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Introduction

This EU primary school simulation game aims to awaken children's interest in political decision-making processes and the European Union (EU). In the course of the game, the game introduces the participants to the key competences of *argumentation* and *negotiation* as well as to conflict resolution strategies (core curriculum in Lower Saxony). It can serve well as an introduction or supplement to the teaching topics of Europe or the European Union.

The materials were developed by the agency *planpolitik* in 2015 as part of the Jean Monnet project "Simulation games for action-oriented EU primary school (PEP for its German abbreviation)" and researched by the *Chair for Political Science/Civic Education* at the University of Göttingen. Since then, the game sets (including handouts and online components) have been available to teachers for independent implementation. In 2022 and 2023, these simulation games were renewed and revised with the help of funds from Germany's *Federal Agency for Civic Education* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, bpb). The agency *planpolitik* successfully tested the simulation games at 13 primary schools, and they were again evaluated by the *Chair for Political Science/Civic Education* at the University of Göttingen. Teachers are now able to play the updated games independently and integrate them into their lessons.

To ensure that the game runs smoothly, please note the following information and recommendations:

Target group

The game was designed for fourth grade students (depending on the students' level of competency, suitable for grades 3-6). This restriction of the target group is based on the experience that younger students have problems with the complexity of the game and are not yet sufficiently competent in argumentation and negotiation. Therefore, it is not recommended to conduct the simulation game in lower grades, unless the class has above-average performance.

Number of participating students

Up to 32 roles can be assigned in the game. Once all roles are filled, the game is played in eight country groups of four students each. If your group is smaller, we recommend reducing the groups to three students. If there are fewer than 24 participants, it is also possible not to fill one or two countries. The minimum group size we recommend is 18 students (six countries of three students each).

Procedure of the simulation game

The simulation game takes 180 minutes to complete. It is also possible to precede the simulation with an exercise introducing the European Union (chapter 3.1). This can take place on another day without any restrictions, as can the in-depth evaluation of the game (chapter 4). The game elements described in chapters 3.3 to 3.5 should be carried out in a continuous manner.

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Preparation and Execution of the Simulation Game

1. Intended increase in competences

The basic prerequisite for a successful simulation game is the definition of the desired increase in competence, which should be adapted as precisely as possible to the target group. Especially for fourth grade students, it is important to build on the children's own experiences and competences in order to support them according to their abilities and existing knowledge.

On the one hand, the EU primary school simulation games aim to give children a basic understanding of the European Union and of politics and political negotiations in general. On the other hand, the children's argumentation skills and political communication skills are to be strengthened. During the game, they are confronted with different opinions and learn to understand the respective arguments for different positions. Finally, they have to independently justify, negotiate, explore compromises and develop solution strategies for political conflicts. The persuasiveness of the arguments presented plays a central role. Being able to speak freely and social skills such as the willingness and ability to listen to other students or the ability to work in a team are also promoted.

The students take on the role of ministers from selected EU member states. The students learn that the European countries pass common "laws" (actually EU regulations and directives, simplified here because of the target group) and have to make compromises. The negotiation process is often difficult and conflictual because each country has individual interests that may differ from those of the other states. The European Commission – in the person of the game leader (i.e., the instructor takes on the role of the European Commission and the game leader at the same time) – acts as a moderator and mediator between the states.

Through the simulation game, the students also learn that there are different ways of decision-making. In the negotiations, they can fall back on the different modes. Furthermore, they experience the importance of good arguments and

how difficult it can be to reach a joint decision. By taking on the roles of their respective countries, the ability to change perspectives is trained at the same time.

It is very helpful to do an introduction to the European Union with the students beforehand (chapter 3.1). That way, they learn that the EU is an association of states in which the member states cooperate in many areas, but also pursue their own interests. Different economic strength, political attitudes, languages as well as geographical conditions lead to different needs and interests of the countries. Nevertheless, they have to accept compromises in order to make cooperation in the EU work.

2. Preparation

2.1 Timetable

The simulation game is designed in such a way that it can be carried out as one unit in 180 minutes. It is recommended to allow more time for individual parts of the simulation (e.g., introduction to the topic, negotiation, and evaluation) if this seems necessary and the teaching schedule allows it. As the simulation game requires a high level of attention and concentration from the children, sufficient time should be allowed for breaks.

