anyone what it is like to have no rights.

Chee-Han Kartosen-Wong

Chee-Han Kartosen-Wong (41) is a film editor of commercials, documentaries and films. As a child of Chinese parents, she grew up in Borne, The Netherlands, where they were the only ones of Asian descent. She experienced a lot of racism. When she got pregnant, Chee-Han and her husband started looking for children's books which their son could identify with - but none existed. In the children's books that did feature children of Asian descent, they were depicted stereotypically. She herself had few role models in her youth. That's why she started writing inclusive children's books.

Jeangu Macrooy

Jeangu Macrooy (30) is a singer and songwriter. When he came to the Netherlands at the age of 20 in search for more freedom, he was struck by the difference in prosperity compared to his homeland Suriname, and the lack of awareness that it stems from the Dutch colonial past. He was shocked to find out that Keti Koti, the celebration of the abolition of slavery, was only celebrated by a small group of people. He represented the Netherlands at the Eurovision Song Contest with a protest song about slavery, partly sang in Sranantongo, which got mixed responses.

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Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (79) is a retired psychologist and family therapist from Portugal. From an anti-dictatorship family, she went into exile in Paris, France, in 1964, with her boyfriend, who was escaping the mandatory military recruitment for the Portuguese war in the African colonies. She returned to Portugal in 1975, a year after the democratic revolution. She fought for the rights of institutionalised young people and for women's sexual health rights in a country in transition from the conservative Catholic context of the dictatorship.

Željko Rogina

Željko Rogina (65) grew up in Eastern Slavonia, Croatia, where he still lives. He is a retired teacher of philosophy, ethics and logic. He was admitted to the Union of Communist as a high school student, but disappointed by the conflicts within the party leadership, and the national rhetoric, he resigned in 1990 and decided not to be involved in politics anymore. During the changes in Croatia he joined the army as a volunteer and served until June 1992. When his unit was deployed to the battlefields in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he decided to return and take up his work at school.

Michaela Roman

Michaela Roman (77) is a retired Romanian biologist and has no political affiliation. At the beginning of the 1970s, she was a top student in biology. She thought she would become a researcher, but she did not succeed at that time, as the regime blocked all positions for biologists, and so she did not have the freedom to choose where to work or what to do for a living. After the Revolution, she started a small business that enabled her to raise two children alone, granting her the freedom to do so.

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Annex 2: Text fragments

Željko Rogina (Croatia)	I was present, I did not directly participate, but I witnessed the transition from a one-party to a multi-party democratic system, from a socialist mode of production to a capitalist one. Now, when I summarize all of that, I can say that nothing is black and white. When it comes to democracy in society, it is far greater than it used to be, incomparably greater. What we couldn't do or weren't allowed to do before, we can do now. The question, of course, is whether anyone hears that and whether it finds its echo. Regarding this economic transformation, I sincerely believed that a better world where there wouldn't be those who have and those who have almost nothing would be possible, but it turned out that it won't be like that for the time being. So, we can only hope that the system we have adopted will become more democratic over time and that we will try to preserve at least some meager elements of a social state.

Željko Rogina (Croatia)	So, the question is, was there any real genuine democratic process in the states at that time? Of course not. There was something called a delegate system, but it was a plagiarism of true democracy where everyone could vote and be elected, and especially there was no pluralism of opinions in it. It functioned like this. The base, working people in their workplaces and other citizens in local communities choose their delegates. These delegates then choose their own, and they again choose among themselves, until they reach the highest levels of power, of course, the will of the

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	citizens was completely lost. Of course, above all this, the Communist Party carefully acted, or as it was called back then, the League of Communists, so that some dissonant tones in this supposed electoral process could not be found. That's as far as that goes.
Andrés Ruiz Grima (Spain)	Does anyone know who they have voted for? Does anyone know, in any given country in the world, except the big ones, Trump, Biden. I mean the parliamentarians, the congressmen, and so on. Who are they, as people? how do they live? what do they live on? It should be votes from people that you know, that can represent you, that you can monitor. That would be democracy. And to go further, well, a contract, a binding contract. But no, the one who insults the most, the one who has the most means to appear in the media, economic means to appear in the media, wins.
Michaela Bedrnikova (Czech Republic)	Sure, I had been little bit disappointed, because when you just had the feeling, probably quite unrealistic, that everything was going to be great, that everybody was going to be honest, and then you've found... that I don't know, moment after the revolution people were greedy and using the situation to their advantage again. And then you find out how much corruption there is, how many different things there are, how many coats-changing and things like that. Well, that's very sad, of course. And I felt sorry for that, one was experiencing a certain disillusionment. But like life goes on. It's just a kind of a tax for freedom. Well, that's how freedom is, so just somebody... Personally I had a feeling a little bit that freedom would be associated with a kind of honesty or truthfulness or whatever in those early days . Well, that turned out not to be the case for everybody. So this was a disappointment. Of course it was.

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Nikos Vatopoulos (Greece)	That all these now signal a change, not only of the political and economic model, but also of the way in which humans self-define. I think this is the shocking thing that has happened in our era. Because in the previous decades, the so-called post-war decades, despite the huge issues that naturally existed. Every era has huge issues. there was a widespread belief that the world would somehow progress and that you would find a job in some way, that things would logically be better in ten years that science would help, that your children would be better educated than you, they would immediately find a job, and that the pursuit of happiness is somewhat independent of you. It will come to fit into a course. Okay, surely this whole scheme is oversimplified, but I want to say that, at least my generation grew up with a sense that the world is progressing. The world will progress one way or another. As it takes from everyone, automatically, with struggle, with conflict, with demand, with faith in work, with education, in some way, there will be progress. In recent years, this belief has collapsed. And society has acquired many cavities, many cells, and many hollows. So, this fragmentation of social perception , of social organization of all states, has given birth to all extreme phenomena, I would say, ideologically, which essentially have undermined faith in democracy.

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Chee-Han Kartosen-Wong (The Netherlands)	The Netherlands is a society of many different ethnic backgrounds. And all Dutch people who are born here. And we are all equal. And we can only achieve that equality if we all speak up. And stop being silent. Because I come from a Chinese family and my parents kept silent. And less now, by the way. But they used to stay quiet because they thought it was not important enough... and because they didn't want to make a fuss. But speaking up is not causing trouble. Fighting for your rights is not causing trouble. Anyone would do that. Who is not treated equally. And I hope that the new generation will continue to do that.

Michaela Roman (Romania)	What I hoped... It's hard to explain, because I didn't think of democracy, because I always thought of a leadership that would be... ... collective... smart. Smart. That doesn't do injustice to people, because each one has its own suffering. I had to face so many illogical things, so that I always wanted... I wanted to be led by smart people. I didn't wish to lead or... but to be led by smart people. That's what I hoped for. Of course, then came democracy, pluralism... So, in the first years of transition we witnessed, like everyone else, the building of a democracy. Not knowing much about democracy, I was learning as I went along. I was also taught by Mihai, who was...The important thing is that, formally, everything was comme il faut. Many parties, pluralism. It turned out to be a hindrance, as it is today. We have to admit that more parties only mess up the stories. Although with small steps, with many relapses, progress has been made. I don't dispute that. We have a democracy. Fragile, but we have it. And most importantly in this world, at least at my level, we have freedom. So I think that's the most important thing. I can talk, I can go where I want, I can move as I want. So I think it's

