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Europe now

Competition: How exchange changed
my life

Content analysis of the application
rounds 1 and 2

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Introduction

The initiative „Europe Now“ provides the opportunity for exchange students to take part in a competition called “How exchange changed my life”. This competition is open for all students who have a European experience in student exchange. The ambition is to refer the experiences and ideas concerning visions for Europe and the own professional outlook.

The outcome of the rounds 1 and 2 have been analysed by a qualitative content analysis. The analysis was done with the assistance of maxqda, a software for professional text analysis. The 31 texts were analysed in terms of the different topics mentioned there. For every new topic a new category was built and a code was allocated to the according paragraph in the text. Every single text was coded concerning relevant topics. Every according paragraph was allocated to an according category. For every category subcategories were built within the same procedure to extract relevant attributes and dimensions. The output was a comprehensive system of different categories built from paragraphs of all 31 texts. The following study is based on this system of categories. Original quotas were used to get a better view of the students' experiences.

This paper is divided into five main chapters featuring the students, their origin, their experiences and their vision regarding Europe. Most emphasis is on the students' vision of Europe and their professional outlook. In the first place the group of the participating students is described regarding their personal background, their field of study, their home and host institutions and the length of their stay. The second chapter deals with the benefits and changes the students experienced during their exchange time. In chapter three the students' impressions of the actual life in the EU are discussed. The biggest part of the paper deals with the students' vision of Europe. They explained their ideas and suggestions for a better life, their plans and hopes for the future. Some students wrote about visions for Europe in general, other explicitly about visions for the EU. The last part is all about the professional outlook from a wide point of view – some students have already specific job perspectives, others described ideas and dreams of their future.

1 Background of the students

1.1 Gender, citizenship and year of birth

Overall 31 students participated at the rounds 1 and 2 of the competition. The gender distribution was quite well balanced. The students were born between 1973 and 1987. Students born after 1983 were in the majority. 27 persons came from Europe, namely from Austria and East- and South-East-European countries. Four persons came from South-America.

Gender	number
male	14
female	17
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>

Table 1: Gender

Year of birth	number
1973	1
1975	2
1980	2
1981	1
1982	2
1983	1
1984	5
1985	8
1986	7
1987	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>

Table 2: Year of birth

Citizenship	number
Austria	6
Slovakia	1
Hungary	1
Croatia	2
Serbia and Montenegro	6
Macedonia	1
Poland	1
Romania	3
Bulgaria	5
Ukraine	1
Uruguay	1
Costa Rica	1
Argentina	1
Mexico	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>

Table 3: citizenship

1.2 Exchange and study information

The majority of the students did their exchange via CEEPUS. Other programmes mentioned were Ernst Mach, Erasmus, Aktion Austria-Hungary and Aktion Austria-Czech Republic. The exchange took place between the years 2006 and 2009. Most of the participating students did their exchange in the year 2007/08. The duration of the exchange was from one to nine months, but most students stayed in the host country for four or five months. Detailed information can be found in the tables 4 to 6.

The students came from several European and South-American universities. As host institutions universities in 8 European countries were chosen. Particularly Austria was a very favoured country for exchange. Detailed information can be found in table 7 and table 8.

The field of study was very broad. The highest number of students did their studies in economics and computer sciences. Also language and translation studies were very popular. More information about the field of study can be found in the table 9.

Program	number
Aktion Austria - Hungary	1
Aktion Austria - Czech Republic	1
Erasmus	1
CEEPUS	22
Ernst Mach	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>

Table 4: Program

Year of exchange	number
2005/06	5
2006/07	5
2007/08	15
2008/09	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>

Table 5: Year of exchange

Duration of exchange	number
1 month	1
2 month	2
3 month	6
4 month	11
1 semester	4
5 month	8
6 month	1
9 month	1

Table 6: Duration of exchange

Home institution	number
Austria	
University of Vienna	3
BOKU Vienna	2
WU Wien	1
Slovakia	
Matej-Bel-University in Bansa Bystrica	1
Hungary	
ELTE Budapest	1
Croatia	
University of Pula	1
University of Zagreb	1
Serbia and Montenegro	
University of Belgrade	4
University of Novi Sad	1
University of Montenegro	1

