<u>**European Project "Thematic network among Twinned Municipalities"**</u>
Provincia di Bologna

FINAL REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The twinning of communities within the European territory has been one of the first steps in building a continent in which peace and prosperity are at the very heart of a new concept of interaction between different countries. Twinnings started in the immediate WWII aftermath and are still central today to an idea of EU that proposes cooperation and cultural/economic exchanges as the winning recipe for a prosperous and peaceful future in which integration within diversity remains the main objective.

On the one hand, this project has the aim of celebrating twinning initiatives, in the context of a strong civic participation that is typical of European peoples and that seeks for more space within all dynamics concerning the decision-making process of European institutions. On the other, it intends to provide material for debate in building an increasingly solid European Union in a wise and participated manner. In doing this, the report provides a number of cues that are useful in the creation of a thematic networking in the field of twinnings, by providing the basis for a more in-focus and effective type of twinning.

In terms of content, the questionnaire has asked local administrators and citizens, residing in twinned municipalities, six questions. Overall, the answers have pointed at a number of common issues that seem to show a very neat path to the building of a Union in which integration means unity in diversity. The judgements and proposals in the answers shed light on both those aspects that the European institutions have successfully dealt with and those that still need further attention. Hence, the filled questionnaires also provide incentives and concrete suggestions in relation to the possibilities of profiting from the margins for improvement that the EU still has ahead.

The questionnaire contains the following questions; this report provides a numbered paragraph for each question:

1- What does your Town hall do in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the European Union?
2- List hereafter 10 things that in your opinion are "European".
3- Does a European Culture exist in your opinion? Could you describe some aspects of it?
4- In your point of view, what kind of initiatives, experiences could favour and foster a deeper sense of belonging to the EU?
5- In your point of view, what kind of initiatives, experiences could favour and foster a deeper sense of belonging to the EU?
6- According to you, what can Europe do for young people?

NOTE: The statistical aspects of this presentation have rather approximate. Yet, while they do not have a particularly scientific character, the following results provide a number of indications and dynamics that are useful to the aim of providing the ongoing debate with some useful and well-defined contents.

1. MUNICIPALITIES AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Question: What does your Town hall do in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the European Union?