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	not... There's nothing more important in this world than freedom. I mean, it's the priority. I feel this way because I didn't have freedom before and, consequently, freedom is what I like most.
Lisbeth Ruiz Sanchez (Belgium)	Opportunities, not equal opportunities, but opportunities for all, and the right for people to be what they want to be, to say what they feel and think, without hurting other people. But freedom to say what you feel. I think that's a very important point for me, because I missed that in Cuba. That feeling of, I can say what I want, I can share my opinion. I know that can be a little dangerous sometimes, with the haters and social media and all that. But that's just a basic human right, just saying what they feel, what they think. Sharing your opinion is very important. And also getting opportunities in life, no matter where you come from, you should also get opportunities in your life, you should be allowed to be part of a society where you can also get the chance to grow up, to be able to contribute. That's very important to me.
Amir Mohammadi (The Netherlands)	Democracy has to be inclusive. Everyone has to be able to talk and express themselves. The rest of the things from a democracy are expectations, like freedom of speech or something. But democracy is that everyone has to sit and not one person is making a decision. It's a group brain that is making a decision. Yeah, but I said that democracy is everyone sitting around the table and making a decision. But democracy in the Netherlands actually proved itself to me in the past, when I was undocumented. I said I'm not happy with the way of things going on here, but I'm not against the platform. The platform is, for example, Android, iOS. So you get some software, some apps in the

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	Android and iOS. You're working with it. Some of them are going right or wrong. The platform has no problem. The platform is functioning well. Democracy platform in the Netherlands functioning well. That when I was undocumented, I was able to talk in the live TV program with the politicians. So they accept me at the table. So yeah, this is democracy and then what we are for. To go to have a really inclusive, real inclusive society and freedom. Then I hope, I think we are on the good track. Arguments up and down always exist, but that's a nice thing from democracy. Instead of killing themselves, talking, arguing, protesting.

Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)	Democracy is also about speaking up. I have also seen in recent years that change is possible. Even if you think about the colonial past. The big shock I had in 2015. It really is a very different era we are in now. In which the Netherlands is actually very engaged with that history. Seeing how we can deal with that history. And...that change does come as a result of people speaking out. The fact that people have spoken out about the colonial past. Way before I released Gold. I see my contribution as an artist, as a modest contribution. But it is a movement of people who keep finding the courage to speak out about something, which then ensures that...For example, in 2023, on July 1st, on Keti Koti, the King apologised for the history of slavery of the Netherlands. That really marks...that really marks a...a new era for me. You have different conversations when they say "we recognise...that past, that pain...we recognise how terrible it is and we recognise the knock-on effect". So we can also really start looking at...What problems we have now that we can trace back to that history and how we are going to solve them together.

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Jeangu Macrooy (The Netherlands)	Democracy to me means believing in...The power of our collective voices. I really am a believer in power to the people. That change is really possible if you find each other and express yourself together. And that we should take that space. And be very happy that we can.

Milice Ribeiro Dos Santos (Portugal)	Well, when I think about all these years, there's a bitter aftertaste, it's inevitable. Because I live in a country with a democracy, we even have the socialist party in office at the moment, but there are such social inequalities, there's so much we haven't achieved. When I think that 20% of the population lives below the poverty line, people with jobs who can't get the bare minimum, A country where 1.5 million people don't have a family doctor, where housing is a serious issue and so many are living in streets...Of course there's a bitter aftertaste. And I almost feel like saying we need another 25th of April, and maybe then we can change things. In a democracy, we need everybody to be engaged in the process, everybody should be involved, and we should care for the democratic process and make sure it stays in pace as the world evolves and new problems arise. There's a study from 2022, a recent study, showing that Portugal is well-positioned compared to other democracies, both on the level of civil liberties and fair electoral processes; on the other hand, it is poorly positioned due to the lacking political involvement of its citizens and an absence of political culture. And this is, in fact, the key takeaway. When we think about politics in Portugal, we conclude that political parties have their own power dynamics and that they operate far, far away from the voters, they are removed from the people who elected them. Therefore, there is an emptying of the political function and people feel unequipped for political intervention. I think this is one of the reasons fostering populism, which suddenly expanded in Portugal, because it captured the discomfort of our citizens...who can't find their place in this country.

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Annex 3: What Democracy Means to a Citizen and Expectations from Youth

- Right to vote – the ability to participate in electing representatives and making important decisions.
- Freedom of expression – the right to freely express opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints.
- Right to assemble – the possibility to organize and participate in peaceful protests and gatherings.
- Right to information – free access to information and transparency in government actions.
- Protection of human rights – respect for the basic rights and freedoms of all citizens.
- Equality (by the law) – all citizens are equal by the law, regardless of social status, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.
- Participation in law-making – through elected representatives, citizens influence the creation of laws.
- Responsibility of government – the government is responsible to the citizens and must answer for its actions.
- Right to justice and legal remedy – the ability to seek legal protection in case of rights violations.
- Right to education – enabling informed decision-making and critical thinking.
- Social rights – the right to basic social services such as healthcare, education, and social security.
- Encouragement for civic engagement – motivation to participate in social and political processes for the common good.

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What is expected from young people today?

- Active participation in society – engaging in the community through volunteer work, initiatives, or civic involvement.
- Education and self-improvement – commitment to learning and acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies for future challenges.
- Responsibility – taking responsibility for their own actions and decisions.
- Respect for diversity – openness towards different cultures, beliefs, and people.
- Environmental awareness – caring for the environment and actively participating in sustainable practices.
- Developing critical thinking – reflecting on information, social norms, and political issues.
- Innovation and adaptability – readiness to embrace change and adapt to new technologies and working conditions.
- Advocacy for human rights – promoting equality, respecting, and protecting the rights of all people.
- Building independence – gradually developing financial and emotional independence.
- Constructive expression of opinions – participating in discussions in a positive and productive way.
- Solidarity and empathy – showing concern for others and the community, and understanding others' needs.
- Initiative – the courage to take initiative in solving problems and creating positive changes in society (agency)

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Annex 4: Is your Democracy my Democracy?

‘’Your body my choice’’:

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/13/your-body-my-choice-maga-men
https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/your-body-my-choice-a-new-rallying-cry-for-the-irony-poisoned-right

“A New Rallying Cry for the Irony-Poisoned Right”

It took less than twenty-four hours after Trump’s reelection for young men to take up a slogan that could define the coming era of gendered regression: “Your body, my choice” (The New Yorker)

The article discusses how the right has distorted the phrase “My body, my choice,” which has often been used in the fight for women’s reproductive rights.

Photo by Alec Perkins, https://www.flickr.com/photos/alecperkins/33332921525/

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Black Lives Matter

Photo by John Lucia, https://www.flickr.com/photos/studioseiko/27950807420/

Leonhard Lenz, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BlackLivesMatter_protest_Berlin_2020-05-30_25.jpg

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Justice:

The cases of Black, Roma and LGTB+ community members being brutally killed by civilians and/or police

Photo by Julia Tulke, https://www.flickr.com/photos/aestheticsofcrisis/

Zak/Zackie: LGTB+ citizen brutally killed by co-citizens and police, Athens

Photo via Unicorn Riot by Maria Louka, https://unicornriot.ninja/2022/greek-police-kill-teenager-as-racism-violence-against-roma-people-spikes/

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“Justis for Niko’’ (Justice for Niko)

Photo via Unicorn Riot, https://unicornriot.ninja/2022/calls-for-justice-for-nikos-sampanis-renewed/

Identity issues: Who is more Greek? A black man or D. Trump?

(Left) Photo by Gage Skidmore, https://www.flickr.com/photos/gageskidmore/53067465959
(Right) All-Pro Reels, CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giannis_Antetokounmpo_%2851664127127%29_%28cropped%29.jpg

Trump claims to be “more Greek” than Antetokounmpo; Giannis reacts
November 3, 2024

https://www.thenationalherald.com/%CF%84rump-refers-to-giannis-antetokounmpo-as-the-greek-who-has-more-greek-in-him-the-greek-or-me/

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Public Domain, https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8840865/department-defense-augments-us-customs-and-border-protection-removal-flight-efforts

Chained migrants are deported from USA (23/1/2025)

Photo by Louisa Billeter, https://flickr.com/photos/24761036@N00/54291209052

Post democracy (20/1/2025, Inauguration day, U.S.A.)