Home institution	number
Poland	
Agricultural University of Cracow	1
Romania	
Technical University Iasi	1
University of Bucharest	1
Babes Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca	1
Bulgaria	
University of Economics Varna	1
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia	1
University of National and World Economy Sofia	1
Academy of Music Dance and Fine Arts Plovdiv	1
PU Paisii Hilendarski	1

Home institution	number
Ukraine	
Taras Schewtschenko University Kyjiv	1
Macedonia	
Cyril und Methodius University	1
South America	
Universidad Catolica del Uruguay	1
Universidad de Costa Rica	1
Escuela Bancaria y Comercial, Mexico	1
Universidad Blas Pascal, Argentina	1

Table 7: Home institution

Host institution	number
Austria	
University of Vienna	5
BOKU Vienna	1
WU Wien	1
University of Graz	1
Johannes Kepler University Linz	1
Alpen Adria University Klagenfurt	1
Fachhochschule Technikum Wien	1
Fachhochschule Salzburg	1
Fachhochschule-Studiengänge Burgenland GmbH	1
Management Center Innsbruck	1

Host institution	number
Czech Republic	
Charles University Prague	2
ICT Prague	1
Masarykova Univerzita ve Brne	1
Hungary	
University of Technology and Economics Budapest	1
University of Pecs	
Slovenia	
University of Ljubljana	1
University of Maribor	1

Host institution	number
Serbia and Montenegro	
University of Belgrade	1
Poland	
University of Economics Cracow	1
Karol Adamiecki University Katowice	1
Technical University of Lodz	1
Romania	
University of Arts George Enescu, Iasi	1
Bulgaria	
University of National and World Economy Sofia	1
Univeristy of Plovdiv	1

Table 8: Host institution

Field of study	number
Earth science	1
Textile engineering	1
Biochemistry	2
Forestry	1
Environmental Engineering	1
Computer sciences	4
Economics / Business management	7
Banking and Finances	2
Tourism	2
Statistics	1
Social Sciences	1
Law	1
Music	1
Slavonic Studies	3
Translation Studies	3
German Studies	1
Comparative Studies	1

Table 9: Field of study

2 Exchange

The students do not only describe their visions for Europe and their professional life, but also the experiences made during their internships. There are a lot of benefits they could take with them and the time abroad seemed to generate a lot of self-development.

2.1 Benefits

Going to another country for studying abroad does not only mean to learn new subjects in the host university. In their essays the students mention a lot of benefits. Please note that statements in double quote are original statements from the student's essays. Grammatical errors have not been improved in order to enable a pristine impression.

The biggest advantage for the students was learning about other cultures. Learning about cultures means also to learn about the people of a country and *"what they were thinking, doing and how they were working."* You get to know different ways of living and *"you learn many things about the cultural heritage and traditions of the people"*. European culture, traditions and history are seen as something special. In the words of one student this sounds as follows: *"I think Europe has the skill of communicate the culture through many different tools what it is (cultural events, architectural legislation, museums, etc.). When you are in Europe you can feel the culture and the past everywhere. And you can see there a cultural mix that I haven't seen it in another place."* But the cultural mix is not always seen as an advantage. The same person worries that local traditions and culture may get lost thereby.

The students noticed differences as well as common aspects in the cultures and habits of various people with different citizenships they met during their internships. Getting to know people with different backgrounds and make new friends is seen as very valuable. The students noticed some differences but also that they *"share a lot of common ground in many aspects like globalisation, work and study abroad"*. Although there are different visions of life in some aspects, there is the opportunity to learn from each other, to share important common ideas and work together into one direction. The study abroad is described as an exercise based on mutual understanding, cooperation and share of experiences and values. Consequently when young people from different European countries meet and exchange experiences and opinions, this should not only be considered as one step towards better understanding among individuals but also towards raising tolerance and understanding among different EU-nations.

Some students state that they realized, as a result of meeting so many people from the whole of Europe, *"that Europe does not mean only business relations but also friendship based not on economic interest but on interest of the personality of a person"*.