Firstly, we must stress the fact that answers have not been picked from a range of preset answers. This means that the presence of common answers in different questionnaires is extremely significant. The answers to the first question suggest that twinning is itself a strong incentive to feel European. Half of the respondents mention twinning as one of the initiatives encouraging a sense of belonging to the EU. According to the answers, twinnings seem to act as an incentive for a number of related initiatives. The most popular of them are exchanges and student (all) mobility, which interviewees believe to be important within their municipalities. A good share (38%) of the respondents believe that exchanges with other Member States are very useful to spread the sense of belonging.
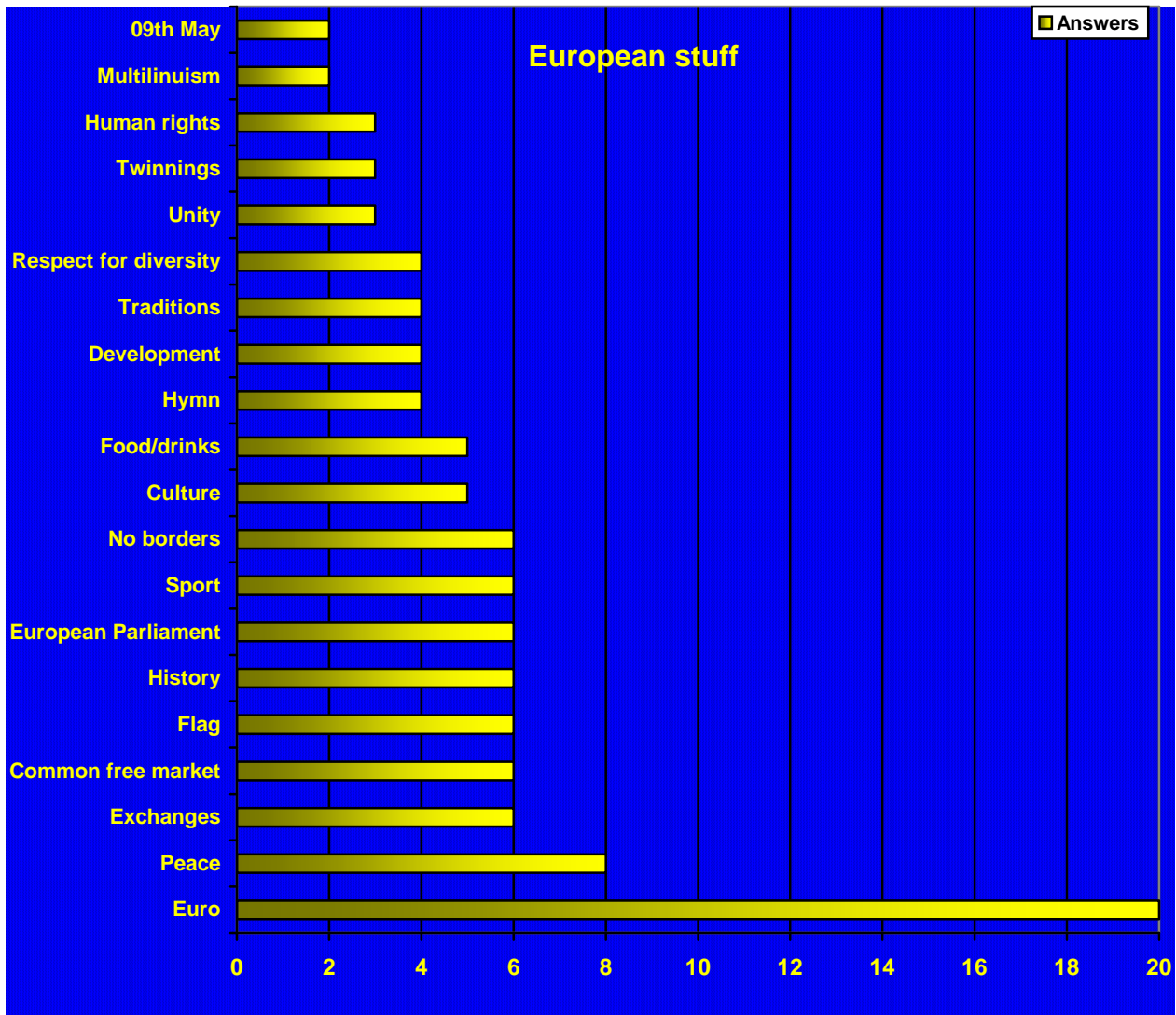
In the scope of helping citizens to feel more European, an important recognition goes to those municipalities who have set up a Eurodesk. Indeed, 24% believe this initiative to have a crucial role in this direction. The fourth spot of this peculiar table goes to the teaching (at all levels) contents and issues concerning the European Union. Over 17% of the answers include the importance of disseminating information relating to EU institutions and Member States decisions. Meetings and conferences relating to art, music and culture in general, have a role to play according to 15% of respondents. European naming of local places and initiatives relating to language are also mentioned in some answers. It is interesting to note that some refer to 9th May (European Day), peace schools, equal opportunities initiatives and the creation of committees dealing with European projects as activities that are crucial in the strengthening process of this sense of belonging. Concerning this process, two answers have stressed that their municipalities have not done enough.

Given the results, the best way to instil a sense of belonging seems to be that of allowing more civic and institutional (local organisations) participation. To participate to something means feeling an integrated part of that something and hence participating even more actively, giving birth to a virtuous loop that inevitably breeds integration dynamics originating in the citizenship and hence more likely to succeed. Hence, there seems to be a need for allowing municipalities to profit further from initiatives such as twinning and Eurodesk. In light of the success of these initiatives and with the irremissible aim of favouring favour a sense of belonging and a deeper process of European integration, we need to reflect on the chances of expanding the spectrum of possible initiatives that European municipalities can embark on.

2. EUROPEAN TRAITS

Question: List hereafter 10 things that in your opinion are "European".

The answers to this question have a particular meaning. To a certain extent, they provide information relating to European citizens and to their idea of what is specifically European. The following chart shows the statistical results:

European stuff

Answer	Value
09th May	2
Multilinuism	2
Human rights	3
Twinnings	3
Unity	3
Respect for diversity	4
Traditions	4
Development	4
Hymn	4
Food/drinks	5
Culture	5
No borders	6
Sport	6
European Parliament	6
History	6
Flag	6
Common free market	6
Exchanges	6
Peace	8
Euro	20

It is worth thinking about the undisputed protagonist role the Euro (59%). From a certain perspective, it is quite normal that the Euro is such a popular answer. The fact that all European citizens use it every day across the whole Union makes it the EU symbol par excellence. Nonetheless, we must stress that many well-known observers of communication dynamics within the European phenomena have noted that mass media have dedicated far more time and space to the single currency than to any other equally important European issue or policy. Furthermore, in terms of popularity, no other answer comes close to this first one, this being a possible sign of the imperative need for information campaigns addressed to citizens in which EU political elites illustrate in concrete terms what they are doing and have done for Europeans. Some (24%) have observed how the European Community has become synonymous of peace and its very concept is indeed a European "thing". Undeniably, the European Community seems to have successfully achieved this objective and the recognition that goes with it.