Historical Context Sheets

CHANGING DEMOCRACIES

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Croatia

By Denis Detling

Between 1945 and 1990, Croatia was one of the republics within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which operated as a one-party state under the leadership of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (a part of which were republican Leagues, among them the Croatian League of Communist) headed by Josip Broz Tito. Tito dominated the political scene until his death in 1980, after which Yugoslavia entered a period of instability. Throughout the existence of Yugoslavia, a cult of personality around Tito was maintained. Although Yugoslavia was defined as a country of nations and nationalities, the government suppressed national sentiments, offering instead the policy of "brotherhood and unity." Despite Yugoslavia having a more liberal version of socialism compared to other Eastern European countries, political and civil liberties were limited. The state controlled social and economic life. The media was state-controlled, and criticisms of the regime were rarely tolerated. However, Yugoslavia enjoyed a higher standard of living compared to many Eastern European countries, thanks to its specific model of self-management socialism and openness to the West. Citizens were allowed to travel abroad, which was rare in other socialist states.

The education system was shaped in accordance with the dominant ideology. The state invested in literacy and made education accessible, and most young people had access to primary and secondary education.

The late 1980s marked a key period of political and social change in Croatia. In Croatia, as well as in other Yugoslav republics, there was a growing desire for democratization, which shifted the crisis from economic to inter-republic and inter-ethnic relations. All of this, along with the rise of nationalism, led to the weakening of the Yugoslav federation, ultimately resulting in the collapse of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in January 1990, which had served as the unifying ideological and political force in Yugoslavia.

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At the end of 1989, the League of Communists of Croatia agreed to officially introduce multi-party politics, a process that gradually unfolded in other republics (except Serbia and Montenegro). At the beginning of 1990, the first opposition parties in Croatia were registered, advocating for democratic reforms, a market economy and a stronger degree of independence. The strongest party in Croatia was the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), led by Franjo Tuđman. In Croatia's first multi-party elections in the spring of 1990, the communists lost power, and the HDZ won, with Franjo Tuđman becoming the President of Croatia. Elections were also held in other Yugoslav republics. In Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, parties advocating for change won, while in Serbia and Montenegro, the communists retained power. Following the elections, negotiations began between the presidents of Yugoslav republics on the restructuring of Yugoslavia.

At that time, nationalism and the sentiment for separation from Yugoslavia was growing in Croatia. At the same time, there was a rebellion of a part of the Serbian population on Croatian territory, who wanted to live together with Serbs outside of Croatia in accordance with the growing Serbian nationalism. Based on a referendum held in May 1991, Croatia (along with Slovenia) declared independence on June 25, 1991. This led to an open armed conflict with the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian paramilitary units. While the leadership of the Yugoslav People's Army sought to preserve Yugoslavia, the leadership of the rebellious Serbs in Croatia did not want to live separately from Serbia. During the war (1991-1995), a large part of Croatia was under Serbian control, including the eastern part of the country. The war resulted in heavy losses, the displacement of non-Serb populations from occupied areas and extensive destruction. The war ended in the summer of 1995, after the Croatian Army, in a military operation code-named Storm, restored control over most of Croatian territory.

The process of democratic transition continued throughout the 1990s. After the first multi-party elections in 1990, Croatia left the one-party socialist system and began establishing a democratic order. During this period, the political scene was dominated by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman, who was the first president of independent Croatia. During the war, democratic processes were overshadowed by the military conflict and political centralization. Although a formal multi-party democracy existed, the opposition was weak, and the media was under significant state influence. In the second half of the 1990s, criticisms were directed at the authoritarian tendencies

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of the government, restrictions on media freedom, and the slow progress in strengthening the rule of law. Only after Tuđman's death in 1999 and the change of government in 2000 did Croatia accelerate reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and integrating into European and international structures.

The education system underwent changes as content related to Yugoslav identity was removed from school curricula, replaced with Croatian culture and history and adjusted to the new political and socio-economic conditions.

Alongside political changes, Croatia experienced a profound economic transformation. The transition from a socialist planned economy to a market economy, and from social ownership to private ownership, was a difficult and painful process. Unlike other Eastern European countries where state ownership existed, in Croatia, by 1990, almost all companies were under social ownership (with the presence of worker self-management). During the transition, part of the property was transferred to state ownership, and the rest was privatized. The privatization process was accompanied by numerous irregularities and controversies. The transition resulted in a drastic decline in industrial production, loss of markets, slow acquisition of new markets, a sharp rise in unemployment, the impoverishment of much of the population, social insecurity and social stratification. The war devastation further exacerbated the economic situation, slowed development, and increased national debt.

Milan Ivanović and Željko Rogina testified about life before the democratic changes, but also about the events that took place during and after, critically reflecting on what they witnessed. Željko Rogina was an active participant in the war, and Milan was involved in the reintegration process. As a child, TündeŠipoš Živić welcomed the democratic changes in the early 90s. There, she shares the memories of her parents. However, during the war, she stayed with her family in an area controlled by the Serbs and testifies to the new non-democracy, but also to the peaceful reintegration that followed, and with it, the democratic changes that she experienced.

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Czech Republic

By Bohumil Melichar

In 1938, Czechoslovakia succumbed to the pressure of the aggressive policy of German Nazism. After its leaders signed the Munich Agreement, they not only surrendered border areas with a strong German minority to the Third Reich, but also resigned the freedoms of parliamentary democracy. In the spring of 1939, the entire territory was finally occupied by the Wehrmacht and Slovakia was established as an independent state with a conservative fascist government loyal to Berlin. The six years of Nazi occupation were accompanied by material deprivation, intimidation of the national elite and waves of terror against democratic and communist underground resistance. The Jewish minority was targeted for genocide and virtually ceased to exist. The war operations ended in May 1945. Prague was occupied by the Red Army and President Benes and Communist Party Chairman Klement Gottwald returned to their homeland. Spontaneous anger calling for post-war retribution supported forcibly expelling the German minority from the border areas.

The left and centre political parties joined together to form the so-called National Front, which was gradually taken over by the Communists with Soviet support and from 1948 began to establish a Stalin-inspired dictatorship. Not only were large enterprises nationalised, but also small trades and small family farms were forcibly collectivised. Dissenters who saw this process as theft were tried alongside members of the political opposition in show trials, executed or imprisoned in forced labour camps. Non-conformist artists and intellectuals or church leaders were also targeted by state terror. Other citizens worked and lived in a centrally controlled economy that favoured the development of heavy industry and engineering over the needs of ordinary consumers. After Stalin's death, the possibility of reforming socialism opened up. Greater freedom for intellectuals gave rise to a generation critical not only of the violent excesses of Stalinism, but also calling for a greater degree of democracy, openness and freedom in all spheres of life.

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The experiment of socialism with a human face in Prague was suppressed by the occupation of the Warsaw Pact army in August 1968. Tank troops occupied the whole country, and after the reformist wing in the Communist Party, the advocates of an undemocratic version of socialism took power. While the Soviet soldiers built a permanent base near Prague and remained there until 1991, there were purges in the Communist Party and at all higher levels in all institutions. For disgruntled individuals, disagreement with this situation meant not only the end of their professional lives, but also harassment by the secret police, not only of themselves but also of their families. On the contrary, consent could have enhanced career opportunities and opened up the possibility of participating in the rise in living standards that the new government promised. Indeed, the Communists of the non-democratic group called for a calming down and the restoration of 'normal life' (the era of the 1970s and 1980s is called 'normalisation' in Czechoslovakia). In exchange for formal loyalty, they offered ordinary citizens a comfortable life in which unemployment was non-existent, health care and education were guaranteed and paid for by the state, an extension of maternity leave to three years, and large-scale construction of flats. Only a few intellectuals, religious figures or former politicians rejected a quiet family life spent working, watching TV, playing sports and staying at weekend cottages outside the cities. In 1977, they founded the dissident association Charter 77, which criticised the communist regime's violations of basic human rights.

