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The European Union in German-for-the- Professions Courses

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THE EUROPEAN UNION IN GERMAN-FOR-THE-PROFESSIONS COURSES

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of more than fifty years, the European Union (EU) has gradually changed the lives of the Europeans in significant ways. The EU grew out of the devastation of WWII and was initiated in the early 1950s with a simple agreement on common oversight of coal and steel production in Germany and France. What began with the European Economic Community in 1957 with six member states has grown into a union of 27 member states today, covering most of the European continent with a combined population of more than 450 million people. It began with economic cooperation aimed at increasing prosperity and ensuring peace, two objectives that clearly have been met. Today the EU is much more than a mere utilitarian cooperative for economic reasons; it also strives to project values. The EU is very active in such areas as climate change, consumer protection, human rights, equality in the workplace, environmental protection and renewable energy, and much more.

Americans generally still think of Europe predominantly in terms of nation states. It is of course true that most affairs in the various countries are determined by national and regional governments, but increasingly decisions these governments make are guided by decisions made by EU institutions such as the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice, and the European Central Bank. Almost half of the legislation passed in Germany, for example, is related to EU laws, called directives. Even in areas such as foreign policy, the EU is increasingly trying to speak with one voice.

For the average citizen of an EU member state, the “Europeanization” has had significant effects. These developments have come gradually and today they are part of everyday life in the EU. For example, as a result of the Schengen Agreement, most border controls between member states have been eliminated. The Euro, introduced on January 1, 2002, in 12 states, is now the common currency in 16 of the member states, as Slovakia just adopted the Euro at the beginning of 2009. The free movement of goods, capital, services, and labor has been established for the most part in the EU. Citizens can seek employment in another member state and many do so, as we find a German doctor working in Sweden or a Polish plumber working in France. Concern-

ing higher education, the mobility programs ERASMUS and SOCRATES have enabled large numbers of college students to study for a semester or a year in another EU member state and have the coursework counted toward their degree program. The Bologna Process, to be completed in 2010, aims at aligning degree programs across the continent. For Germany, this means phasing out the *Diplomstudiengänge* and introducing Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in all disciplines.

RATIONALE FOR COVERING EUROPEAN UNION TOPICS

Instructional materials for Business German both from Germany and the US tend to treat the EU as an ancillary item. Typically, the EU is not dealt with systematically, but sporadically through current events articles or otherwise. *Forum Wirtschaftsdeutsch* <<http://wirtschaftsdeutsch.de>>, a German online resource for Business German, does not include units on the EU among its numerous teaching modules. Calls for a systematic treatment of the EU in foreign language classes in general go back to the year 2000. In an article entitled "The European Union and the Second Language Curriculum of the 21st Century," James Davidheiser made the case for a thorough inclusion of EU matters into the foreign language curriculum. Sensing that many FL instructors do not cover the EU because they themselves lack background knowledge, he provides a comprehensive overview of key facts of the EU and includes numerous pedagogical suggestions. The author provides many activities ranging from learning about European geography to political parties in the EU Parliament to social aspects of the EU. He concludes with a list of activities divided into proficiency levels. Because the EU is constantly changing and evolving, some of the facts presented in this article are no longer accurate. An excellent current introduction to the EU is the textbook *The European Union: How Does it Work?* (Bomberg, Peterson and Stubb, 2008). It covers the historical development, the EU's institutions, the member states, organized interests and lobbying, key policies, EU expansion, and the EU as a global actor.

RESOURCES

The EU clearly is a reality in the life of Europeans. Its decisions are wide-ranging and affect political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the member states. This alone provides a strong reason for the Business Language community in the US to learn about the EU more systematically. There is a second, very practical reason to do so: an abundance of material, both text and

video, is available. For the instructor of Business German, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at these sources.

The EU spends a lot of money on its translation and interpretation services. While important negotiations at summit meetings are mostly conducted in a few key languages (English, French, and German), the EU now has 23 official languages (Irish Gaelic was the last to be added) and all official documents are translated into the various official languages. In addition, the interpreting staff interprets the proceedings of the EU Parliament into all 23 official languages. It is not surprising to learn that the EU employs thousands of translators and interpreters. There is a clear intent behind this practice: in order to counter the fear of a loss of national identities with increasing European integration, the EU has placed a strong emphasis on national languages, both for its own proceedings as well as in education. The Council of Europe, an organization focusing on cultural issues and not related to the EU, recommends that all Europeans be trilingual.