Concrete actions and formal symbols appear in this table as specifically European. Among the actions, the dismantling of frontiers and the consequent strengthening of a free trade zone both hold a 24% share. Same percentage goes to the EP (European Parliament), which is repeatedly mentioned. It is interesting to note that neither the European Council nor the European Commission are cited in any answer. This might be because a Parliament (whichever) is always the key to democratic representation. From this angle, the answers seem to suggest the need to endow the EP with more decision-making powers. This is a necessity that has also been raised lately in a number of institutional European sites, indicating a concrete receptivity on the part of European political elites.
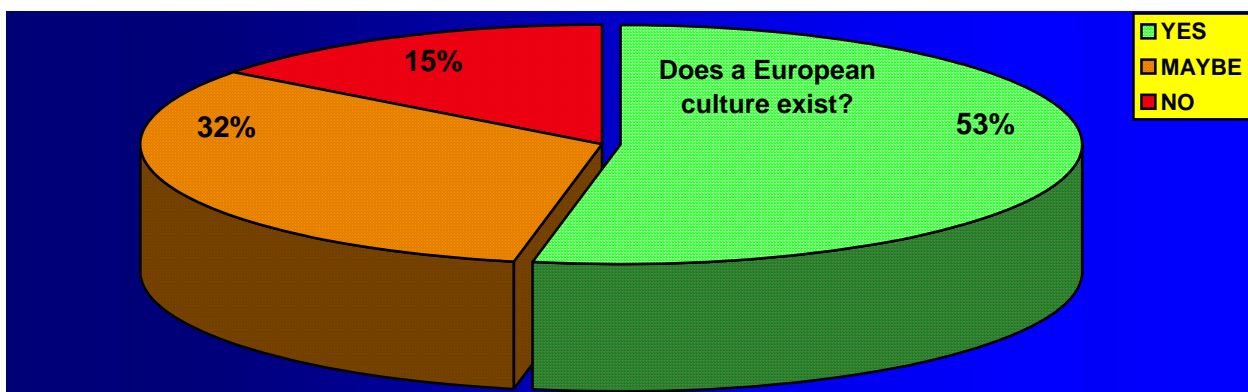
Exchanges, particularly student and cultural ones, have an equally important weight in the results of this enquiry. Mobility practices have been mentioned in reply to many of the submitted questions. This is a clear indication that they are considered so successful and important as to become a central concept in describing the EU in a few words. Formal aspects such as the flag and the hymn hold a 12%. Both sport events and history (in its wider concept) are considered to be specifically European (24%). Among what is thought to be European, 18% have responded with answers relating to food and drinks. Additionally, traditions, respect for diversity and human rights, development, unity, twinnings, multilingual skills and 9th May, are all mentioned at least twice.

There is one mention for the Schengen and Lisbon Treaties, consensus, values, laity, the idea of partnership, the European Space Agency and the European Food Standard Agency. There are only two answers that seem to distance themselves from achieved objectives and positive aspects. One concerns bureaucracy as an integral part of contemporary Europe; the other refers to a certain sense of fear, which according to one respondent is specifically European. This last answer seems less worrying if we consider that similar phenomena are taking place in many Western countries.

3. EUROPEAN CULTURAL TRAITS

Question: Does a European Culture exist in your opinion? Could you describe some aspects of it?

Many academic observers in the field of European Studies believe that the existence of a single European culture is a necessary step in the building of a sense of European belonging/identity. As demonstrated by the following chart, the results of this enquiry are rather comforting for all europhiles.

Even if with some differences, 53% of respondents believe that a European culture already exists. It is interesting to note how some of those who have replied 'yes' and some of the 'maybe' supporters, have mentioned some common aspects/traits. Hence, while some believe that certain characteristics

point at the existence of a European culture, other think that those characteristics are only the first signs of common cultural traits. In the following analysis, the opinions of the two groups have been gathered together with the purpose of underlining what are the arguments in favour of believing in the existence (whether apparent or barely visible) of a European culture. Moreover, the following numbers highlight how the range of answers is quite wide.

