GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS
MODULE 6 - EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ROLE PLAY GAME

This role play game puts your pupils in the shoes of a Member of the European Parliament. For one to two hours, your classroom becomes the European Parliament itself, and your pupils discuss how they would tackle current EU topics like global warming, tobacco rules and an EU army.

This role play game will help your pupils to develop their democratic skills. These skills include developing a critical opinion, debating skills and learning to make compromises.

First, **pupils work in smaller groups** - parliamentary committees - on a legislative proposal from the European Commission. They use a game board with thematic cards. While amending the legislative proposal, they must take into account the different points of view of the Council of the European Union and other stakeholders. There are five topics to choose from, of different difficulty levels.

Second, there is a **plenary debate in class**, where the groups present their adapted laws. This is followed by a class vote.

Finally, there is a thorough **debriefing and evaluation** of the role play game, pointing out the similarities and differences between the classroom exercise and reality.

METHODOLOGY	DURATION	MATERIALS
Role play game: work in parliamentary committees	25 mins	- <u>Game board</u> for each group - <u>Worksheet</u> for each group - <u>Set of theme cards for each group.</u> The cards need to be printed on one side and cut out. - <u>Thematic legislative proposal of the European Commission</u> for each group.
Role play game: plenary debate and vote	10 mins per theme	- Blackboard/flipchart + chalk/marker - <u>Filled-in worksheet for each group</u>
Debriefing and evaluation	15 mins to 1 hour	- Computer + projector - <u>Presentation</u> of part 6

OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

ATTITUDE

- The pupils develop an overall critical attitude: they form an opinion on current EU topics.

KNOWLEDGE

- The pupils are familiar with and understand (a simplified version of) the EU decision-making process.
- The pupils understand the European Parliament's role within this process.
- The pupils know that the European Parliament deals with concrete topics that have an impact on their daily lives.
- The pupils know more about the themes that are discussed.

SKILLS

- Throughout the exercise the pupils develop their democratic skills: they learn how to take the opinion of others into account, how to form their own opinion, how to consult others and how to compromise.
- The pupils learn how to present their proposal and how to speak in front of a group.

STEP BY STEP

1. ROLE PLAY GAME: WORK IN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

SETTING

The class is divided into groups of four to five pupils. Each group is assigned a theme to work with. Each group sits around a table with all the materials. Ideally, the tables will have already been prepared by the teacher.

Each group has a thematic legislative proposal of the European Commission. On their table there is also a worksheet (identical for all themes), a game board (identical for all themes) and the cards that belong to the theme. The thematic cards are placed on the game board with the blank side up and with the corners featuring the numbers or symbols folded up.

A set-up theme looks like this:
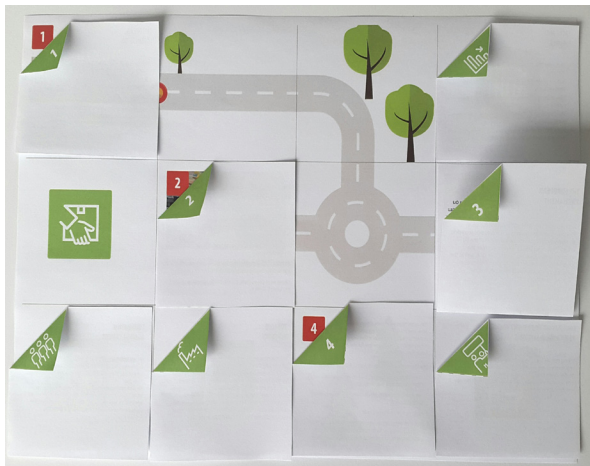
Note: : the image indicates that the theme is 'smoking'. This particular theme has fewer cards in its set than some other themes. That is why the middle square in the left-hand column is not covered by a card. Some themes have a card for that square.

PROCESS

The teacher explains briefly to the pupils that from now on, they are all Members of the European Parliament and that, within that capacity, they will draft their own laws. The teacher also explains that they will have to present their law to the rest of the class and that the class will vote on it. The teacher chooses the topics that the pupils will work on before explaining the game.

After that, the teacher briefly explains the game board, which shows a simplified version of the EU decision-making process: the European Commission is the institution that initiates law, by making legislative proposals. These legislative proposals then go to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, who share the legislative power.

Each group of pupils works independently following the instructions and timing on the worksheet and cards: the group starts with card number 1. One pupil in the group turns over the card and reads what it says out loud. The group then performs the assignments on the card. Afterwards they move on to card 2, then to cards 3 and 4. They take notes on the worksheet.