Getting in touch with a new culture and with different people also means to learn a new language. Next to English, regarded as lingua franca for the communication between exchange students, the students could also improve or learn the language of their host country. For many students talking in a foreign language is seen as challenge but also as one of the biggest aims regarding their internship.

In addition to learn the language, the ways of learning and studying in general are a big issue for the exchange students. It is seen as opportunity for young people from the new EU-countries to spend some time in the so called "older EU countries". There they get in touch with modern ways of learning and teaching which are based on flexibility and reasoning. As examples they mention team work, motivations to speak freely and a huge range of thematic courses.

With the experiences made during their internship they hope to help their countries to develop new curricula and new methods of learning and teaching. One step in this direction is the use of new forms of teaching in their own work: *"Now I try to implement the received in Austria experience in the work with my students at the University of National and World Economy"*.

In addition, the students could also improve their know-how concerning their specific field of study. Furthermore the student exchange program helped to get a clearer understanding regarding the own professional future.

2.2 Changes by the exchange

The students did not only benefit from their study exchange but could also discover a lot of changes during the time abroad.

One big issue was the development of the own personality. One student expresses his own development in a very figurative way: *“It helped me grow up as a person in every possible way. I learnt to solve my problems by myself but also to be more tolerant and open to changes, always willing to give my best, keep preparing myself and help other whenever I can.”*

To grow up as a person contains a high range of new gained qualities. One of the main issues of personal development is to become more open in general, for example more open towards changes, more open towards other people and towards helping other people. One person states that her *“eyes were opened by this exchange period”* and this cannot be substituted by any lectures or books. Self-development as a consequence of living and studying in a foreign country for a few months *“helps more than anything else not only in the international relations between the person and its partners, but also in the way the person communicates and works with all people surrounding him/her”*. Another student came to the understanding that the European Union is more than a financial and economic federation and that it is essentially formed in the minds of the people.

In connection to *“growing up as a person”* the study abroad was also instrumental for the development of more tolerance and a higher self-confidence. The students gathered a broader perception from the people in Europe and prejudices could be reduced. Beside the rise of tolerance towards other people the students gained more self-confidence regarding their job and education, thinking and speaking a foreign language and the judgement of their origin, their home country and their culture. For younger students it also was a new experience to become independent. They learned to manage things on their own and solve problems by themselves without their parents' help.

Due to the study experience far away from home the perception of Europe and the European Union changed. Due to contacts with people from all over Europe the feeling of being European became stronger. Also the perspective for their own professional future changed and appeared much clearer after the study exchange.

3 Impressions of the reality in the EU

During their stay in the host country the students got an impression of the reality of everyday life and compared their new impressions with their experiences from their own countries and their previous life.

The students got aware of some differences between countries, cultures and people in Europe. For example there are distinctions in the field of the welfare systems, like in the pension system. Even though Europe is home to different religions, different nations and cultures, living and working together is possible. Despite the differences within Europe, freedom is described as one of the greatest assets. It is possible to keep peace and people do feel safe.

The EU is seen as association of different countries that offers their people various opportunities for living: *"We can travel freely, meet various people, speak and learn their languages and habits, beliefs and religions"*. Free choice of study and work is seen as valuable as well. Freedom of travel and the Schengen-Community is an issue, which is mentioned very often by the students. Mobility within the EU *"without crossing the borders"* is seen as remarkable, particularly from students from non EU-countries. Travelling between different countries and also migration within the EU is easier than ever before. This development is perceived as enrichment of our future.

The enlargement of the European Union towards Eastern Europe is seen as important extension, especially for students from Eastern Europe. In the minds of the young people the Eastern European expansion is connected with a change of attitudes: *"Opening the borders especially towards Eastern Europe was a kind of a metaphor for me, how the thinking within Europe has changed"*. A young woman remembers the time of communism, when the crossing of borders was very difficult. These difficulties continued for some time even after the Iron Curtain has been dismantled. But now she experiences for the first time a society, which is much more open. This openness of the EU and their inhabitants has been mentioned frequently in the articles of the exchange students. Particularly for students from countries which are not members of the European Union, this open society is a very huge incentive.