Alternatively, parts of the preparation and follow-up of the game – the introductions to the EU and the topic (chapters 3.1 and 3.2), as well as the in-depth evaluation (chapter 4) – can also take place on another day.

However, the *explanations about the course of the game with the distribution of roles*, the actual *negotiations* as well as a *short intuitive evaluation* should not be separated from each other. An in-depth evaluation, on the other hand, benefits from a certain time gap, as the students have then had the opportunity to process the experiences from the simulation game.

2.2 Classroom

The classroom should be prepared so that group tables (GT) are available matching the number of countries participating in the game. In addition, for some phases of the game, a circle of chairs (CC) is needed in which all students can sit.

Depending on the phase of the game, it is recommended to let the students work at their group tables or in the circle of chairs, respectively. Working in groups is suitable for preparation, while the circle of chairs allows for more direct communication, which promotes negotiation.

Timetable and room plan for the execution of the simulation game:

Introduction to the EU (optional)		40 min	
Introduction: Europe	20 min	GT	
Introduction: European Union	20 min	CC	
Simulation Game		180 min	
Introduction to the topic	45 min	CC	
Explanation of the game	15 min	GT	
Role distribution & presentation of country positions	45 min	GT	
Negotiations	60 min	CC	
Summary/Evaluation	15 min	CC	

2.3 Materials

Introduction to the EU* (optional)

- ❖ Schedule „Introduction to Europe and the EU“
- ❖ EU country cards (one set for each group table)
- ❖ Map of Europe (number of groups)
- ❖ Table of results (number of participants)
- ❖ Potentially a large map of Europe for the board

Simulation game

- ❖ Adhesive tape
- ❖ Schedule “Environmental protection” *
- ❖ Plastic waste and rotting-period cards * (for an introductory exercise on the topic)
- ❖ Country labels for sticking on ** (Number of participants for each country; content of one game set corresponds to two game runs, additionally available as printable material for free download online)
- ❖ Table placards** (Flag and name of the country; number of countries)
- ❖ Role profiles** (Number of participants in each country)
- ❖ Country overviews*
- ❖ Draft laws of the European Commission and law to fill in** (can be written on several times with water-soluble foil pen)

* Materials are available for free download online.

** Materials included in the game set.

3. Procedure of the simulation game

3.1 Introduction: Europe and the EU

In this unit, students should understand that the EU is a community where laws and rules exist. The member countries have to discuss and negotiate in order to pass these laws and to ensure the cooperation of the EU. In the negotiation, the students will experience for themselves that they can only pass a law together.

Introduction: Europe

The students should be evenly distributed across the group tables. The group composition can be changed later for the simulation game.

With the help of the EU country cards, the students learn about Europe in a playful way. Each group receives a set of cards and a map of Europe, and each receives a results table. The task is to correctly assign flags, member states and capitals in the group. The results are then entered individually in the table and the countries with a number on the map of Europe. Afterwards, the results should be compared in the plenary and the students can show where the countries are located on a large map of Europe (if available).

Introduction: the European Union

The students are asked about the meaning of Europe, which countries they have already been to, which currency they used there, etc. This is a bridge to the topic of the European Union, what exactly it is and why it exists. The students should understand the difference between the continent of Europe and the EU as a community of member states. For this community to function, it needs rules (laws) that apply to all. The students will decide on such a law in the course of the game. Finally, the facilitator should provide further basic knowledge about the EU, for example, that the euro exists as a common currency, that the Union consists of 27 countries, that it has 24 official languages and that its headquarters are in Brussels (for further examples, see the schedule "Introduction: Europe and the EU").

3.2 Introduction: Topic environmental protection

The aim of this thematic introduction is to provide the students with basic knowledge on the topic of environmental protection and in particular on the avoidance of plastic waste, as well as to collect arguments for and against the ban on plastic waste in all countries of the European Union.

Background information on banning plastic packaging

The average person in Germany consumes about 38 kg of plastic waste per year. In other EU countries, plastic consumption is even higher, but in some it is far lower. Generally, plastic consumption in Europe is a lot higher than in the rest of the world. Some of the plastic waste can be recycled, but this is not possible with all packaging. They are incinerated, end up in landfills or directly in the environment.