Many of the official documents, as well as educational/promotional materials, are available at the German portal of the main EU Web site (<<http://www.europa.eu>>). The brochure section contains a list of publications available in PDF format on the following topics (<http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/index_de.htm>):

- Audiovisueller Bereich
- Außenbeziehungen
- Außenhandel
- Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik
- Beschäftigung und Sozialpolitik
- Betrug
- Bildung, Ausbildung, Jugend
- Binnenmarkt
- Energie
- Entwicklung
- Erweiterung
- Fischerei
- Forschung und Innovation
- Gesundheitswesen
- Haushalt
- Humanitäre Hilfe
- Informationsgesellschaft
- Institutionelle Fragen

Justiz und Inneres
Kultur
Landwirtschaft
Lebensmittelsicherheit
Menschenrechte
Regionalpolitik
Steuerwesen
Umwelt
Unternehmen
Verbraucher
Verkehr
Wettbewerb
Wirtschaft und Wahrung
Zoll

A useful introductory text at the EU main portal is “Europa in 12 Lektionen” found at <<http://www.ec.europa.eu/publications>>. This publication is available in many languages. The German version of this primer is divided into the following 12 chapters:

1. Warum brauchen wir eine Europaische Union?
2. Zehn Historische Schritte
3. Erweiterungs und Nachbarschaftspolitik
4. Wie funktioniert die EU?
5. Aufgaben
6. Der Binnenmarkt
7. Wirtschafts und Wahrungunion (WWU) und Euro.
8. bergang zur Wissensgesellschaft
9. Das Europa der Burger
10. Freiheit, Sicherheit und Recht
11. Die Europaische Union in der Welt
12. Welche Zukunft fur Europa?

These brief chapters provide an excellent introduction to the various topics. They are presented in a visually attractive manner and are linguistically appropriate for fourth-year US college students taking Business German. There is much more information available on the main EU Web site, including a series of short educational videos. Filed under the category “EUtube,” these videos are in English and cover a variety of topics ranging from consumer issues to renewable energies.

The most important video source is the weekly program “Europa aktuell” from <<http://www.dw-world.de>>, also known as Deutsche Welle. This half-hour news program offers features on various EU related issues. The weekly segments are available as Video on Demand. Selected segments now are also available as MP4 files, which instructors can download and permanently save on their computers.

Most online editions of daily and weekly news publications of the German-speaking press provide extensive EU-related coverage. Almost daily, the European/foreign part of the political section offers articles about the EU. These provide excellent resources for reading comprehension material and current events, such as:

Financial Times Deutschland <<http://www.ftd.de>> > Politik > Europa
Wirtschaftswoche <<http://www.wiwo.de>> > Politik > Ausland
Süddeutsche Zeitung <<http://sueddeutsche.de>> > Politik > Ausland
Die Welt <<http://welt.de>> > Politik > Ausland

SAMPLE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following section illustrates how material from some of the above-mentioned sources can be used to teach Business German students at the intermediate and advanced level about the European Union.

1. *EU Geography Activity*

At all levels of instruction, it is important that students have a basic understanding of geography. Find a suitable map of the EU (e.g., in Bomberg, Peterson, and Stubb, 2008 or in the “EU Guide for Americans” at <<http://www.eurunion.org>>, the very useful Web site of the EU mission in Washington, DC). Teach names and locations of the member states in German. Present them in the order in which they joined the EU (for a chart showing which member state joined the EU by year, see Bomberg, Peterson, and Stubb 74). Add the capital of each member state. Add flags, if desired. Supporting videos from EUtube (best access from <<http://www.eurunion.org>>): “European Union Capital Cities” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOUi7_prSbY> “European Union” (anthem) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZ9lhoo8fZo&feature=related>>.

2. *EU History Activity*

Equally important is a basic understanding of the historical development of the EU after WWII. The short history chapter of the EU Commission’s

“Europa in 12 Lektionen” provides an excellent source: (<http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/eu_glance/60/index_de.htm>). Entitled “*Zehn Historische Schritte*,” it covers the major treaties and developments of the EU’s half century of existence. Keywords are printed in bold face and should be part of a pre-reading vocabulary activity. Supporting videos from EUtube with a minimum of spoken English include: “50 Years EU”: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvRznNKY108&feature=Playlist&p=076DFAC291E71024&index=22>>. This discussion can be completed by reading excerpts from the following dossier at <<http://www.welt.de>>: “Die Geschichte der EU”: <<http://www.welt.de/politik/europawahl/article3804528/Die-Geschichte-der-EU.html>>.