In addition to these three most frequently mentioned issues – differences, various opportunities and the EU-enlargement – there are also some other topics, which come to the students' minds when thinking of Europe respectively the European Union:

- Europe is seen as a very big *"country"*, which is getting bigger and bigger
- Europe is seen as the most peaceful *"country"* in the world and *"in the history of mankind"*
- The EU helps to improve the living standards of its members
- The health insurance guarantees medical support to any member of the European Union
- The common currency
- The EU is also based on economic principles

Some fears also come up regarding the EU, fears of losing one's national identity and job, the fear of inflation and of being assimilated by all the EU's rules and regulations. One student believes that some fears occur in combination with the fear of the new and will be accepted in the course of the time.

4 Visions of Europe

The biggest part of the essays dealt with the students' visions of Europe. They explained their ideas and suggestions for a better life, their plans and hopes for the future. Some texts deal with visions for Europe in general, other texts deal explicitly with visions for the EU. Although it is not definitely clear if the students use the terms Europe and EU synonymously, the visions are not summarized separately. Since the content is very similar and the ideas are more or less overlapping, a common presentation seems more appropriate.

4.1 Tolerance

Tolerance seems to be the right header for the most mentioned and explained visions. Tolerance is such a broad term that a division in different aspects, disaggregated in the sections below, seems useful.

4.1.1 Freedom of thought

In a first step tolerance is brought into relation with freedom of thought and open-mindedness. The EU is described as a group of countries who want to keep their independence while promoting peace, equality and prosperity as a union. The inhabitants are described as free persons in a community: *"To be part of Europe means to be a free person in one big society with common points of view."*

4.1.2 Multiculturalism

The second important topic in connection with tolerance is multiculturalism. Europe is a multicultural society and tolerance and openness towards other people is perceived as a necessary conclusion for living together. One student compared Europe to a student exchange program:

"I imagine Europe as an exchange - the same one as I am experiencing now in Poland. Students coming from different countries with different habits and values are living in one community and living the life of the community. I suppose this is the most probable outcome of the process of "Europeisation". Neighbours speaking different language and celebrate different festivals but still living in the same neighbourhood and work in the same company, without any problems and constraints."

With a peaceful and amicable coexistence and cooperation the aim of tolerance should be achieved. Impacts of different cultures, languages, religions and conventions will enrich the community. Although there are many cultures, languages, nations and even more differences, there is the vision of Europe as one unity. Furthermore, multiculturalism brings advantages for Europe's position in the world: It opens possibilities for multinational and international dialogue and strengthens the skills to negotiate in political, social and cultural terms.

4.1.3 Education and exchange programs

Based on the fact of multiculturalism one student mentions the case of Roma and Sinti in Eastern Europe and raises the idea of common programmes for promoting the importance of education to these ethnic groups. This point leads to the issue of education. Education is sometimes seen as a condition for tolerance. Respect and curiosity should be encouraged in schools. Moreover, tolerance is a condition for implementing high-grade programs on different levels, for example at the level of higher education:

"Tolerance means with the help of international programmes, conferences and cooperation to improve the qualification of young specialists and to give young people more opportunity to gain international experiences in education, culture and science and to develop their potential."

The development of exchange programs is seen as positive factor for pupils, students and young scientists for getting in contact with another culture and for increasing tolerance towards the “different”. But to implement such programs and to offer more scholarships a higher promotion of the idea of exchange is needed. One student explains this as follows:

“What Europe could do for us is to financially support the program of student exchange and make it available for greater number of students, especially having in mind South-Eastern Europe. Europe should invest more in young people by making them able to travel and study abroad, making them able to become men and women with good human values who will lead the Europe into bright future.”

A positive consequence of experiences in foreign countries is - besides the learning of another language - the contact with other people and another way of living that can be transferred to the own social environment.

4.2 Being a European in one big society

Many statements of the students suggest the vision of Europe as one big society apart from borders. The feeling of being a European becomes stronger and more important, not only for the students themselves but also for their social environment.