For some years now, the problem of plastic waste has been receiving more and more attention, especially since plastic can take up to 5000 years to decompose and thus damage the environment in the long term.

Some EU member states want to draw attention to the dangers of plastic packaging. They are calling for a ban on thin packaging that does not recycle well but can be easily replaced. Plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables is a good example. France and Spain have already introduced laws in this area. For more clout, however, several countries need to take collective action against plastic packaging.

In those EU countries where plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables has already been partially banned, the law is still limited and only concerns certain types of packaging and plastic. There is no comprehensive law banning plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables in any country yet. However, the EU has had a plastic strategy since 2017, under which the EU Single-Use Plastic Directive 2019/094 – also known as SUPD (Single-Use Plastic Directive) – was adopted in 2019. Among other things, this concerns the ban on single-use plastic tableware and to-go packaging. In Germany, this has been in force since 2023. A plastic ban for fruit and vegetable packaging has not yet been passed, but is being demanded and discussed by some countries.

For further information on the legislative state of affairs, the following links may be helpful:

- ❖ Website of the Council of the EU: <https://tinyurl.com/3n6bsjsv>
- ❖ Information von EURACTIV: <https://tinyurl.com/yp4pey75>
- ❖ Article by The Guardian: <https://tinyurl.com/mry45fv8>
- ❖ Background information on single-use plastic packaging: <https://tinyurl.com/mnasvp9n>

Introduction for the students

For the introductory exercise, you will need different types of plastic waste to show the students (e.g. a plastic deposit bottle, a plastic film, a Tetra Pak, a plastic bowl for fruit and vegetables, a lunch box that is used several times, etc.). Now ask the students to name these plastic packages and explain the differences between them. Explain that the thickness of the plastic makes a difference when it comes to recycling and that some types of plastic (like the lunch box) are used often, while plastic films have to be thrown away. You could also go further into detail about where the students encounter plastic in everyday life.

The next step is to hand out the rotting-period cards. Ask 1-2 students to sort them from "rotting fast" to "rotting slowly". Now let the students estimate how long each thing takes to rot. Then resolve: An apple casing (2 weeks), paper bags (6 weeks), orange peels (2-3 years), aluminium foil (200-400 years), plastic bags (100-500 years), plastic bottle (450-5000 years; "If the ancient Egyptians had had plastic bottles, you could still find them in the environment today!"). It should become clear that plastic that gets into the environment pollutes it permanently and can lead to a lot of damage.

In the last step, look for plastic alternatives together with the students. Especially for the packaging of fruit and vegetables, cardboard, metal, glass or new types of recyclable materials are conceivable. A ban on plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables could minimise the environmental problem.

An EU-wide ban on plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables has the following advantages and disadvantages, among others:

Advantages of an EU-wide ban on plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables

- ❖ Less plastic is used. This way, the environment is polluted less.
- ❖ A ban encourages producers of fruit and vegetables to consider alternatives to plastic packaging.
- ❖ It is easier to buy loose fruit and vegetables in small quantities. Many people don't want a full bag of apples, but just one or two. So food waste may be reduced as well.

Disadvantages of an EU-wide ban on plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables

- ❖ Some fruit and vegetables stay fresh longer in plastic packaging. This way, food is not thrown away. Food waste is a big problem in the EU.
- ❖ Plastic trays for fruit and vegetables are convenient because you don't have to just put fruit and vegetables in your bag.
- ❖ Some people buy salad or cut fruit to eat healthy. It is difficult not to pack these in plastic.
- ❖ For some packaging there is no good alternative to plastic packaging, or alternatives are too expensive.
- ❖ Plastic packaging can be more hygienic.

3.3 Explanation of the gameplay

The facilitator explains to the students that they are ministers from different EU member states and that they have to decide together on a law (explanatory example: a class rule that applies to all students). The facilitator plays the role of the European Commission.

In order to pass a law, the students have to argue and arrive at an agreement in the end. To do this, the facilitator should clarify with the students what makes a good argument and what possibilities there are to reach an agreement in the negotiation.