The cards either contain an assignment or extra information presented as the point of view of the Council of the European Union, lobby groups or other stakeholders. Step by step, the pupils will form their own 'EU law'. The pupils' final assignment is to prepare a presentation of their law for the other pupils in the class.

CONTENT

All legislative proposals and thematic cards can be found in the document with the game material for this module. There are five themes/topics for this role play. The legislative proposals from the European Commission, the adaptations requested by the Council of the European Union and the information given by the stakeholders, are all chosen to prompt as much discussion between the pupils as possible. They are fictional and solely serve an educational goal. It is important that the teacher explains the reality of the topics after the exercise.

The five topics are ranked according to difficulty, from easy to more complex:

1. Smoking in the EU
2. An EU army?
3. EU and global warming
4. European democracy
5. Refugees in Europe

- Walk around the groups and help them if they are stuck.
- Preferably, each group works on a different theme. This way each group can present a different law to the class. However, the teacher can also choose to have all groups work on the same theme, or to assign the same theme to two groups, etc.

2. ROLE PLAY GAME: PLENARY DEBATE AND VOTE

SETTING

The pupils remain seated in their own thematic committee. At the front of the class, a blackboard or flipchart shows the following grid:

THEME	VOTES IN FAVOUR	VOTES AGAINST	ABSTAINED FROM VOTE
e.g. 'smoking'			
e.g. 'refugees'			

The teacher writes down the themes that are discussed in the first column.

PROCESS

Each thematic group gets up to two minutes to present its proposal. The group uses the filled-in worksheet to do so. Afterwards, the other pupils have some time to ask questions. Then the teacher immediately moves on to the vote. Everyone votes by **raising their hand**. The pupils in the thematic committee presenting the proposal are allowed to vote as well. The teacher makes the following statements:

- 'Those who agree with this proposal, raise your hand.' The teacher jots down the number in the 'Votes in favour' column of the theme in question.
- 'Those who do not agree with this proposal, raise your hand.' The teacher jots down the number in the 'Votes against' column of the theme in question.
- 'Those who abstain, raise your hand.' The teacher jots down the number in the 'Abstained from vote' column of the theme in question.

After the vote, the teacher either concludes whether the majority has voted for the law to be accepted or rejected.

There is a majority when half + one of the pupils vote in favour of or against a proposal. Those who abstained are not counted. In case of a tie, the teacher suggests that the vote be suspended. That way the proposal remains undecided upon.

This process is repeated for each law.

SOME TIPS

- The number of groups in the class determines the time needed for the exercise.
- The smaller the groups, the higher the involvement of each individual pupil. Take both timing and the personal involvement of pupils into account when deciding how many groups the class should be divided into.

3. DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION

SETTING

The teacher discusses the similarities and differences between the exercise and reality with the help of the presentation for this module. The pupils either remain seated in their smaller groups or go back to their normal places in the classroom.

PROCESS

First, the teacher asks about their **experiences**: 'What was it like to walk in the shoes of an MEP?' Possible answers are that they found it hard to make decisions when there are so many interests at stake or that they liked having the power to make decisions. Ask the pupils who had similar or opposite experiences: e.g. 'Who also felt like this? Who thought the opposite?'

After this introduction, the teacher moves on to the **evaluation** of the exercise. They explain that the role play game in class is different from what happens in reality. There are differences both in format and content. At the same time, of course, there are a number of things that are similar. These differences and similarities are shown in the presentation by means of a roster (see picture).

EVALUATION OF THE ROLE PLAY

The first question for the pupils is: 'What aspects of the exercise do you think were **similar** in format or content?' Then the teacher shows and explains the similarities using the presentation, with the input of the pupils.

The second question is: 'What do you think works **differently** in reality?' Then the teacher discusses the most important differences, again with the input of the pupils and using the presentation.

Thirdly, the teacher discusses the **reality of the themes** that were discussed in class. This is very important as it ensures that the pupils leave the class with an accurate image of reality.