Europe is seen as a mixture of contacts, memories and hopes for a better future. There are more things binding people together than differences separating them. Besides common institutions, regulations and currency *“we all have hopes and aspirations for a better life, health, simpler and more humane administration and politicians that truly serve the people”*. Due to the experiences of the exchange time also common grounds in aspects like globalisation, work and study were discovered. As a consequence the students observed that European people are not different, but that they have in some aspects of life different visions. Consequently the idea is brought up to learn from each other and to realise that we live in one big country. For some students the existence of a society is connected with the absence of boundaries. Due to their study exchange they could look *“over and through the boundaries”* and feel *“the vision of life without boundaries”*. But the discussion of borders does not only have one dimension. There is the idea of one country named Europe. But there are also votes for Europe as a *“giant entity, a borderless idea that connects this great continent (...)”*, with the condition not to tend towards becoming one big country. The common notion of these different views lies in the vision of living in a Europe without boundaries, where free moving and travelling is possible without any obstacles.

Such proposals can be politically discussed but the development of a European identity needs some time, even if the students recognize that the feeling of being a European is increasing. The intentions for the future can be summarized by the following quote: *“I envision a future in which people from various European countries when travelling abroad and being asked where they come from, would first say: I'm a European.”*

4.3 Peace

Peace is seen as a basic aim for the European Union. It is mentioned in the students' texts that the EU should fight for the *“greater goal”* of a better life in peace. They see the united Europe bringing peace and stability. Keeping peace and prohibiting war are cogent reasons to promote the European idea. Furthermore the North-South-gap and the West-East-gap should be reduced step by step. Peace is perceived as precondition for common growth. To achieve this aim politicians and inhabitants of the whole European Union must work together. Only then a peaceful and friendly living together is possible.

But peace in Europe was not always possible. No more than 60 years ago the states of the EU have learned that living in peace and keeping relations with neighbouring countries is possible

and helpful. This development should be promoted, not only in Europe itself but also as role model for all crisis-ridden regions in the world.

4.4 Close cooperation within the EU

Another vision is a closer cooperation within the EU instead of competition. It seems expedient to promote cooperation on behalf of peacekeeping, economic cooperation but also in regard to being a role model. Close cooperation is seen necessary for Europe's participation within global developments. The EU should *"take a tougher stance in international relations, making her partners across globe aware of her values and beliefs, not by force but by common sensing"*. It is also important to protect the people and the environment and to dissuade national governments from *"being corrupt and short sighted in their decisions"*.

Europe should speak in a strong, definitive voice when situations become critical and decisions should be made quickly. These decisions must be possible with majorities and not only with unanimity. For critical questions there should be a democratically elected commission, which has to be in charge to make clear decisions immediately.

4.5 Standardisation

Standardisation in Europe seems an important aim for the students participating in the competition. Suggestions and opportunities for making procedures in Europe consistent are presented in this chapter.

4.5.1 Labour

In the field of labour the vision of equal conditions in getting a job for all Europeans emerges: *"I think it is harder for a Polish or a Bulgarian person to get a job in say Germany, than it is for a German person to find one in either Poland or Bulgaria."* The proposal for a solution sounds as follows:

"I would suggest all the job interviews should be held either in English or in the native language of the country in which people would like to work in, without declaring either the applicant's nationality nor its native language, at least not until they are granted or not the job. At the end of the day, it is all about job qualifications and no matter where you are from, if you have those qualifications, then you are the right person for the job"

In general labour mobility is an important topic for the students. The EU could be a lot more active in this respect. Sustainable and appropriate working conditions should be created. Another issue is the harmonisation of the pension systems between the EU member states, which *"would give more chances for the labour mobility in European Union and make the European labour force more compatible in the world"*. Also information about working in the EU should be increased as most of the EU citizens do not know anything about working in another country.

4.5.2 Education

Education is seen as the basic step to success. The educational systems of Europe differ widely and particularly in the new EU-countries the education systems have to be reformed. New plans and modules should be developed and new equipment should be implemented. Since it will take a long time to change the old ways of learning into modern ones, the help and cooperation of schools and universities in Western countries will be needed. In the case of standardisation and adoption of curricula the student exchange plays an immensely important role and the experiences of the young people could be helpful for their countries.

4.5.3 Economy

One vision in regard to economy is the implementation of the Euro in whole Central Europe. Another idea is a tax union. Specific economic factors like taxes should be adjusted with the outcome of easier and more intensive trade.