Arguments/Justifications

The students are asked what a good argument/justification is. They are asked to formulate an example sentence: "I don't want to do homework today because...". The focus is on the argument being as convincing as possible.

Negotiation options

There are different ways to arrive at an agreement for a common law:

- ❖ Direct voting: the (simple) majority decides (disadvantage: if the decision is close, many people are dissatisfied with the result);
- ❖ Compromise by consensus: everyone gives in and the solution lies in the middle. If everyone agrees with this middle way, the decision is made by consensus (advantage: everyone supports the result; disadvantage: often a long, exhausting process);
- ❖ Barter: Everyone gives in on one thing and gets what he/she wants on another (advantage: partial successes for everyone; disadvantage: result as a whole may be illogical or impracticable);
- ❖ The strongest prevails: one person decides (disadvantage: no participation of all).

The advantages and disadvantages of these options should be worked out with the students in advance. A visualization (e.g. on the blackboard) can be useful. Afterwards, the tasks of the European Commission (making the proposal) and those of the Council of Ministers and the Parliament (deciding) should be explained.

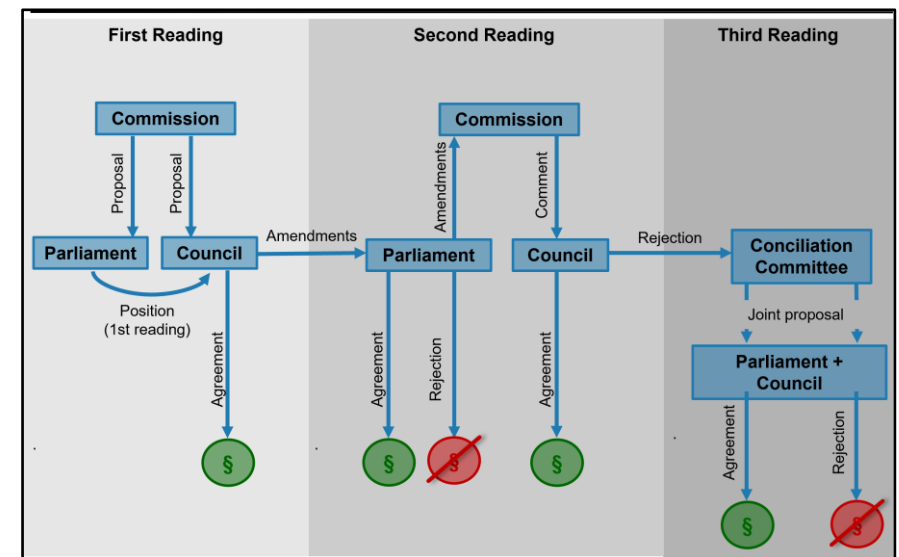


Background information: ordinary legislative procedure

The Commission has the right of initiative and makes a proposal for a directive or regulation to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU (EU Council of Ministers). After the Parliament has discussed this proposal, amended it if necessary and voted on it, the Council negotiates on the basis of the Parliament's decision.

The simulation deals exclusively with the negotiations conducted by the Council after receipt of the proposal by the Commission (Reading 1). For didactic reasons, the Council's voting procedure has been simplified to a simple majority (rather than qualified majority voting). The terms "regulation" and "directive" are replaced by the word "law" to make it easier for the children to understand. Parliament is not represented in the game, so any previous amendments are not relevant. In reality, the Council's decision is again submitted to the Parliament for amendment and vote. Further readings follow, but these are not relevant to the course of the game.

It is important to mention that the Council and Parliament must agree on a joint draft in order to adopt a regulation or directive.



The proposed law

The law is divided into three segments, which the students discuss separately during the negotiations:

- 1) From when on should the law apply? (green)
- 2) Does the ban of plastic packaging for fruit and vegetables have to be applied by all EU member states, or can each country decide voluntarily whether it wants to introduce the law? (blue)

Note: It is important that the students grasp the difference between *have to* (mandatory) and *can* (voluntary) for them to argue successfully.