CONTENT

1. Similarities and differences with reality

	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
FORM	**Thematic committees in the European Parliament**. The European Parliament deals with very diverse themes. That is why MEPs specialise in only one or two themes. The European Parliament has about 20 fixed and some ad hoc thematic **committees**. Within these committees, MEPs first familiarise themselves with and discuss the theme before presenting it to the rest of the European Parliament. **Interest groups**. MEPs are often approached by interest groups. **Voting by show of hands**. In the European Parliament, voting on proposals is often done by a show of hands because, generally speaking, this is quicker. Sometimes MEPs vote electronically (= individual vote), for example when Parliament is heavily divided on a subject and the result of the votes is not clear at a glance. A political group can also ask for an electronic vote (beforehand), and the final vote on a report is also mostly done by electronic vote. This helps members of the general public to keep track of which MEPs voted in favour/ against or abstained from voting. **Voting by majority**. In the European Parliament, the rule for a majority is also half + one of the votes cast.	**Several political groups**. During this exercise, the pupils did not belong to a political party. In reality, there are seven **political groups** in the European Parliament. In plenary sessions, the MEPs sit together in their respective political groups, from left to right. Each group is chaired by a president. **Shared legislative power**. This exercise could give the impression that only the European Parliament has legislative power in the EU and therefore makes all the decisions. In reality, however, it shares its power with the Council of the European Union. **More complex** - The exercise was done with only a few people. In the European Parliament, debate and voting involves up to 751 MEPs. - The class exercise was conducted in one language. In the European Parliament, everyone is allowed to speak any of the 24 official languages. Everything is then translated into the 24 official EU languages.
CONTENT	**Arguments.** The arguments mentioned during the exercise are similar to the ones expressed in European debates.	**More complex** - The themes are often **more technical**. For example, the topic at hand could be the size of the holes in fishing nets. This would require scientific research on the type of fish that can be caught with each type of net, etc. - The legislative proposals that the European Parliament votes on are much **more detailed**. Every detail is discussed and, if necessary, modified.
	Finally, there is one item that belongs to both the similarities and the differences: **the themes themselves:** - The themes can be considered similar because they are all topics the European Parliament is currently dealing with or has dealt with in the past. - The themes are also different because in reality the proposals and positions of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU are different.	

2. Current state of play of the themes

1. SMOKING IN THE EU

To stop young people from taking up smoking, the European Union focuses on prevention (= making sure people do not start to smoke) and discouragement (= making sure as few people as possible smoke or making sure they quit).

That is why European rules stipulate that every pack of cigarettes sold in the EU features a combined health warning (picture, text warning and information on services for quitting smoking) in the official language(s) of the EU countries where they are sold. This way, the EU informs the buyer about the dangers of smoking.

Tobacco advertising has been limited as well: campaigns that promote smoking are forbidden.

Next to the fixed rules concerning the sale and advertising of tobacco products, the EU also makes recommendations to EU countries to forbid smoking in government buildings, as well as in public and other spaces. But ultimately the countries decide for themselves whether to follow the recommendation or not.

In 2014 the EU approved more strict tobacco rules. They came into force in 2016:

- The sale of cigarettes with characterising flavours, like menthol, is now forbidden.

- The warnings on cigarette packs must cover at least 65% of the pack, and there is a predetermined series of combined warnings for each country.

- There is a limit on the amount of nicotine in e-cigarettes.

In the original legislative proposal, standardised – 'neutral' – cigarette packets were put forward as an option, but the EU institutions could not agree on this topic. The proposal to raise the minimum age for buying tobacco to 18 throughout the EU also did not make the cut.

Every Member State can, however, decide to implement stricter rules: in France, for example, standardised packaging has been obligatory since January 2017 and the same rule has been in force in Ireland since October 2018. The prices of tobacco also differ from country to country. The EU country where you can buy the cheapest pack of cigarettes is Bulgaria, the price being around EUR 2.60. The most expensive cigarettes are sold in Ireland, where a pack costs more than EUR 10.

More information on this topic can be found on https://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/overview.

2. AN EU ARMY?

Despite plans for a European Defence Community being made in 1952, the European Union does not have an army. Each Member State decides autonomously whether to have and deploy its own army.

Cooperation on foreign affairs and defence policy has, however, increased a lot, especially with the Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy launched in 2016. The Member States of the European Union deepen their defence cooperation and align their military expenditure and investments with initiatives like the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

There are also **ad hoc EU missions** outside of the EU for peacekeeping, conflict prevention and international security. Troops are deployed for two types of missions:

- Civil missions (e.g. training police forces)

- Military operations (e.g. anti-piracy actions)

The European Council decides on each ad hoc mission separately. Countries can participate voluntarily. The EU has already carried out approximately 34 civil and military operations. Known examples are rebuilding after the tsunami in Atjeh (Indonesia) and combating piracy in the Horn of Africa.

