



## On the Standing Start of the European Debate Competition

Already this week, from 24 to 27 June, the first competition of the *Erasmus+* youth debate project *Debate Your Issue* (DYI) will take place online from the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. This event will kick-off an exciting summer tournament in the art of debate, with participants from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Serbia. Although due to the epidemiological situation it is not yet known in which countries it will be possible to hold the race in person, the project's participants are nevertheless ready to apply the new knowledge and skills that have been forged in intensive argumentation and speech training for more than six months.

*“Of course, the most difficult challenge throughout the whole project was to keep up our enthusiasm and the work ethic in order to conduct all activities online. However, the curiosity, eagerness and warmth of the project participants and the partners abroad have not been affected by the pandemic and continue to inspire us to organize the best possible tournament. As a partner, responsible for the implementation of the debate competitions, we started our direct preparations already in May. The biggest and the most time-consuming struggle was to model a safe and concrete strategy template so that it would be possible to plan and organize the stages of the tournament in each partner country. The strategy included three types of competitions that we have to be ready to host – physical, online and hybrid, which involved both the online and physical part. Having created this strong basis, we started to work on the first DYI debate competition in Vilnius. The improvement of COVID-19 situation in Lithuania have helped us a lot in this regard, as we were sure that at least Lithuanian participants will be able to finally see each other in person. Nonetheless, hopefully, together we will be able to host a wonderful debate competition,”* says **Povilas Gembickis**, Member of the Board of the *Jaunimo Debatai* – the Lithuanian International Association of Youth Debate Alumni.

Representatives of other partner countries are also very actively preparing for the competition in Vilnius. For example, the Czech team reveals that the most intense stage of the debate training was at the end of the last year, but 2021 started at a more moderate pace. *“Although digital fatigue seemed to have occurred, it was not an obstacle for us to hold exciting virtual learning meetings with, for instance, local opinion leaders (leader of the Pirate Party), famous YouTubers and political Instagrammers, even a social artist and the Greenpeace activist. Also, the topics discussed were diverse: overtourism, inclusive education, basic income, meat tax, etc. This project is special because most of it has taken place virtually. But, that does not mean the content should suffer. On the contrary, and I think we have succeeded in providing very high-quality training content, that is a very positive lesson learned,”* emphasizes **Teresa Weiser**, leader of the DYI project, *Goethe-Institut Czech Republic*.

The Serbian, as well as Belgian colleagues agree, confirming that the interesting content of the lectures and the inspiring lecturers were the key to success for the involvement of young people and the driving force for discussions, arguments and questions: *“We organized workshops weekly and kept the connection during the week through chat groups. However, when we finally were able to start hosting live trainings outdoors, meeting in person made our connection with the participants even stronger and their motivation went through the roof,”* characterizes **Sara Agić**, representative of the *Novo Kulturno Naselje*.

In general, all teams are pleased that the competition will start immediately and are looking forward to the opportunity to meet in person the DYI participants from other countries.

\* Due to Covid-19, changes in the project are possible.



For more than six months now, the participants of the project *Debate Your Issue* have been participating in virtual training in debating and in discussions on weekday evenings and weekends, on issues such as everyday media literacy, disinformation, populism, migration, climate change and European Union policies. The young people have emphasized the benefits of the trainings' content – opportunities to learn public speaking, non-verbal communication, overcoming shyness, upholding one's opinion and listening to others, as well as the acquiring of new contacts and learning in a multicultural team. Some also appreciate the enrichment of their English vocabulary through learning debating theory and reading information on specific political topics, while others are motivated to take in-depth looks at media research and European institutional data and subsequently express their views.

\*The next competition stages will take place: 8-11 July, Wrocław, Poland; 22-25 July, Novi Sad, Serbia; 5-8 August, Riga, Latvia; 19-22 August, Prague, the Czech Republic; 2-5 September, Brussels, Belgium. The final conference of the project DYI will take place in 7 September, in Brussels.

For the latest information on the progress of the project, please visit: [www.debateyourissue.eu](http://www.debateyourissue.eu), you can also subscribe to our newsletter at: <https://debateyourissue.eu/about-dyi/> and follow the DYI on [Youtube](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)

Project partners: [Mediawijs](#) (Flemish Digital and Media Literacy Centre, Belgium), [Goethe-Institut Czech Republic](#), [National Library of Latvia](#), [Lithuanian International Association of Youth Debate Alumni](#), [Kolegium Europy Wschodniej](#) (Eastern European College, Poland), [Novo Kulturno Naselje](#) (New Cultural Society, Serbia).

The project is co-funded by the *Erasmus+* Programme of the European Union.

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