- 3) Should there be fines when the law is not applied? If so, how high should those fines be? (orange)

Note 1: The students should understand that these fines are to be paid by the fruit and vegetables producers, and not by the country or the EU.

Note 2: Furthermore, it is important that students discuss the possibility of introducing fines, even if their country is opposed to a mandatory plastic ban. Ultimately, the negotiations may still result in the adoption of a ban, so their opinion on how high the fine should be is still relevant.

Afterwards, the European Commission presents the students with the three elements of its proposed law:

1. The law will apply in *two years*.
2. All member states *have to* apply the law.
3. If the law is not applied, a *high fine* will be issued.

3.4 Allocation of roles & country presentation

Now the roles are raffled off. All children draw a name tag from a cloth bag. Alternatively, a representative from each group table can draw a table sign from a cloth bag. Afterwards, the country stickers are distributed accordingly so that all students can stick the flag of their country on their clothes. It is recommended that the students do not choose the countries freely. This means that they have to take on positions from countries that they do not know or that are more difficult for them to empathise with.

From now on, the students play EU ministers of selected member states. Their task is to represent their country's opinion on the ban of plastic packaging for

fruit and vegetables. For this purpose, each student receives a role dossier of his or her country. After reading the dossier, the ministers of the countries present their positions in the plenary. With this information, the students discuss and change the draft of the European Commission in the circle of chairs and then decide on a law (for a more detailed description of the procedure, see the "Environmental Protection" schedule).

The role dossier

The first blue pages provide background information on the participants' country – for instance on the number of inhabitants and on the national level of consumption of plastic packaging. It should be pointed out to the students that different EU countries have different preconditions, and because of that, different interests with regards to the plastic ban. The plastic consumption per head is given in broad terms. It may be helpful to quickly explain the students what this metric means.

On the last three pages (green, red and blue again), students can find the positions of their countries and two arguments in favour of their respective position.

Presentation of countries' positions

In order for all students to get to know the other countries and their positions on the draft law, one student from each group of countries is asked to introduce his or her country. This person will present the information about the country (first blue pages) in the plenary.

Afterwards, the students should present their country's position on the Commission's legislative proposal. The aspects "from when", "have to/can" as well as the option of the "fine" should be dealt with and supported with the corresponding arguments from the role dossiers (potentially supplemented by the arguments they have thought of themselves).

To simplify the visualisation of the arguments of the other groups, the students can fill in the 'ambassador sheet' during the presentation. This supports attention and facilitates the students in getting a good overview.

Optionally, an ambassador phase can be played: In order to give the students an overview of the positions of the countries involved, an "ambassador phase" can be played instead of presenting the countries' positions on the three points of contention. For this purpose, each country group receives a country overview (note: the positions of their own country are already filled in). Each group appoints an ambassador who visits the other group tables, asks for the countries' positions and enters the information in the table accordingly. The role of the ambassador can be passed on to other students in the group during the game. The ambassador phase ends when all groups of countries have completed their tables.

Before starting the negotiation, all students should have understood the aim of the game as well as its rules. It is also important that the students are aware that they are not representing their personal opinion in the game and that they identify with the role of the ministers.

3.5 Negotiations

Before the negotiation can commence, the facilitator sticks a positioning line (from one side of the circle of chairs to the other) on the floor with masking tape. From now on, the facilitator takes the role of the European Commission and leads the negotiations, which consists of three parts ("from when", "have to/can" and "fine"). The ministers negotiate each of the three points by presenting their arguments for or against the Commission's proposal. They can use the arguments from the *introduction to the topic* (chapter 3.2), from their role dossier, or new justifications. The aim is for the students to gain an understanding of how majorities are distributed and how these can be changed through valid arguments.

Procedure

The ministers sit in a circle of chairs as their country groups. They need their role dossier as well as their table holders in order to be able to position them according to their opinion.

The European Commission welcomes the participants and explains that the ministers are now in the official negotiation. This means that they should address each other exclusively as ministers of their respective countries and use formal language if possible. The starting point for the negotiation is the legislative

proposals submitted by the European Commission. The ministers are asked to adopt a position. This can be changed in the course of the negotiation. The aim is for the ministers to reach a majority agreement and for a law to be passed.



1st legislative proposal: from when should the law apply?

