



Project Website <https://pros4democracy.internprize.eu/>

Activity Video Summary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX-VIYS9XNg>

Lesson Category

Media and News Literacy

Title

Pressure on the Press

Area(s)

**Democracy; Constitution; Rule of Law;
Freedom of the press; Autonomous press**

Objectives

Students will:

- 1. acquire a better understanding of their country's political structure and the Constitution;**
- 2. come to appreciate the importance of free and autonomous press in a free democracy; and**
- 3. gain a better understanding of items on the news about press freedom.**

Time needed

8 teaching periods + excursion + project work

Materials needed

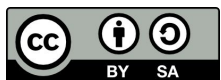
**Internet content, newspaper articles,
internet**

Age level(s)

14-18

Number of participants per group

**Any number as long as classroom is
divided into 4 groups.**



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<https://eurovoters.eu>

Pressure on the Press

Step-by-step description of activity

1. The teacher starts with a brainstorming activity with mind mapping starting from the word “Democracy” taking the local scene as point of departure. The teacher makes an effort to direct the activity towards mentioning the executive and legislative powers possibly the activity could also touch upon the judicial powers though not likely.
1. The teacher presents a hypothetical scenario in which the Government wishes to build a road and the project is presented as the best solution to ease traffic and in the scenario there will be some provocation such as that the road will destroy agricultural land, get close to a historical building, can bring change to demography of the town because the lands close to the new road will become more attractive to businesses because they are no longer fields but on a main road etc. The scenario will be analysed according to the critical-incident-analysis strategy, which is discussed in the EUROVOTERS methodological tool.
1. The students shall have the task of discussing the project in groups first and draft questions for the “Government”, as one would have in a press conference. This activity can be disciplined with a group being the environment lobby, another being the culture lobby etc. depending on the eloquence of the class and level of awareness of lobbies or special interest groups. If there is or has been a recent similar controversial project then this activity can have a scenario that resembles or can provoke transfer from what has been reported in the press.
4. The teacher runs a workshop about “Is our Prime Minister an elected king?” ...once elected a Prime Minister can do what he/she wants. This can be President etc. by analogy depending on local political system. The workshop starts from the Prime Minister who decides on something and identifying the hurdles that he/she has to come across before really doing what one wants. Best is to stay on a macro-idea by saying, for example, that from now on elections will happen every 7 years instead of 5. Challenges would be his/her colleague Ministers, his/her own political party, the Opposition in Parliament, citizens in a referendum, going to the Constitutional Court. This workshop introduces the term “checks and balances” and “rule of law”. The Depth of this discussion needs to take into account the eloquence and previous knowledge of the classroom. In the process the teacher can mention the press.
4. The teacher may use the role-play and simulations strategy, as explained in the EUROVOTERS methodological tool, after the completion of the workshop. The students are invited to play the roles of the Prime Minister, members of Prime Minister’s political party, members of opposition, citizens, and members of the Constitutional Court.

6. The students are invited to bring different newspapers to the classroom. They are invited to share their knowledge about who the different newspapers / TV channels in their country belong to and check on the internet who owns them etc. They are invited to read or watch online videos about news items and to see how the same news item is reported in different ways. One can then show how a paper or a news channel is pro Government, pro Opposition etc. and one can make a practical exercise to present a news item (maybe about the new road announced by Government) so that students can produce news items taking on different roles as “owned” news channels and independent news channels.

6. Depending on the readiness of the students one can venture into what powers and big business does when they are criticised by the press including:
 - ridicule the journalist,
 - put down the criticism to bias or hidden interests,
 - employ a critical journalist to make him/her depend on Government for income,
 - discriminate with budgets for public announcements not putting money in the way of free press,
 - libel cases and how they try to put journalists or news providers into financial difficulties,
 - SLAPP suits,
 - social media campaigns with big money that news channels may not have,
 - gag news with emergency laws citing special circumstances and
 - other extreme situations.

8. Concluding note would be an explanation of why historically we spoke of the separation of the three powers whereas now we speak of the Press as the Fourth Estate because it is the platform for opposition to abuse of power in the country.

Strategies of teaching and learning

Problem-based learning; Discussion Groups; Research;
Role play and simulations; Critical-incident analysis.

Evaluation

Students write a short article about a news item that is objective and informative with at least one element in the content that they have researched or investigated.

Notes to the educator

The activity may be implemented in a cross disciplinary method between Language, Citizenship Education, Political Studies, History.

Notes to the students

There can be an activity just after the mind mapping about Democracy in the beginning where students build a mini glossary about the subject. The glossary may become enriched as the lessons proceed so that at the end of the process the vocabulary includes terms related to The Fourth Estate therefore visually putting the free and autonomous press at par with words like “Parliament”, “Referendum” and “Elections”.

Suggestions for follow-up activities

A school can create a medium term project (also possibly cross curricular) where the school has its own online news channel about their town.