18% of the two groups of the interviewees ('yes' and 'maybe') see European history as the most visible sign of a common culture. The popularity of this answer is likely to be due to the fact that the European Community was founded as an antidote to a number of historical events, particularly the two World Wars and the Cold War) that have characterised the last century. The capability of managing differences, religion (the term Christianity occurs repeatedly) and music are each mentioned by 15% of the sample. Notwithstanding the increasing problems linked to illegal immigration and to the EU enlargement process to the East, some answers quote diversity management skills, in its broadest meaning, as being on of the visible aspects of a shared culture.

Given the territorial dominance of Christian religions, it is rather obvious that religion and Christianity in particular are mentioned as a shared element. Quite differently, the fact that music is symptomatic of an advancing single European culture is not at all obvious. By using the term music, respondents seem to refer to classical music and to the great European composers. The following spot in this ranking goes to literature (12%). While the same observations made for music apply, there is something else to be added. That is that the great poets and writers who lived in Europe were used to travel across borders and reside in European countries other than their own, being among the first examples of European mobility.

Art, Welfare policies, linguistic skills, tolerance and promotion of/respect for human rights have each been cited by 9% of the sample. While earlier observations for music and literature apply to art, it is worth noting how social protection policies and a related culture are believed to be indicative of a European culture, marking the difference with North-American ones. Tolerance and promotion of/respect for human rights are the two sides of one coin that was forged in Europe in the aftermath of the tragic events produced by anti-Semitism and which still appears to characterise a shared culture. It is peculiar that the answers mentioning multilingual skills are not many, yet there seem to be two reasons explaining this. On the one hand, many respondents reside in Italy, which is known to have invested too little in multilingual training compared to other European countries (particularly Northern and Eastern Europe, with the noticeable exception of the United Kingdom). On the other hand, we must take into consideration the age average of the respondents. The answer relating to multilingual skills might have been popular if the age average had been lower.
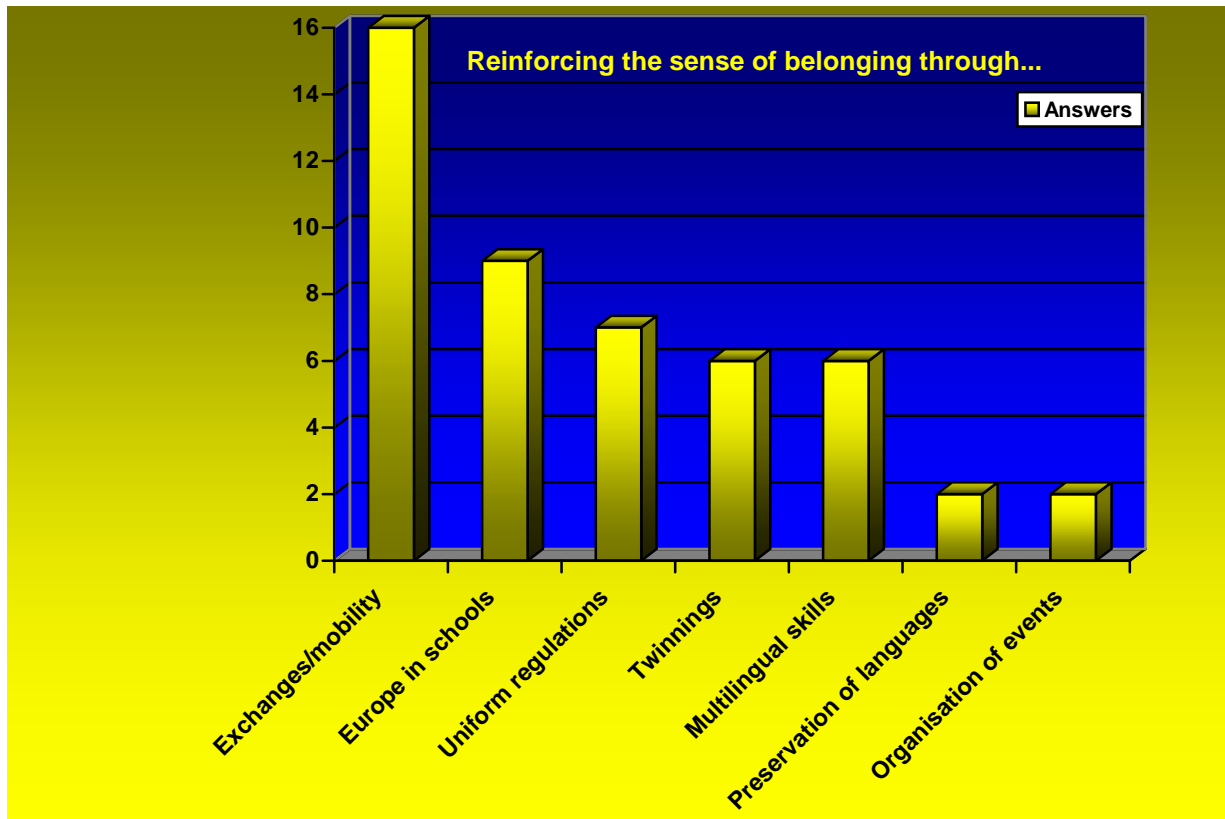
Finally, among the many different answers mentioned once or twice, it is worth noting sport, science/technology, democracy, freedom of thought, architecture, desire for and curiosity in travelling, preservation of traditions, civic sensibility and juridical culture.