The European Commission explains that the law should come into force "in two years", positions its placard accordingly and asks the ministers one after the other to also place their placard on their starting position and to justify this position with arguments.

After all countries have presented their positions and reasons, the students have time to discuss within their country group whether and with what reasons they want to change their position. It is important to note that the students have to agree within their country group. There is also the possibility to negotiate new options during the discussion. Once all flags are on their final positions, the European Commission summarises the result and enters it in the space provided in the draft of the bill form.

2nd legislative proposal: Must or can the law be implemented by the member states?

Once again, the European Commission submits its proposal to the ministers and positions its placard on "must". The ministers are asked to take a position as well and to justify it with an argument. Afterwards, the ministers are given a short time to reflect on their own position. The second negotiation takes place in the same way as the first, and the result is recorded by the European Commission in the text of the regulation.

3rd legislative proposal: should fines be imposed and if so, in what amount?

The Commission presents the third negotiating item and positions its placard at "high fines". The ministers also place their placards.

The negotiation proceeds analogously to the first two, unless the ministers have chosen the option of voluntary implementation in the second negotiation point.

Then this third point of negotiation is omitted. The European Commission can ask the ministers whether they are sure about the voluntary option. If they are not, this can be negotiated again briefly in order to deal with the third negotiating point. If the decision on the voluntary option is final, the game is over.

Tips for conducting the negotiations

- ❖ The facilitator has the opportunity to ask the students who change their position, or even those who stick to one position, about their arguments for their decision.
- ❖ If a majority emerges for one option, the negotiator should announce that a final argument can be made from each position and then there is a final opportunity to change position.

Alternative proposals from the students can be taken up if the majority of the ministers are in favour.

Further tasks of the facilitator

- ❖ Answer questions and provide assistance (content, rules of the game, procedure, organisation).
- ❖ Make sure that all students identify with their role.
- ❖ Keep to the timetable and remind the students of it if necessary (max. 20 minutes per negotiation point).
- ❖ Document relevant aspects of the game for evaluation.



4. Evaluation

After the game, an evaluation of approx. 15 minutes should take place in which the students can share their immediate impressions (intuitive game analysis). Phases two and three of the evaluation can also be done on the following days if there is little time available or the students' concentration has already waned. Before starting the evaluation, the students take off their national tags and step out of their role. It is very important for a reflective discussion about the game and its outcome that the students assume their actual identity.

The evaluation in three phases

1. Intuitive game analysis: How did the students feel during the game?

- ❖ How did you feel during the game? What happened?
- ❖ How did you feel as a politician?

2. Reflection on the game and distancing: How can the course of the game be explained?

- ❖ Are you satisfied with the result? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- ❖ Did you achieve your original goals? If no, why not?
- ❖ How far have you moved away from your original goals?
- ❖ What arguments convinced you? And why?
- ❖ Was it difficult to reach an agreement? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- ❖ Why do you think that some of the countries had very different opinions?
- ❖ Do you know similar situations or conflicts from your own life? If so, how do you deal with them?

Note: Feel free to ask a selection of these questions.

3. Critique of the game: What did the students learn?

- ❖ What did you learn?
- ❖ What did you like about the game?
- ❖ What would you change about the game?

Comparison with reality

Finally, it is the task of the facilitator to explain to the students the difference between the game situation and reality.

The difficult and lengthy agreement process in the game, for instance, may be very close to reality, but there are nevertheless aspects that are presented differently or simplified in the game. For example, the process of passing a law is more complicated in practice (see chapter 3.3). Among other things, 27 member states of the European Union negotiate with each other, and it takes at least six months before a law can be passed.

The facilitator again explains the tasks of the European Commission (makes the proposal) and the European Parliament and Council of Ministers (decide) and also explains that before and, if necessary, again after the Council's decision, the European Parliament must also approve the law. Photos of the Commission, the Council and the Parliament can be shown for visualisation (not included in game set).

Further info & download of all materials:

www.pep.uni-goettingen.de

This material has been developed within the framework of the Jean Monnet Project "Simulation Games for Action-Oriented EU Education in Primary Schools" (PEP) with the support of the European Commission. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any further use of the information contained therein.

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