

Defensive Democracy: Freedom of Speech vs. Protection of Democratic Values

Follow the guidelines below
to implement this learning
activity in your classroom



Cluster competences

- Media literacy aspect: The learner can cope with several sources of media.
- Digital literacy aspect: The learner develops digital and technological knowledge, skills and attitudes to act in society.
- Information aspect: The learner develops knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with (dis)information.

Learning objectives

- Information aspect:**
- S1 – The learner can demonstrate an understanding of how the structure, content and wording of a piece of information can be designed to influence opinions or to trigger actions.
 - S7 - The learner can demonstrate that they approach with similar scrutiny information that corresponds to their beliefs/opinions and information that does not.
 - S8 - The learner is able to critically discuss the possible intent of the author/s of an information item.
 - S9 - The learner is able to critically discuss the possible harm resulting from a suspecting or identified disinformation/misinformation item.

Digital aspect:

- D1 - The learner can demonstrate that they understand various techniques used by media platforms to emphasise, amplify and extend the reach of their content.
- D2 - The learner can explain concepts like 'echo chamber', tunnelvision and information bubble.
- D4 – The learner can explain how digital tools can be used to manipulate the appearance of websites, images, personal profiles, attributed statements, product/service reviews.

Media literacy aspect:

- M3 - The learner can elaborate on the role of media in a democratic society and how this role changes in repressive states.
- M4 - The learner can differentiate between facts, fact interpretation, and opinions.
- M6 - The learner can verify the veracity of a claim seen online.
- M8 - The learner can demonstrate that they actively seek critical information, including such that challenge their own beliefs and opinions.

National learning objectives

- Understand the principle of "defensive democracy" and its legal and historical justification in Europe.
- Recognise the balance between free speech and the need to protect democracy from hate speech or extremist propaganda.
- Strengthen civic competences by analysing real political communication examples in a group setting.
- Build skills to identify misinformation and its ethical implications in the public space.

Topics

1. Freedom of speech and its limits in Europe vs. the US
2. Historical roots of the concept of “defensive democracy”
3. Hate speech and incitement to hatred in public communication
4. Role of political advertisements and their societal impact
5. Legal frameworks in Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the EU

Method

- Individual reflection and note-taking
- Group analysis and discussion
- Case study work (billboard examples)
- Teacher-led legal and ethical framing
- Structured classroom debate

Materials

- Handouts WS1 and WS2, 3, 4, 5 (includes sample political posters and reflection questions)
- PowerPoint presentation covering EU, CZ, and SK legislation + analysis of real-life examples
- Internet access or printed sources for legal references

Lesson Plan

Lesson plan (90 minutes)

1. Introduction and reflection (15 min)

- Students note personal examples of hate speech or group discrimination seen in public or online.
 - Define where they believe the boundary of freedom of speech lies.
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2. Individual work with PL1 (10 min)

- Fill in worksheet defining “incitement to hatred” and examples.
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3. Group work (20 min)

- In groups, analyse controversial political billboards (from parties like SPD, SNS).
 - Evaluate visual and textual strategies, possible intent, and societal impact.
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4. Legal and historical framework (15 min)

- Teacher presentation of European laws on hate speech, Czech/Slovak context.
 - Explanation of “defensive democracy” with examples from Germany.
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5. Debate and discussion (25 min)

- Is limiting free speech ever justified?
- What are the dangers of not acting on hate speech?
- Each group presents their conclusions and discusses with the class.

Assessment

Formative:

- Observation of participation in group analysis and discussion.
- Evaluation of reasoning and critical thinking during debate.

Summative:

- Short reflective essay (homework): *“Is limiting freedom of speech justified if it protects democracy? Why or why not?”*



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