4. SENSE OF BELONGING

Question: In your point of view, what kind of initiatives, experiences could favour and foster a deeper sense of belonging to the EU?

This is possibly the most relevant question in terms of useful input for the construction of a European future in which a sense of belonging and integration play a predominant role. Answers from both local administrators and common citizens are especially valuable at a time in which European leaders seem to struggle in finding the right path to an ever closer Union. Hence, at this

time, it is crucial to listen to citizens' opinions in order to start a participated debate with the aim of reinforcing the European project.

Notwithstanding the consolidated European policies in the field, respondents vigorously (47%) call for a stronger commitment to mobility. Hence, to a certain extent, citizens appear to appreciate the choice of investing in this field, but insist on the strengthening of these policies (possibly with lower costs for individuals). A large majority of answers relate to student and cultural/artistic exchanges, with little interest for work mobility. This disinterest is probably caused by a reasoned logic following which significant work mobility can only take place after a further development of student and cultural exchanges. There might also be an element relating to the desire for geographic stability at work, which has started to change in favour of a more flexible approach to working abroad in the last decade or so.

A substantial 26% underlines the role of schooling and the need to propose more European contents in schools. This opinion seem to originate from the awareness that both in terms of time and spaces, European contents can be best provided in schools. Furthermore, it is commonly accepted how training young individuals is much more fruitful than teaching older ones. Hence, at least one respondent out of four, teaching Europe at school is crucial for a more solid sense of belonging to the Union. Following these are those (21%) who are concerned with regulatory and legislative aspects. The desire for a normalisation and standardisation of regulations in the various Member States is strong, particularly, but not solely, for what relates to fiscal and bureaucratic issues. As in previous cases, interviewees want to stay on the path leading to common European regulations for all Member States. Again, they seem to spur institutions to insist further on a path that the EU has already decided to follow.

Similarly, twinnings and multilingual skills are rather popular. With 18%, answers ask the EU to do more for these two aspects, which have always concerned EU political elites. The recent idea of
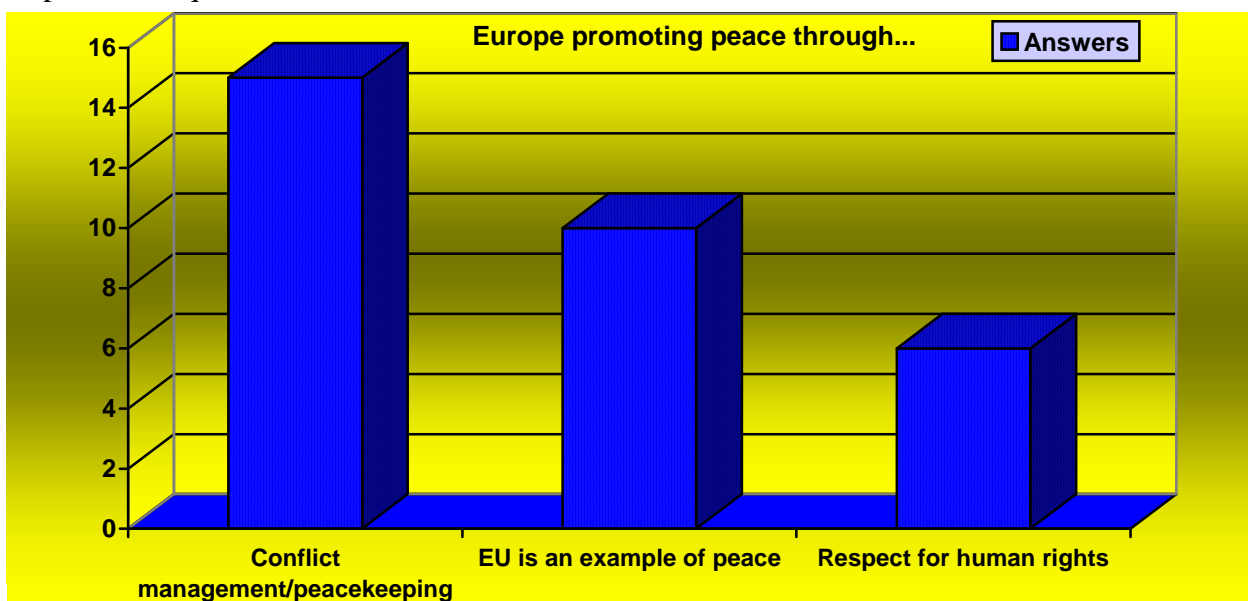
endowing twinnings with a thematic character is certainly in line with the respondent suggestions. It must be stressed how there are conflicting opinions in relation to language, similarly to the field of European Studies. While some feel the need for multilingual skills, others support the idea of a single official European language. This seems to be a rather delicate topic if we consider that 6% believes the preservation of local and national languages to be a useful tool in raising a sense of belonging.