It is important to know that EU interventions happen **within the guidelines of the UN (United Nations)** and in close **cooperation with NATO** (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation).

Useful links:
- More information on this topic can be found on https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/security-defence-crisis-response_en and www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/159/common-security-and-defence-policy
- Figures about world military expenditure and the weapons trade can be found on https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/foresight/topic/changing-security-paradigm/world-military-expenditure_en

3. THE EU AND GLOBAL WARMING

The EU is fighting climate change through concrete policies. It has put in place climate and energy targets for 2030, e.g. a share of renewable energy of at least 32 % and a cut in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 40 %. In 2020, the European Commission launched the European Green Deal, which sets even more ambitious targets, e.g. to become the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

Because the consequences of global warming are already noticeable, the European Commission has also published an EU strategy for adapting to climate change.

The EU also played an important role in worldwide negotiations on a legally binding agreement to take action against global warming, the Paris Agreement, in 2015. The EU ratified the Paris Agreement in October 2016. Under this agreement, countries promised to try to keep global warming under 2 °C and preferably under 1.5 °C. The Paris Agreement has been in force since November 2016.

Useful links:
- More information on this topic can be found on https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action_en and www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/72/combating-climate-change.
- An infographic with greenhouse gas emissions by country and sector can be found on www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20180301STO98928/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country-and-sector-infographic.

4. EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

European citizens have directly elected a new European Parliament every five years since 1979. According to the common rules of the EU, the elections should be held by secret ballot and direct universal suffrage (one vote for every adult citizen). It should also be based on proportional representation. In addition to these common rules, electoral arrangements are determined by national provisions and can vary a great deal. Furthermore, citizens can only vote for candidates from their own country or their own regional constituencies. It is the Member States that determine whether citizens have a right to vote or are obliged to vote.

You can find more information on the European election system on www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/21/the-european-parliament-electoral-procedures.

There are several initiatives to get citizens more involved in European policy and to make the EU more democratic:

- Since 2012: the European Citizens' Initiative: if at least one million Europeans from a minimum of seven EU Member States sign an initiative, they can call upon the European Commission to draw up a legislative proposal.

- The Conference on the future of Europe, announced in 2019: this conference will be a public forum for a debate with citizens on a number of the European Union's key priorities and challenges. It will initially run from 2020 to 2022.

- Many more participatory instruments exist, such as the European Ombudsman, public consultations (experts in a particular field), the right to petition and citizens' dialogues.

5. REFUGEES IN THE EU

Every EU country has its own asylum policy. However, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) sets **common minimum standards** for the treatment of all asylum seekers and applications for all EU Member States (also known as the Dublin Regulation), including:

- The Member State where a migrant first enters the EU is responsible for examining the asylum application.

- Every asylum seeker has **the right to shelter, food and basic care** while his/her asylum application is under consideration. This is the responsibility of the Member State processing the application.

- Migrants can **apply for asylum only once** in the EU. If one Member State denies their request, then this person cannot apply for asylum in any other EU Member State. In order to check this, the fingerprints of each asylum seeker are registered in the Eurodac database.

In response to the sudden uncontrolled arrival of migrants in 2015, the EU took several **measures**, including a deal with Turkey and other third countries to prevent migrants from coming to the European Union. Since then, the number of new arrivals to the EU has dropped. The events of 2015 and beyond have nevertheless put a strain on many Member State asylum systems and the Schengen Area. There is an urgent need to reform the Common European Asylum System. This is, however, a difficult issue, as the Member States have different opinions on how to tackle the issue.

Useful links:
- Look here to find the most recent figures about migration worldwide: www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html
- You can find an infographic of the European Parliament with information about the European Union and migration on www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/index.html?page=intro
- The Common European Asylum System is explained on https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en

USEFUL LINKS

- This video (from 2015) explains how the European Parliament functions in less than six minutes: www.europarltv.europa.eu/programme/others/how-it-works-the-european-parliament. (you can change the language in the top-left corner of the page). If you have enough time after the exercise, you can play this video. After watching it, you can discuss the similarities and differences between the exercise and reality with the pupils. Note: this video dates from 2015 and some things have changed. It does, however, still provide a good explanation of how the European Parliament functions.

- You can find more information on the functioning of the European Parliament on www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/organisation.

- In reality, the ordinary legislative procedure is more complicated, with a first, second and sometimes even third reading by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. You can find a visual representation and thorough explanation of the process on www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/powers-and-procedures/legislative-powers.