While dissent languished under intense pressure from State Security, an unwritten agreement between most citizens and the Communist Party to remain silent in exchange for material welfare began to be challenged in the 1980s. The young generation, which had not directly experienced the poverty of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the struggles of World War II, the Stalinist trials, or the attempted reform of the system in the 1960s, began to clamor not only for freedom of speech, but more importantly for the dazzling Western consumerism they had known despite the Iron Curtain. The standard of living rose slowly and the young generation was frustrated not only by the impossibility of defining themselves against the political system, but also by having to wait in a waiting list to be allocated an apartment, to buy a good washing machine, a car or even a bicycle. In the mid-1980s, a renewed effort to reform socialism was launched in the USSR, and as a result, a debate over the principles of democracy, openness and the future goals of society opened up in Prague. But it led to a questioning of the very foundations of the socialist establishment.

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A few months after the excited crowd tore down the Berlin Wall and the Eastern Bloc began to crumble, student demonstrations in Prague were violently suppressed by the police. The wave of resistance to the brutal crackdown led to nationwide protests, a general strike and a demand for political pluralism. The student community in Prague founded the Civic Forum to renew Charter 77's efforts to have a dialogue with the government. In Slovakia, a similar organisation called Public Against Violence was formed. Václav Havel, a founding member of Charter 77, became the head of the now very active opposition. The disintegration of the socialist dictatorship took place very quickly, and in December 1989 Havel assumed the presidency. Similarly, the willingness of critics of Communist Party policy to act together was short-lived. In January 1991, the Civic Forum broke up after it won a landslide victory in the first democratic elections. During the 1990s, a political spectrum formed, divided between left and right parties, which was typical of parliamentary democracies in the West. At the same time that the civic movement promoting democracy against the dictatorship of the Communist Party was splitting, the national cleavage of the state was also taking place. In 1992, after two years of constant tension between Prague and Bratislava over the post-revolutionary settlement, the leaders of the most successful political parties on the Slovak and Czech scene agreed on the administrative division of the country. Two independent states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, were created.

A key figure in this transformation was the chairman of the newly formed Civic Democratic Party, Václav Klaus, who as prime minister advocated for the rapid privatisation of state-owned enterprises and the transition of the entire society to a market economy within a few years. This "shock therapy" brought not only quick results, but also social insecurity linked to corrupt practices, the decline of many factories considered during socialism to be the showcase of the national economy and an increase in unemployment. Initial massive public support for this policy began to be challenged in the mid-1990s by the realisation that Western consumerism was not automatically available to all. In 1996, social democracy succeeded, and the democratic left was reintegrated into the system of mainstream politics, forming a counterweight to the neoliberalism of the architects of the privatisation scheme. The process of the Czech transition between democracy and dictatorship ended with the announcement of a referendum on accession to the European Union in 2003, symbolically decided by the politician responsible for the events of the first years of the transformation, Václav Klaus in the office of President and the chairman of Social Democracy, Vladimír Špidla, in the office of Prime Minister.

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The lives of all three of the witnesses - Jiří Zajic, Michaela Bedrníková and Lucia Bartosová - were strongly influenced by the Velvet Revolution. Their lives under the socialist dictatorship changed almost overnight, only to experience the chaotic and free era of the 1990s, in which Czech and Slovak society was searching for a new identity. While Jiří Zajíc experienced the Prague Spring as a high school student and the subsequent repression prevented him from studying the field he wanted to study because of his religious and political convictions, both Lucia Bartošová and Michaela Bedrníková belong to the generation of student activists of the Velvet Revolution born in the 1970s. The first two belonged to parallel social structures–in this case the Catholic and Protestant underground churches–while Lucia Bartošová and her family lived a life that most people in Czechoslovakia imagined as "normal". They were all actively involved in the protests in the autumn of 1989 and in the building of post-revolutionary society.

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Greece

By Vassiliki Sakka and Maria Fragoulaki

Life before dictatorship

The end of the Civil War (1946-1949) in 1949 did not bring political stability to Greece. On the contrary, until 1967, when the Junta (the dictatorship of the Colonels) was imposed, the whole political climate was unstable and was preparing the ground for a constitutional aberration. The constitution was a reigning democracy, with strong interference from the king and frequent changes of government. Right-wing parties became entrenched in politics. Typically, the party of the National Radical Union (ERE), led by Constantine Karamanlis, who was prime minister from 1955 to 1963, set itself up as an anti-communist progressive union of all the forces of the political right, while the Communist Party was outlawed. Courts martial operated and persecution of leftists, deportations, imprisonment, confinement in camps and executions were imposed. Emblematic was the execution of Nikos Bellogiannis and three others on the false charge of espionage already 2.5 years after the formal end of the civil war, despite the international mobilisation for their lives.

In 1951, the EDA (United Democratic Left) was founded as a coalition of left-wing parties, which in the 1958 elections became the official opposition, triggering a series of repressive measures against leftists throughout the country. Early elections were held in 1961, marked by a prevalence of violence and fraud. The coalition of conservative centrist parties under Georgios Papandreou (Union of Centre) emerges as the ruling opposition. It disputes the election result and declares the so-called 'Unadmitted Struggle'. Until 1964, when the Centre Union emerged as the leading party in the elections and George Papandreou became Prime Minister, there was prolonged political turmoil, with strong involvement of the royal family. The climax was the 1963 assassination of Grigoris Lambrakis, a member of the EDA and a member of the global movement for peace and disarmament, in a car crash staged by senior police officers. The rule of the country by the Centre Union was interrupted in July 1965 by the departure of its deputies (the so-called Apostasy or Iouliana). A period of great unrest and

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political crisis followed, with constant changes of government and prevalence of political violence.

The political anomaly culminated on 21 April 1967 with the coup d'état of a group of sworn army officers, who imposed a dictatorship (the "Junta of the Colonels"). The dictatorial regime abolished democratic institutions, imposed restrictions on the freedoms of the press, speech and assembly, and there was tight control over education and trade union activities. Education was controlled, with an emphasis on nationalist propaganda. Family life was conservative, oriented towards traditional distinct gender roles. In daily life, citizens faced restrictions on freedom of expression and political activity. Censorship was intense, and those who opposed the regime risked arrest, torture or exile, which characterised the entire period of the dictatorship. All three available Greek testimonies confirm the restriction of freedoms and the resulting climate of insecurity and discrimination against non-conformist citizens, especially against members of the Left.

The transition

On 24 July 1974, Constantine Karamanlis was invited from Paris to take over the government of the country. Karamanlis formed a government of national unity and took steps to restore democracy. He stabilised the political situation, restoring individual freedoms, and sought to demilitarise politics, while legitimising the Communist Party of Greece, which took part in the first free elections in November 1974, in which it defeated the newly formed New Democracy party under Karamanlis. On 8 December 1974, a referendum on the constitution was held, which led to the abolition of the monarchy, as the vast majority of Greeks opted for an unrestricted democracy. The new democratic constitution of 1975 guaranteed human rights, parliamentarianism and the separation of powers. All three available Greek testimonies underline the 'enthusiasm' with which a large part of the population welcomed the post-independence period, expecting 'freedoms'. The era of intense 'politicisation' for 'change' - the betterment of the world - was beginning. "It was a frenzy really, I don't forget the sound, the sound, the atmosphere of it, the relief like you wouldn't believe, ecstasy, an ecstasy of the world."

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Democracy (“Metapolitefsi”)

From 1974 to 1981 political life was dominated by the right-wing party, New Democracy, while in 1981 the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) under Andreas Papandreou won the elections, bringing the centre-left to power and focusing on social reforms. Since then, the country has experienced relative political stability and democratic government rotation, while the threat of military intervention has been removed. Social rights have been strengthened with reforms in labour, welfare and education. At the level of everyday life, political freedoms were fully restored and trade unions and political organisations developed. Stronger rights for women and minorities were enshrined in law. Education was made more accessible and modernised by the standards of the time, with the aim of tackling inequalities. Greek citizens developed strong hopes for economic prosperity and social progress, especially after the country's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981. More generally, this period was accompanied by a strong sense of change and improvement in living conditions, with citizens seeking to participate in political and social life, though there were some setbacks, disappointment and frustration in several cases. From 1989 to 2009, stability and sequence prevailed in political life, despite various scandals. From 2010, Greece faced a severe financial and socio-political crisis after the bankruptcy of the country and the imposing of strict financial restrictions by the IMF and E. B. Turmoil, social and political unrest, demonstrations and deterioration of living status, along with unemployment and brain drain, signaled the end of Metapolitefsi. Public outrage led to a change of government in 2015, when for the first time a pure left-wing party won the elections and formed a government (until 2019), even though it could not avoid another memorandum and harsh measures.