Finally, according to some (again, 6%), the organisation of transnational events would have a crucial role in strengthening this sense. By events, they mainly refer to conferences, sport competitions and festivals. Other answers relate to the creation of partnerships, the improvement of schooling systems and the determination to insist on the strategies employed until now. It is worth noting how very few respondents have mentioned the need for regular communication of initiatives and legislative acts of the EU. This seems to be a fundamental element in fostering debate and citizens' participation. Indeed, this remains a central issue in the academic and citizen criticisms of the EU.
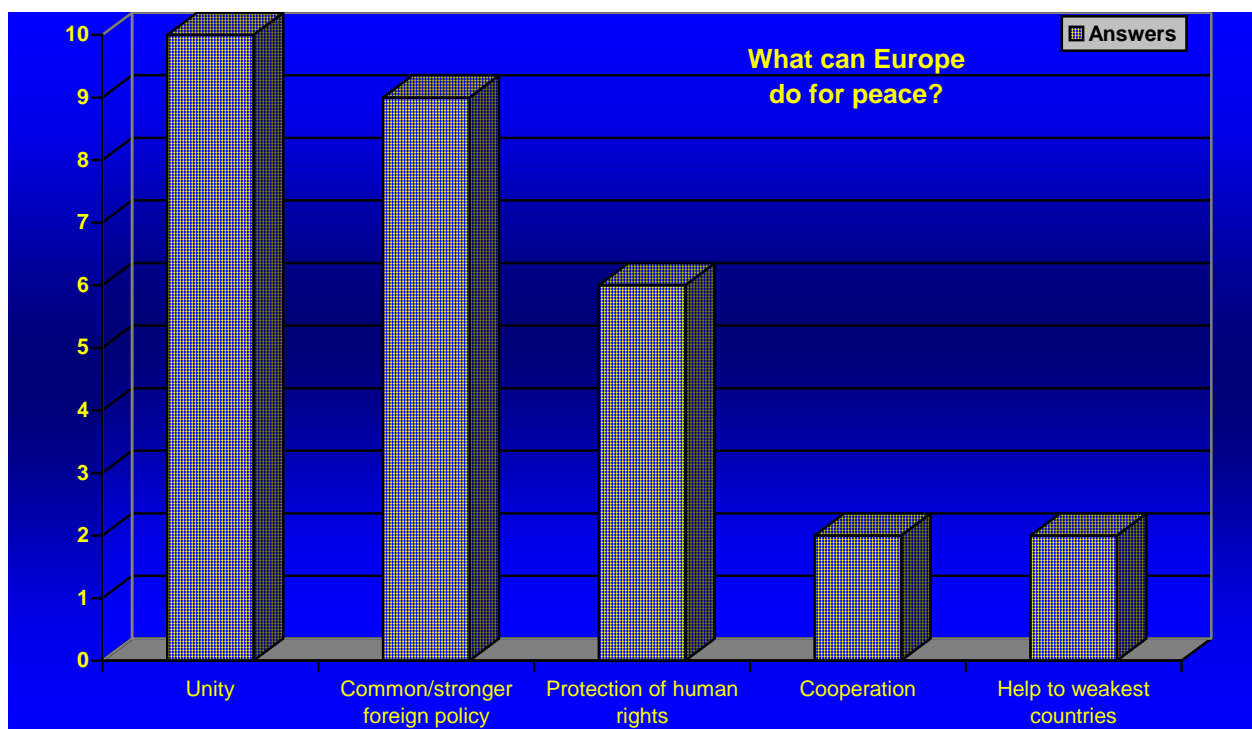

5. PEACE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Question: What has Europe done to support peace and what should it do from here forward to promote a peaceful solution to conflicts?