4.5.4 Traffic and transport

Another aim is the standardisation of traffic and transport. For example road signs and regulations should be the same all over Europe. Also air traffic standardisation, which means the same prices per kilometre in the whole EU, is still to come.

Beside these suggestions for standardisation there occurs also the desire that public transport (except airplanes) should be free or even cheaper for students and workers. Cycling should be funded and the railway network should be expanded.

4.6 EU as Role Model

Changes in their own country were a topic particularly for students from South America, but also for those from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The EU is seen as a role model, for example in the aspects of living together, working and studying. Advocacy for common values and interests seems also worth imitating.

There is also the vision of the EU as model democracy like a “giant polis” in which every citizen of a EU-country with the right to vote would be a citizen: *“The people of the city would have the feeling of belonging to the city, which they could see, belonging to the country, which they could feel, and to the EU, which they could understand.”*

In summary there is the belief that different blocks of countries will follow the example of the EU, particularly for getting better living conditions for their inhabitants.

4.7 Other visions

Social fabric

In regard to the social fabric the problems of homeless people, the integration of immigrants, the issue of unemployment and the difference between the salaries in Western and Eastern Europe are mentioned. Also the medical service seems to be an important issue. For indigent people free or even cheaper medical service should be offered. The fundamental values of the family should be more respected. The EU *“should provide more help to young people and families in regard to housing and up-bringing of their children, provide more help to the old and the sick”*. In general the solving of social issues is seen as a big challenge.

Environment

Another vision is the respectful handling of the environment's resources. For example there is the desire to be able to drink tap water in every European Land.

For students from South America Europe is already very advanced regarding climate change, environmental problems and cleanness. There are some developments like the use of wind energy and solar panels to find a way out of the fossil energy dependency. To find a sustainable solution for the problem of climate change also all other countries beyond Europe have to participate.

Easier administration

A suggestion for easier administration is to implement a central helpdesk and a web page in each town which gives advice, instructions and necessary papers and forms on administrative issues. As this seems to be impractical, *“equally useful would be a single universal card that*

would contain both the personal identification and health insurance data". Bureaucracy is seen as a big problem and administrative procedures should be simplified.

Another suggestion is the implementation of an international student card which is accepted in all European countries and which grants discounts on transport and in museums.

Fight against crime

Another wish is that the EU should take action in fighting corruption, international crime and terrorism. The security of the citizens should be ensured.

Human rights

The respect of human rights is claimed in general.

5 Professional Outlook

The second part of the essays deals with the students' professional outlook. Some explain their dreams, others their concrete job-perspectives. There exists a broad range of ideas and plans for professional development in the own country as well as abroad, all with a relation to the experiences made during the exchange time.

5.1 Work in general

Some students make concrete statements regarding their job preferences while others try to describe their visions on how good job conditions would look like.

One of the working fields mentioned is social work. As concrete example the idea of voluntary work in a foundation where deprived children are supported in learning is explained. For this work the knowledge of different languages seems to be useful. Another precise idea is the aim to do policy making, either in a private company or in the public sector, no matter if in the home country or abroad. Also favoured is the field of science. The students want to establish international relations and to connect with researchers from whole Europe in their fields of science. Networking with international colleagues is seen as desirable for exchanging experiences and to benefit from each other.

One student wants to support the exchange between Eastern and South-Eastern and Western European countries. A concrete idea is to support universities in Eastern Europe to obtain better equipment. Students with international experience could be a link between countries and bring them closer together by claiming to represent their home country.

5.2 Work in the home country

There are some good reasons for the students to work in their home country. Due to the belief that the country is *"built up from ground"* by the young people they want to bring in their experiences made in other EU-countries and to implement some of the ideas in their home country. There is also the desire to work as teacher and to incorporate experiences received during the exchange time in the work with own students.

Another idea is to *"establish a well recognized research team at some scientific institutions"* in the home country with the aim to establish strategic networks with well connected regional experts. Furthermore collaboration with scientists in other EU-countries should be aspired.