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Lithuania

By Sandra Gaučiūtė

Life Before Democracy

Before democracy, Lithuania experienced different political regimes.

- February 16, 1918 – Lithuania declared independence from Germany.
- June 15, 1940 – The Soviet Union occupied Lithuania.
- June 1941 – massive deportations to Siberia.
- 1941–1944 – Germany invaded the USSR, forcing the Soviets to retreat. Nazi occupation and the Holocaust followed, with 90–95% of Lithuanian Jews murdered.
- 1944-1990 – Second Soviet occupation.

During the Soviet occupation, personal freedoms in Lithuania were severely restricted. Censorship was widespread, controlling the press and political opposition. Free speech was also limited, as any criticism of the government, based on one-party rule, was met with punishment. Privatization was abolished, leading to the nationalization of land, businesses, and property. Collectivization led to the confiscation of private land and the forced joining of farmers into collective farms, with those who resisted facing deportation to Siberia.
The Soviet regime restructured education, introducing compulsory schooling and integrating it into the communist ideological system.

Targeted terror against the Church ensued, resulting in the closure of churches and severe restrictions on the freedoms of faith. The Soviet regime actively restricted religious practices.

The KGB (Soviet secret police) operated from 1954 to 1991 as the Soviet Union's main security agency. However, its predecessors, such as the NKVD, had already been carrying out mass repressions, deportations, and executions in Lithuania since 1940. The KGB suppressed political dissent, monitored citizens, and targeted those opposing the regime. It conducted arrests, interrogations, torture, and forced confessions. Prisoners faced brutal conditions, psychological pressure, labour camps, and executions. Many were

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deported to Siberia, where they endured extreme hardships. During the Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1940–1990), an estimated 50,000–70,000 people were killed due to mass executions, deportations, forced labour camps, and political repression.

Significant Events
Deportations (1940s–1950s): During the Soviet occupation, the USSR conducted mass deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia and other remote regions to eliminate resistance and suppress nationalism. People were deported in animal wagons, and some of them never even reached the place of deportation.

- June 1941: The first major wave saw 17,500 people deported, including former Lithuanian President Aleksandras Stulginskis, government officials, teachers, intellectuals, farmers, and clergy members.
- May 1948: 40,002 people deported.
- March 1949: 33,736 people deported.
- October 1951: 16,150 people deported.

Many deportees, including children, were sent to harsh labour camps in Irkutsk, Altai, and near the Arctic Ocean, where many perished.

Lithuanian armed resistance (Partisan War) (1944–1953): After WWII, Lithuanians launched an armed resistance movement against Soviet occupation. This was the longest guerrilla war in Europe, lasting nearly a decade. It is believed that between 40,000 and 50,000 fighters participated throughout the partisan struggle in Lithuania. A diverse range of people were involved in this war, but most of the partisans were young, between the ages of 18 and 30.

In Lithuania, partisan groups were often organized into smaller structures based on their localities. The Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (ULFF) was established in 1949, with Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas as leader. The Soviet occupying authorities responded harshly, employing intense repression, mass arrests, killings, and violence against the partisans and their supporters. It is estimated that 30,000 Lithuanian partisans and their supporters were killed during the partisan struggle.

The Chronicle of the Catholic Church (1972-1989):
The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania was an underground publication that ran from 1972 to 1989, documenting the Soviet government's human rights violations, persecution of believers, and repression of clergy and

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public figures. It became one of the most significant dissident publications in Lithuania, exposing Soviet crimes and drawing international attention to the country's struggle for religious and national freedom.

Founded by Father Sigitas Tamkevičius, the Chronicle was produced and distributed in complete secrecy, and the regime saw the Chronicle as a major threat. Many of its contributors, including Sigitas Tamkevičius, Alfonsas Svarinskas, Jonas Boruta, and Nijolė Sadūnaitė were arrested, imprisoned or exiled. The Chronicle played a key role in inspiring resistance among Lithuanians. It demonstrated that the Soviet system could be challenged and that the desire for religious and national freedom remained strong.

The Transition to Democracy

The transition of Lithuania from a Soviet republic to an independent democratic state (1988-1990) was a challenging process, marked by political struggle, international diplomacy, and mass demonstration.

- June 3, 1988: The Sąjūdis movement was founded, advocating for Lithuanian independence.
- August 23, 1989:The Baltic Way, a 600-km-long human chain, symbolized Baltic unity against Soviet occupation.
- February 24, 1990: Lithuania held free elections, with Sąjūdis winning a majority in the Supreme Soviet.
- March 11, 1990: The Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania was declared, restoring independence.
- January 13, 1991: Soviet military aggression in Vilnius (January Events).

Significant Events

The Rock March (lit. Roko Maršas): The Rock March was a series of music festivals and political demonstrations held in Lithuania between 1987 and 1989. These events were crucial in spreading the ideas of Sąjūdis, the Lithuanian independence movement, and mobilizing the youth against Soviet rule. The concerts featured patriotic songs and speeches about Lithuania's future, independence, and national identity. One of the largest Rock March gatherings was held in 1988, drawing 100,000 people to Vingis Park in Vilnius. The event called for legalizing Lithuanian national symbols, such as the tricolour flag and national anthem.

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Rock band "Duck" singing on stage during the first "Rock March". Vilnius, Lithuania, 1987. Photo by Raimondas Urbakavičius. National Museum of Lithuania.

The Baltic Way (Baltic Chain): The Baltic Way (also known as the Baltic Chain) was a peaceful political demonstration on August 23, 1989, where approximately 2 million people from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia joined hands to form a 600-kilometer (370-mile) human chain across the three Baltic states, from Vilnius (Lithuania) to Tallinn (Estonia), passing through Riga (Latvia). This event was a powerful symbol of resistance against Soviet rule and a call for independence. The Baltic Way took place on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 23, 1939), a secret agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union that led to the occupation of the Baltic states in 1940. Protesters demanded that the Soviet Union acknowledge the pact's illegality and restore Baltic independence. Using radio broadcasts and newspapers, organisers instructed people to gather at specific points along the route. Despite limited communication tools, the turnout was enormous, showing strong national unity. In 2009, the Baltic Way was added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, recognizing its significance for democracy and human rights.

Baltic Way, 23 August 1989 / Kusurija, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

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March 11, 1990 – The Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania: After the Sąjūdis movement was founded in 1988, Lithuanian society became increasingly vocal in demanding independence from the USSR. The Baltic Way in 1989 demonstrated the unity of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in opposition to Soviet rule. In 1989, the Union allowed limited self-governance for the Baltic states, but Lithuania aimed for full sovereignty. In the February 1990 elections, Sąjūdis secured a majority in the Supreme Court. In March 11, 1990, The Lithuanian Supreme Court adopted the Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania. The act declared that Lithuania restored its independence based on the 1918 declaration, rendering Soviet laws inapplicable in Lithuania. Vytautas Landsbergis, the leader of Sąjūdis, was elected as Chairman of the Supreme Council, becoming Lithuania's first head of state. The USSR declared the independence act illegal and imposed economic sanctions. In April 1990, the USSR cut off oil and gas supplies to Lithuania, attempting to cripple its economy.

January 13, 1991 – January Events in Vilnius: When economic pressure failed to force Lithuania back into Soviet control, the USSR resorted to military aggression in January 1991. The goal was to overthrow Lithuania's government and restore Soviet authority. On January 12, Soviet forces seized the Press House in Vilnius and on January 13, Soviet tanks and troops attacked the Vilnius TV Tower, a key communication site. Thousands of citizens gathered at the Supreme Council building to protect the newly elected independent government, public resistance remained strong, and the Soviet plan failed. Despite that, 14 civilians were killed, and over 700 were injured while defending Lithuania's independence. After these events, international condemnation of Soviet aggression strengthened global support for Lithuania.