The theme of peace more than any other marks the origin of the European project. The motive, undoubtedly, is to research European history, which until just a few decades ago was characterized by violence and internal conflict as well as conflict outside of the European borders (the colonial period). In this way, the politics of cooperation and European cohesion have contributed to a net reduction in the interventionist, nationalistic and aggressive politics that had long characterised European states. The analysis of respondents' opinions takes on particular importance in this context. The question is divided into two parts and while many people responded to the second part, not as many responded to the first, signalling that there is sufficient clarity in regards to successful achievements but there is also a widespread desire for the EU to do still more for peace. Looking at the details in the graph below, we note that conflict management (internal and external) and peacekeeping missions are the most common response (44%) to the first part of the question, that is, the part of the question that refers to the successful achievements.

29% have specified that the European Union itself is an excellent example of peace. However, for many, the construction of a united Europe is in itself a model that guarantees peace in its own territory and provides peaceful inspiration for other parts of the world. With the exception of a few terrorist occurrences and a handful of violent episodes stemming from a perception of social injustice (like, for example, the revolts in the "banlieue chaude" areas), peace is present and consolidated in all of the European Union. Moreover, we would like to stress the fact that 18% of respondents cited respect of human rights as a concrete example of the peaceful policies of the EU. This aspect indeed comes from the European civic sensibility and probably has its roots in the terrible events that marked World War II and is, in large part, connected to the concentration and work camps. In this experience perhaps resides the difference with the current administration of the United States in terms of a thematic approach to human rights.

As we observe in the illustration below, the responses to the second part of the question indicate less agreement in numerical and qualitative terms. The majority of common responses (29%) again suggest that European unity is an inexhaustible source of peace in the territory and therefore as a more general solution for possible international conflict scenarios. The second most common response (26%) highlights the necessity for a more vigorous foreign policy. This element is seen as a way to do more for peace itself. To export concepts relevant to dialogue and diplomacy, it would seem necessary to be able to count on these changes, among which the institution of a European Minister for Foreign Affairs or something along these lines.

Among the responses, once again, the promotion and defence of human rights plays an important role; further evidence of a certain disposition in this direction by European citizens. Many polls and the preceding responses to the questionnaire under discussion demonstrate the strength of Europeans' commitment to human rights. The novelty in this case is represented by the fact that the promotion and defence of human rights is seen as a universal incentive to guarantee peace. It is especially interesting that respondents indicate the necessity for a larger commitment from the European institutions on this front. In line with many contemporary theories in the area of international relations, cooperation and support of developing countries are considered objectives to follow in order to guarantee peace in a number of countries in which internal conflicts often break
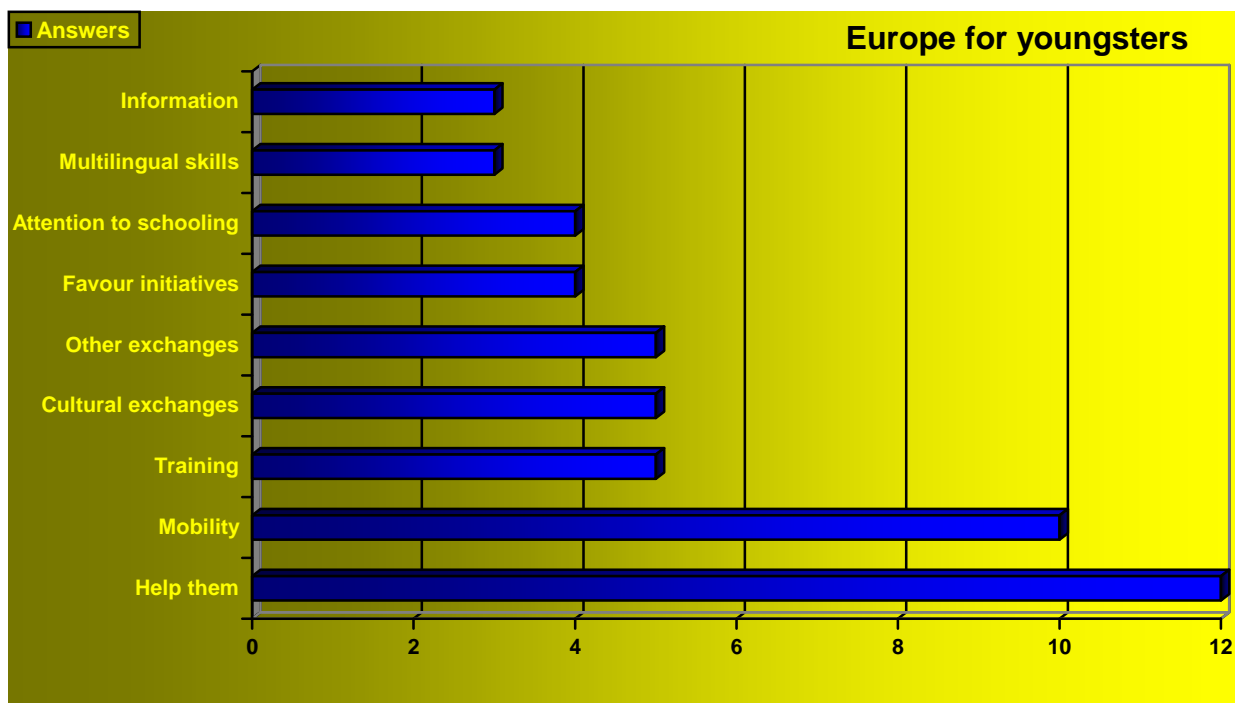
out in response to socio-economic issues. In this sense, it would be useful to consider further economic agreements and cooperation between the EU and the countries in question, besides considering having a European representative within the United Nations.