3. Listening Comprehension Activity

One of the best and most reliable sources of material on the EU is the weekly news program “Europa aktuell” at <<http://www.dw-world.de>>. From the *dw-world.de* Web site one can select the site language (German) and go to “Video on Demand.” “Europa aktuell” is one of many programs *dw-world.de* airs on a regular basis. Business German instructors will recognize “Made in Germany” on this list as well. The recent development of making many of these programs available as MP4 files has made “Europa aktuell” particularly useful for Business German instructors. The program is in German (also available in English) and covers news from across the EU and beyond. The program of May 15, 2009, included a segment entitled “Deutschland: Berufsberatung in der Moschee” (<<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4243514,00.html>>).

(a) Students first read the six-line introductory text provided on the Web site, then discuss the topic around the key words of the text: *Berufsberatung, Moschee, arbeitslos, aktuelle Wirtschaftskrise, Jugendliche moslemischer Herkunft, keine Ausbildung, kein Schulabschluss, gegensteuern, Freitagsgebet, türkische Väter, Töchter und Söhne, Beruf lernen*.

(b) Students view the video without sound and take notes on who is speaking and where.

(c) First view this five-minute report. Global comprehension activity: Students write down key words, which they understand.

(d) Instructor divides the report into 4–5 segments, plays one segment at a time. Students complete a grid by filling in *Ort, Personen*, and *Schlagworte* for each segment.

4. Reading Comprehension Activity

A wealth of reading material is available in the online news publications mentioned above. The most important step for the instructor is selection of appropriate articles. The quantity of available articles can be overwhelming, and many are too challenging even for advanced-level students of Business German. Instructors may use some of the following criteria in selecting appropriate texts from German news sources: Texts that include numbers and statistics, ones with visual support in the form of charts and graphs, that present a limited number of key concepts, discuss a topic students can relate to, present a comparative view of how a particular issue is dealt with in the US. Articles that require a lot of background information the students do not have, have too many new key concepts, or are more of a theoretical nature should be avoided. A sample article is: “Hoffnung für Konjunktur vor EU Wahl” taken from the *Financial Times Deutschland* (<<http://www.ftd.de>>) on June 3, 2009: <<http://www.ftd.de/politik/europa/:Ende-der-Rezession-Hoffnung-f%FCr-Konjunktur-vor-EU-Wahl/522024.html>>. This article is suitable because it presents a timely topic, the economy in key EU member states the week before the European Parliament election on June 7, 2009. Also, it provides statistics (expected changes in *Arbeitslosenquote*, *Wirtschaftsleistung*) and concludes with a list of the economic outlook for selected member states. These are grouped into those member states where the economy is relatively stable (*Die Stablen*) and those that have serious economic difficulties (*Die Abgestürzten*). The instructor can present and discuss ten keywords from the article (e.g. *Konjunktur*, *Volkswirt*, *Wahlberechtigte*, *Immobilienblase*, *Wirtschaftsleistung*, etc.). Students can number the paragraphs. Global comprehension activity: Students write down a short title/headline for each one of the 15 paragraphs. Detailed Comprehension Activity: the instructor creates a comprehension item for each paragraph, using a variety of types of comprehension checks (matching, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, questions).

5. Speaking-Focused Activity

One can select a report from the Eurobarometer Surveys at (<http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm>). This is the official EU public opinion department that has conducted Europe-wide surveys on a variety of issues for about 30 years. Instructors and students can search the various volumes by year. Most of these reports are in English, while others are in German or other languages. Sample topics recently posted include:

Europeans' Attitudes toward Climate Change
The Values of Europeans
Views on European Union Enlargement
Intergenerational Solidarity
Students and Higher Education Reform
Europeans and the Economic Crisis
Attitudes of Europeans Toward Tourism
Women and European Elections

A team of students gleans the key information from one of the surveys. Another team either finds comparative data on a topic about the US or speculates on the attitudes Americans have on the issue. Both teams present their findings and discuss them in class.

6. Writing-Focused Activity

Students read about one of the 27 EU commissioners at <<http://ec.europa.eu/commission>>. Each commissioner comes from a different member state and holds a specific portfolio, such as health, finance, competition, trade, transportation, or environment. Each commissioner also publishes on his or her Web site a biographical statement, the curriculum vitae of the commissioner, or important speeches and issues he or she is currently working on. Students write an essay about their chosen commissioner, focusing on biographical aspects and issues under discussion in the respective portfolio.

CONCLUSION

As the European Union continues to evolve—its most recent milestone is the Reform Treaty of Lisbon, effective December 1, 2009—there is no doubt that the EU is an increasingly important institution whose laws affect the lives of the citizens of the current 27-member community and will continue to do so. It is important that American students of Business German familiarize themselves with the issues and policies of the EU, which in the age of globalization increasingly affect the world community. This article provides instructors of German-for-the-Professions courses with practical, pedagogical information on how to locate source material and to systematically incorporate EU-related issues into the classroom, focusing on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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