1991 - Soviet troops seize the Television Tower and the Lithuanian Radio and Television building in Vilnius. Photo by Andrius Petrulevičius. National Museum of Lithuania.

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Democracy

Lithuania today stands as a resilient, progressive, and outward-looking democracy, balancing economic growth with social challenges and national security.

Important dates:

- February 11, 1991: The first foreign country in the West, Iceland, recognises the independence of Lithuania.
- July 29, 1991: The Soviet Union officially recognized Lithuania's independence.
- October, November, 1992: The first free elections in independent Lithuania when Lithuanians voted for the Seimas (Parliament) and a new Constitution.
- February 14, 1993: The first presidential elections of the Republic of Lithuania after the restoration of independence. Algirdas Brazauskas became Lithuania's first elected President.
- 1992: A new democratic Constitution was adopted.
- 2004: Lithuania joined NATO and the European Union.
- 2015: Lithuania adopted the Euro as its national currency.

The early years of democracy were marked by political instability, economic struggles (in the early 1990s, there were economic crises, high inflation, and unemployment), due to the transition from a centrally planned Soviet system to a market economy, and societal adjustments. Lithuania adopted a semi-presidental democracy, where the Seimas (Parliament) and the President share governance.

Since independence, various political parties have emerged, with shifting power between conservatives, social democrats, and liberal parties.

Step by step, Lithuania reformed its legal system to align with European democratic standards. A new Constitution was adopted in 1992, guaranteeing human rights, free elections, and a multi-party system. Reforms strengthened the judicial system, ensuring independence from political influence.

During Soviet rule, daily life was heavily controlled, with limited freedoms and a lack of consumer goods. Under democracy, people gained access to a free market economy, increased job opportunities, and greater individual rights. The

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quality of life significantly improved, especially after Lithuania joined the EU, allowing free movement across Europe.

At this moment, Lithuania has transformed into one of the fastest-growing economies in the EU, excelling in IT, fintech, biotechnology, and logistics. Vilnius has become a regional startup hub, attracting international investments. Healthcare, education, and public services have been modernized, and Lithuania ranks highly on the Human Development Index (HDI). Culturally, Lithuania balances historical heritage with globalization. Freedom of religion is fully protected, and people can openly practice their faith without state interference. Press freedom remains strong, with independent media actively investigating corruption and political issues. Based on its geographical location, Lithuania plays a crucial role in regional security as an EU external border protector. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the country has provided military aid, humanitarian support, and strict sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

Despite progress, Lithuania faces growing democratic challenges. Political polarization, declining trust in institutions, and judicial independence concerns persist. National security is a growing focus. Freedom of speech is protected, but challenges arise from hate speech, misinformation, and online harassment, which sometimes test the limits of expression. While Lithuania ranks highly in press freedom, journalists face increasing pressure from disinformation campaigns, propaganda and cyberattacks from Russia and Belarus.

In 2021, Lithuania faced a hybrid attack from Belarus, causing a migration crisis as large numbers of illegal migrants were pushed into Lithuanian territory. This event exposed weaknesses in border security and asylum policies, leading to stricter migration controls. As a target of Russian influence, Lithuania must enhance democratic resilience by countering propaganda, securing elections, and increasing public awareness. Strengthening energy security, military readiness, and NATO partnerships remains a top priority in safeguarding democracy.

Human rights issues remain an area for improvement in the context of democratic development. Lithuanian society is still closed, and legislation is unfavourable to certain groups of people. The country sees high levels of gender inequality, economic and social exclusion, hate crimes and limited LGBTQ+ rights.

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Poland

By Weronika Czyżewska-Poncyljusz

The imposition of the communist regime in Poland was a result of the Yalta Conference and the closing of the Iron Curtain–a border separating the spheres of influence of the two opposing sides of the Cold War. Poland fell under the influence of the Soviet Union and was forced to adopt communism as its political system. Both internal and foreign policies of the Polish People's Republic (the official name of the country from 1952) were dependent on the Soviet Union. Power was held by the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), and its chairman, called the First Secretary, was the highest person in the state. The communist party exercised control over administration, the economy, the media, education and all other domains of social life. They used terror and propaganda. One of the tools used to consolidate and maintain communist power, falsify reality and gag rebellion was all-encompassing censorship. The economy was based on the principles of central planning, which meant a departure from free-market economic mechanisms.

Constant economic stagnation, shortages in the supplies of basic goods, and a lack of political freedom and free media, anti-church propaganda and repressions, as well as the frequent abuses of power of the political elites, marked the communist period with great social unrest and protests, always brutally suppressed by the authorities. Mass protests in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976 did not bring any results, apart from tactical concessions by successive leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party. However, the resistance of society meant that Poland was the only country in the Soviet bloc in which the Catholic Church retained its independence and that failed to collectivize agriculture.

In the mid-1970s, the economic crisis was growing, and shortages of basic products were slowly becoming an everyday occurrence. The action taken at the turn of 1975 and 1976 to change the constitution (among other things, the "leading role" of the communist party and "strengthening friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union were included in it) led to the revival of opposition circles. After the workers' protests of June 1976, numerous opposition organizations began to be established, among which the leading role

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was played by the Workers' Defense Committee (established in September 1976) and the Human and Civic Rights Defense Movement (March 1977). In 1977, the killing of a 23-year-old anticommunist activist (Stanislav Pyjas), most likely on the orders of the security services, galvanized the student body all over the country and led to the establishment of independent student organizations. A system of underground education was institutionalized in 1978 when the Association for Academic Courses was created. It offered covert teaching of alternative history, literature, philosophy, sociology, and economics in private apartments and church buildings. The underground opposition press flourished as well, and by the end of 1979, it boasted more than 400 different publications and periodicals.

On October 16, 1978, a Pole, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, became the new pope, taking the name John Paul II. This event raised great hopes, strengthened during the pope's first pilgrimage to his homeland in June 1979.

An unprecedented wave of strikes broke out in the summer of 1980 that involved all social groups and all regions in Poland. Starting from the Gdansk shipyard under the leadership of Lech Walesa, a factory electrician, and spreading quickly to other workplaces, the workers organized a free trade union named Solidarność (“Solidarity”). When the government bowed to Solidarity’s demands and allowed legalization of Solidarity in September of 1980—the first legal free trade union in communist Central and Eastern Europe—the official membership of the movement grew within a couple of weeks to almost 10 million people: 80% of the state employees, including communist party members, joined the newly legalized trade union. Threatened by the scope and pace of the growing opposition and fearful of a possible Soviet military intervention (although to this day historians dispute whether such intervention was possible or likely) the leaders of the Polish military decided to impose martial law on December 13, 1981. Consequently, hundreds of Solidarity leaders were rounded up and detained and all legal opposition organisations closed down. However, the declaration of martial law failed to achieve the communist government’s objectives. The opposition movement, although weakened, survived and reorganised itself underground. Its arrested leaders found themselves replaced by other activists who avoided detention and by a number of female organizers, who in the absence of their arrested male colleagues took leadership positions in the underground press and other Solidarity structures. In July 1983, martial law was lifted. In the same year, Lech Wałęsa received the Nobel Peace Prize.

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The communist government was not strong enough to crush Solidarity but neither was Solidarity ready to take more coercive actions to reach for power. Consequently, between 1982 and 1988, Poland was in a political stalemate between the state and society while the economic situation deteriorated further. During these years, the communist government was well aware that it had neither the internal power nor the outside legitimacy to implement any substantive reforms. By the end of 1988, with a rising number of strikes and protests and general economic malaise among the Polish population, the communist government was ready to re-engage with Solidarity. It agreed to re-legalization of the trade union movement and open negotiations on a possible political transition.