5.3 Enlarging experiences in Europe

Many of the students want to continue their experiences in a foreign European country. They think that Europe offers a global environment where people are used to work with different points of view. Although there are so many differences there is the claim to work towards a common objective and to respect every single person. A second important issue is the contact to people from all over the world and the chance to meet colleagues who work in the same field and on the same problems but with a different background. The practice of a foreign language is seen as useful.

5.3.1 Further education and internship

Although all students participated already in an exchange programme, some of them want to intensify their experiences and apply for another scholarship or decided to do a PhD-Study abroad.

Before starting professional life, some students have recessed their experiences in a foreign country with an internship or want to apply for it. For example one student had an internship at

the European Central Bank. There he “*could experience the international atmosphere of a European body*” and the structure of such an institution. He saw that people from various parts of Europe can work together despite their differences. In general an internship is experienced as opportunity to become acquainted with the workaday life in another country and as personal enrichment.

5.3.2 Work abroad

Working in a foreign country within the EU is an attractive prospect for many of the participating students. The students mention career aspirations in different fields, the chance to practice foreign languages and to learn more about another culture. Also various reasons for their views are explained:

- The desire to work for European institutions like the European Commission or for international programmes like Erasmus or CEEPUS is a repeating issue in the essays of the students. For example one student wants to work as a translator for the European Union as he is interested in languages and multicultural environment and wants to become aware of political, social and economical processes. Another vision is to work for an exchange organisation creating new programs and refining the current ones. In general, more possibilities for young people should be created to help them growing and developing as professionals.
- A student of tourism wants to work in a hotel, a travel agency or an airline, because there he would get in contact with people from various countries.
- A person from South America wishes to work in a European small or medium sized company because he believes in a nice working atmosphere in almost every company and even more in a company of small size where you can easier feel as part of it.
- Working abroad is seen as an invaluable experience. It is an important opportunity “*to understand better the business entourage and to get more profound visions*”. This experiences will not only be helpful for the own carrier but also for the own country to prosper and integrate in the EU.
- Also several other working fields within Europe are mentioned. For instance, one student has the desire to work in a multinational concern with settlements in different European cities. Other persons want to find a post doc position or work in industry. All are confident that there will be an opportunity for them to work “*somewhere in Europe*”.

6 Abstract

The students experienced their exchange time as something they would never want to miss. They could gain various experiences and discovered a lot of personal changes. To get to know other cultures, to meet new people with different backgrounds, to learn a new language and to experience new ways of learning and studying were perceived most advantageous. Apart from these advantages the students discovered changes, for example in the development of their own personality, a development towards more tolerance and a new perception of Europe in general and the European Union in particular.

During their stay in the host countries the students got aware of the reality there and compared these impressions with their experiences gained in their own countries. Although the students realised some differences between countries, cultures and people in Europe, they got the impression that living and working together in peace is possible. They noted that the EU offers their people various opportunities for living and saw the enlargement of the European Union towards Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as important enrichment.

The biggest part of the essays dealt with the students' vision of Europe. Frequently mentioned topics emerged in six fields. The most mentioned and detailed visions can be summarised under the header "tolerance". Tolerance contains freedom of thought, multiculturalism and education and exchange programs. A second important vision is the wish of being a European in one big society. Europe is seen as a mixture of contacts, memories and hopes. The commonalities are experienced stronger than the differences. The idea of a borderless society is mentioned in this respect. The third important notion of vision is peace. Peace is seen as basic aim in the European Union and perceived as precondition for common growth. Another vision of the students is a closer cooperation within the EU to promote for example peacekeeping and economic cooperation. The notion of standardisation is mentioned as a further vision. Standardisation should take place in the fields of labour, education, economy and traffic respectively transport. The last frequently mentioned visionary notion is the function of the EU as a role model for other blocks of countries.

The last part of this paper deals with the professional outlook of the students. Some detailed their dreams, others their concrete job-perspectives. Many of the students want to continue their experiences in a foreign European country. Some of them want to apply for another scholarship or a PhD-study. Beyond that, students have also the desire to work in a foreign European country in different professional fields with the approach to learn more about another culture and to practice foreign languages. Other students see their future in the long run in their home country. Also in this respect, a connection with their experiences gained during their exchange time is given.