In conclusion, we must take note of the negative opinions, among which 9% that note that European peace-keeping missions have been ineffective, in particular, the mission in the Ex-Yugoslavia. European management of conflict avoidance and peace-keeping situations has been harshly criticised by some. It would be useful to develop a debate on this subject that takes into consideration the areas where there is room for political and military improvement, looking at the most recent conflict situations and the European response. In this direction, a few respondents highlighted the necessity to work towards a growing independence from NATO for European peace-keeping missions.

6. Europe and the Younger Generation

Question: What do you think Europe could do for its young people?

First of all, this question seems to have provoked the most enthusiasm from respondents in terms of the number of responses received. The respondents seem particularly interested in the younger generations. It must be noted, however, that the majority of responses are rather generic and point to "assistance for young people" as the main point that the EU should focus on (35%). That lack of specificity regarding the form of this assistance can be considered as an ideal starting point for debate. As indicated in the illustration below, encouragement of mobility (within the EU) is a precise theme that garnered support among the respondents.

Therefore, the EU should further assist young people, in particular (29%), those who reside in other member states for the purpose of study, work and language learning. Many stated that this would be best accomplished through adequate economic support for those who decide to take advantage of the opportunities for exchange. In terms of importance, we see professional development, cultural exchange and other types of exchange (athletic and musical in particular) on the same level (15%

each).   In statistical terms, exchanges can be grouped within the category of mobility giving even stronger support to the idea that helping young people consists of providing opportunities for them to better know and understand their European neighbours.

The question of professional development is addressed separately because it fits within a scholastic-professional discussion that must first find support on a national level within the member states before it may it enter into the issue of European mobility. Here as well, we can highlight how the responses advise an energetic continuation of the current policies related to this theme. The European Union has, in fact, invested strongly in post-scholastic professional development courses (therefore, for a more mature population) and in European scholastic projects.

Nevertheless, the physical state of some schools and the quality of instruction of some teachers (particularly in Italy) leave much room for improvement and seem to suggest a long way to go. The difference and lack of compatibility between the various European scholastic systems is an underlying concern encountered in the responses and indicate that the area of professional development requires the most effort to improve on the European level.
Some of the people interviewed responded that young people also need assistance in terms of employment and research. This is possibly the thorniest area to which the EU seems to have devoted the fewest resources.   Many individual member states, including Italy, have also fallen short in this area, and continue cutting funds for universities and research efforts which also negatively influences the business environment and other economic actors. This aspect, from the responses received, should undoubtedly be included on the political agenda if only to help counteract the negative influence of an increasingly substantial world economic crisis.

In conclusion, the information relative to opportunities available for young people should be more detailed and effectively diffused. If opportunities are available but no one knows about them, it is as if they do not actually exist. Many responses propose greater support for young people in the acquisition of linguistic skills. This should make us pause for reflection as this response is found consistently throughout the different topics on the questionnaire.