As a result of the roundtable discussions between the opposition and the government, which lasted from February until April 1989, an agreement was reached to hold free elections to a pacted parliament in June 1989. The elections brought a decisive victory for Solidarity. In August 1989, the region's first noncommunist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was appointed by the Polish parliament to head a new government with a broad popular mandate to implement wide ranging economic and social reforms to stabilize the country. In November 1990, general presidential elections were called, in which Lech Wałęsa won. Free parliamentary elections were not held until October 1991. The process of regaining independence and rebuilding democracy was symbolically completed in 1993 by the withdrawal of the last units of the Russian army from Polish territory.

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Portugal

By Samuel Guimarães

Life Before Democracy

During the Estado Novo (1926-1974), Portugal was a poor, unequal country with profound shortcomings in access to health and education. In 1970, around a quarter of the population couldn't read or write, half didn't have piped water and more than a third didn't have electricity.

The Estado Novo regime, rooted in a low-cost labour force and authoritarian power, was the result of the political process initiated by the Military Dictatorship that emerged from the movement of May 28, 1926, and the other military coup that, on April 25, 1974, overthrew the ruling regime and put an end to the longest fascist dictatorship in Europe.

For decades, women were still unable to vote, own businesses or leave the country without their husbands' permission. These limitations were accompanied by others that affected fundamental freedoms: There was no freedom of expression or association. A large part of the adult population was prevented from voting. There was only one party. Anyone who transgressed politics faced repression from the political police.

When the April 25 Revolution took place, the country had been at war for 13 years. In the conflicts in the colonies that began in 1961, 45,000 people died and 53,000 were injured. Portugal was the last European colonial empire (Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe).

The country lived under a one-party regime that crushed, silenced and fostered a way of life based on snitching and whistleblowing. The brutal Political Police (PIDE), which arrested, tortured and killed, created a climate of muteness. On the terraces or in cafés, police officers whistled anti-regime songs to catch anyone who recognized them and arrest them as “communists” or dangerous members of the resistance to fascism. Religion and the Catholic Church were

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pro-regime and responsible for a people who were frightened and closed off from the outside world, especially in the inland. In addition to Portugal's apparent neutrality in World War II, Salazar and his ministers supported the far-right Falangist Franco (Spain) and the wolfram mines exploited by the nazis. But there was resistance. To name just a few examples:

- Aristides Sousa Mendes (1855-1954), a Portuguese diplomat in Bordeaux, France, disobeyed Salazar's orders and granted visas to Jewish people who wanted to flee Germany and occupied France. It is estimated that he granted travel visas to 30,000 refugees.
- Humberto Delgado (1906-1965), the so called “fearless general”, tried to overthrow the regime in 1958 in elections that turned out to be fraudulent. This movement brought a lot of hope and filled the streets of the country.
- Virgínia Moura (1915-1998), the daughter of a single mother, is the first Portuguese woman to become an engineer and resisted Portugal's autocratic regime from an early age, even while living underground.
- Margarida Tengarrinha (1928-2023), an artist and freedom fighter, stood out in the underground for having forged various identification documents, allowing many Portuguese to escape or live a freer life.

The dictatorship was based on the autocratic power of António Oliveira Salazar. When he left power in 1968, incapacitated after falling from a chair (he died in 1970), Marcello Caetano succeeded him and took over the presidency of the Council of Ministers. The country experienced the Marcelist Spring, an expectation of change that did not materialize. His appointment raised great expectations among the more progressive currents of the National Union, the only party in the country, but these were soon dashed and Marcello Caetano found himself increasingly alone, abandoned by both the so-called hardliners and the regime's progressives. In 1974, he resisted the coup attempt that took place on March 16, but the same did not happen a little over a month later. On April 25, surrounded at the GNR barracks in Largo do Carmo, Lisbon, he surrendered and handed over power to General Spínola. He went into exile in Brazil, where he died in 1980.

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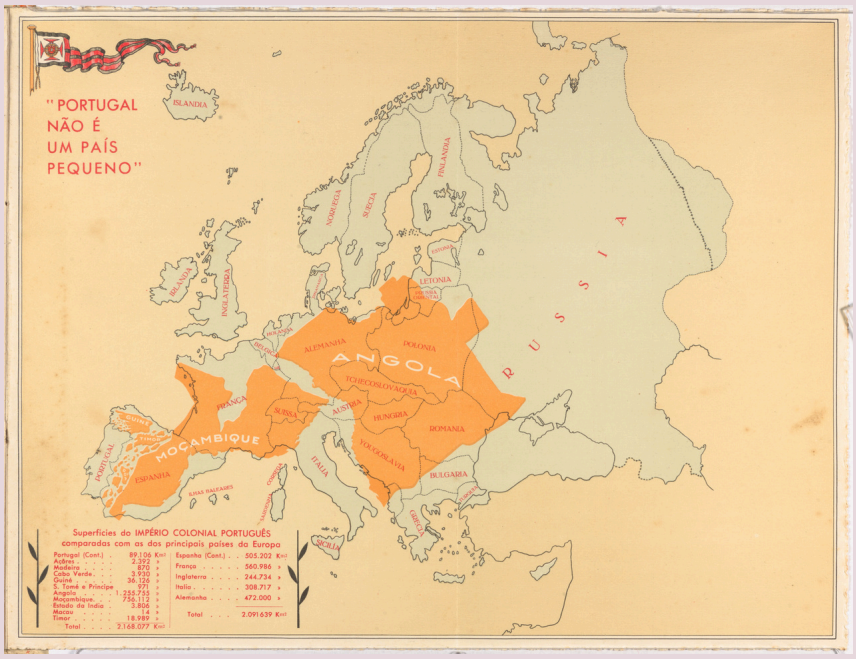
Illustration by Jaime MB,
https://www.tribop.pt/TPd/Li%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20de%20Salazar



Cornell University – PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography
Examples of educational propaganda from Estado Novo (Portuguese fascist dictatorship)
(top) "Salazar Lesson: God, Homeland, Family. The trilogy of national education" (1938)
(bottom) "Portugal is not a small country" (1939)

Transition to Democracy

The political transition included the uncertainty and confrontations typical of revolutionary processes. Democracy emerged victorious. Its first achievements were the most urgent: freedom of expression and opinion, a multiparty political system and universal and direct suffrage. In the first years of freedom, the Portuguese went to the polls in unprecedented numbers.

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The war ended and the former Portuguese colonies gained independence. Between 1974 and 1975, more than 500,000 people from the former colonies returned to Portugal. These were the so-called returnees. The economy also changed. Despite having undergone astonishing development in the 1960s, the national economy was still one of the most underdeveloped in Europe. Today, it is considered by the World Bank to be one of the most developed.

Prosperity made it possible to develop a welfare state like those that already existed in Europe. The pension system was extended to previously excluded groups and, in 1979, the National Health Service was created. This is one of the greatest democratic conquests, because in the days of fascism, being ill was a privilege for the few and all medical care was paid for. In 1976, Portugal adopted a new Constitution, one of the most innovative and progressive in Europe today. Portugal had three bailouts from the International Monetary Fund (1977, 1983 and 2011). In these five decades, the country has made significant progress in combating poverty and inequality. Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community in 1986 greatly contributed to this, paving the way to European funds and faster growth until the beginning of the 21st century.

Some important personalities:

- Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo was the only woman to hold the post of Prime Minister in Portugal, having headed the Fifth Constitutional Government, in office from July 1979 to January 1980. She was the second woman to hold the post of Prime Minister in Europe, two months after Margaret Thatcher took office in the United Kingdom.
- Celeste Martins Caeiro was the woman who, on April 25, 1974, handed out carnations to the military who were leading a coup d'état to overthrow the fascist regime. For this reason, the revolution became known as the "Carnation Revolution".
- Mário Soares, a lawyer and resistance fighter, was imprisoned several times and fought for democracy while in exile in France. He is a key figure in Portuguese democracy, both in protecting the establishment of a pro-Soviet regime in 1975 and in his pioneering work for Portugal's entry into the EEC.

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Carnation Revolution
Source: https://50anos25abril.pt/o-25-de-abril/

Life Today

However, levels of poverty and social exclusion are still above the European average. Around two million citizens are below or on the poverty line. Over the last 50 years, Portugal has caught up with its European partners when it comes to schooling. Starting in 1974 with just 67,000 enrolled in higher education, the country has managed to surpass the European average in the percentage of graduates between the ages of 25 and 34, and today has the most qualified generation ever. Despite this progress, the average education levels of the Portuguese are still much lower than those of the European Union.

If, until the turn of the century, the economy made promising progress, it has since stopped converging with the European average. Despite working more hours on average than other Europeans, Portuguese productivity is low. Wages are also low. This situation particularly affects the younger generations, who have emigrated in search of better opportunities.

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The Portuguese population is decreasing and getting older. In 1974, there were 35 elderly people for every 100 young people. In 2021, there were 183 for every hundred. Over the last 20 years, citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy has remained below the European average. There is a lack of trust in the government, parliament, courts and parties. The majority show no interest or participation in political life. At every election, millions of Portuguese decide to stay away. Although democracy has majority support, only 37% of people reject the idea of a strong leader who doesn't have to answer to parliament or go to the polls.

(Source: https://ffms.pt/pt-pt)

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Romania

By Diana-Maria Beldiman

Life Before Democracy

During 1948 - 1989, the Communist regime ruled in Romania. The chronology of the Communist period is divided as follows:

- **1948 – 1965:** The Stalinist period in which the country was ruled by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. The domestic and foreign policies were under the influence of The Soviet Union.
- **1965 – 1989:** The National-Communist period in which the country was ruled by Nicolae Ceaușescu. Within this period, there are two different sub-periods:
  - **1965 – 1971:** the period in which the regime was a little bit more relaxed and the Romanian leaders established contacts with democratic countries such as France or the USA.
  - After the visit to China and Korea in 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu introduced a more repressive regime with a lot of restrictions for the population. The period **1971 – 1989** was considered a Neo-Stalinist period due to the domestic policy, which was very restrictive for the population.

Transition to Democracy

Revolution from December 1989 led to the removal of the Communist regime in Romania. Many people protested against the privations that they had to suffer during the latest years of communist regime. Because Nicolae Ceușescu wanted to entirely pay the external debt of Romania, during the last decade of Communist period, severe restrictions were imposed on the population: only a few hours a day with electricity, food was exported, the population was starved, etc. All these led to the people's uprising in December 1989.

It all started at Timisoara on 16th of December, and within a few days, the anti-Communist movement spread all over the country. The popular movements

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were repressed and, unfortunately, the events created many civilian victims. The dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were formally judged and executed on 25th of December 1989.

Life During Democracy

After the fall of the Communist regime, a group of people called the National Salvation Front (former communists, dissidents, military people, etc.) took control of the country and promised to organize free elections and democratic reforms.

The first democratic elections were held on the 20th of May 1990 and were won by the National Salvation Front (in the meantime, they had become a political party). Despite the difficulties that marked the transition to democratic society with protests, strikes and mistrust in the new political leaders, certain reforms were taken in order to create the democratic background to achieve the aims formulated in 1989. Thus, various parties re-appeared on the political scene, the post-communist Constitution was adopted in 1991 and Romania integrated itself in the Western institutions: NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007.

Romanian presidents after the fall of the Communist regime were:

- **Ion Iliescu** - December 1989 – June 1990 (interim), June 1990 – October 1992, November 1992 – November 1996
- **Emil Constantinescu** - November 1996 – December 2000
- **Ion Iliescu** - December 2000 – December 2004
- **Traian Băsescu** - December 2004 – December 2014
- **Klaus Werner Iohannis** - December 2014 – (present as of 2024)

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Spain

By Cécile Barbeito Thonon

Life Before Democracy (1939-1975)

Francisco Franco's regime started in 1939, after his side, the conservative "Nationals" beat the leftwing "Republicans" in the Civil War.

Once in power, Franco installed a regime with one single party, the "Falange Española, Tradicionalista y de las JONS". Its "National-catholicism" ideology, inspired by Italian fascism, was based on Catholicism, conservative morals, Spanish nationalism and economic autarchy. It also pointed at enemies such as communists, Jews and masons. It structured society around Youth Front, Women Section, Vertical Union and Social Assistance organisations.

Two periods are usually distinguished. In the first one (1939-1959), as a heritage of the war and of economic autarchy, populations faced poverty and even hunger, and severe repression.
In the second period (1959-1975), Francoism opened its economy to tourism and foreign investment, developed industry, built infrastructure (swamps) and built houses, which led to a growth of 7% of GDP.

The educational system transmitted conservative values through old-school methodologies. While folk dances and traditions were promoted, teaching Basque, Catalan, and Galician languages was forbidden at schools.

Women could not vote and, unlike the past times, were encouraged to stay at home and required to be authorised by their husbands to work. Rights and civil liberties such as the right to demonstrations and reunions were restricted, and censorship was installed. Repression led to 130.000 people executed and 370.000 imprisoned, while about 400.000 people left the country in exile, mostly in the first period.

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While repression decreased in the second period, social opposition increased, mainly led by workers, university students, clandestine unions and parties, grassroots priests and neighbourhood movements. Also, in the '70s, opposition groups such as ETA, FRAP, and others organised themselves through violence. In 1973, ETA killed Luis Carrero Blanco, then President of the government, and expected leader to continue with Francoism.

Transition to Democracy (1975-1982)

The transition started in 1975, due to the death of Franco. The King Juan Carlos de Borbón, who had substituted Franco as head of State, nominated Adolfo Suárez as the new head of the government.

Suárez promoted crucial reforms such as the passing of the Law for Political Reform in 1976 and the Amnesty Law for political prisoners in 1977, which allowed the legalization of political parties. In the first elections that took place in June 1977, Suarez was elected as the new president. The new Spanish constitution was approved in 1978 with 87,78% of votes in favour, and new elections–the first under the new Chart–were celebrated in 1979 where Suárez was re-elected again.

In 1981, a Coup d'État took place by generals, but it lasted only one day. After that, in the new elections in 1982, the socialist party was elected. Although there is no consensus of when the transition finished, it is commonly considered to be the 1982 elections, because this is when the government was in the hands of the opposition of the Franco regime (as Suárez had been appointed by the King, and the King by Franco).

In that period, armed opposition groups such as ETA (Basque Nationalists), GRAPO (Anarchists) and others continued. Nonviolent opposition was also organised through multiple student groups, unions, parties and neighbours' organisations, now legalised, with numerous demonstrations in the streets.

Regarding Transitional justice, while political reforms were made, and the Amnesty law aimed at some reparations to opposition leaders, no Memory Law passed until 2007 (and again in 2024). Few efforts for truth seeking were promoted.

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Life During Democracy (1982-...?)

During democracy, Spain entered the CEE (current EU) and NATO (despite huge opposition), and subscribed to many international agreements not signed previously.

Alternation between the socialist party (PSOE) and the conservatives (PP) has been relatively smooth, sometimes with absolute majority, sometimes in coalition, often with regional nationalist parties.

In 2011, massive street protests ("Indignados" movement, also known as "15M") denounced many shortcomings of Spanish democracy. This also had a side effect in the medium term, as new parties were created (radical right, radical left and liberal, now disappeared), which ended the two-party system and obliged governments to set more coalition pacts.

Currently, the situation regarding rights has improved compared to undemocratic times, but faces many shortcomings: Basic political and civil rights are recognised but the right to protest has been limited since the Indignados-15M protests. Freedom of expression is also limited (i.e. several singers have faced jail terms for singing against the Monarchy).

Different languages (Basque, Catalan, Galician) are taught in schools, though used in uneven levels by the population. Economic rights have also improved, but increasing inequality and inflation (especially in housing) is a great challenge.

While some rights such as health and schooling are applied universally, whether to citizens or undocumented migrants, other rights are restricted for certain groups of people.