

**SESSION SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FIRST POLITIS SUMMER SCHOOL  
HELD AT DELPHI, GREECE, 12<sup>TH</sup> - 17<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY 2005**

*Organised by:*

The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

*In cooperation with:*

Interdisciplinary Centre for Education and Communication in Migratory Processes (IBKM),  
University of Oldenburg, Germany

European University Institute, Florence, Italy

CCME – Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

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*And:*

The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – Greek Project, Athens

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Summer School Participants:

71 selected student partners

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## **Introduction**

The objective of this report is to give an accurate account of the first POLITIS Summer School organised by ELIAMEP and held at the premises of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi, Greece, from July 12<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

Although some contextual information may be provided, the focus will clearly be on the academic activities that took place during the Summer School. For this reason, the report is structured in five main parts along the content of the training sessions, whilst respecting the chronological order of the Summer School Programme:

a) Introduction, b) setting the Foundations for intercultural communication, perceptions of Europe and the representation of migrants' interests at the European level, c) the Focus Sessions on civically active immigrants in the EU 25, d) the Practical Training on the interviewing process, and e) the Conclusion and Evaluation Session.

### **A) Introduction to POLITIS and the Summer School**

Shortly after arrival of the group at the European Cultural Centre, the Summer School Programme set off with the distribution of information packs with working material for the week. Brief videotaped interviews were conducted with each participant, asking them to state their expectations for the Summer School. Throughout the Programme, all sessions were videotaped for subsequent analysis by the POLITIS team.

The Summer School formally opened with a **Welcome Speech and Presentation of the POLITIS Research Project** by project coordinator Dr. Dita Vogel. After introducing the research team and welcoming all participants, Dr. Vogel moved on to present the origins, aims and structure of the POLITIS project.

She underlined that from the first conceptions of POLITIS in January 2004, the current project had evolved and had developed two key objectives. On the one hand, POLITIS pursues a better understanding of the factors that impact on active civic participation of first generation immigrants in the EU 25. On the other hand, through its unique structure, POLITIS aims to explore the views held by non-EU nationals who study in the EU, on Europe and the European Union.

In order to achieve these aims, the project is structured in four consecutive phases. Starting with a preparation phase which had been concluded in May 2005 with the publication of 25 expert country reports, the Summer School itself formed part of the second phase which includes the training of student researchers and their gathering of interviews. The third phase of POLITIS corresponds to the analysis of the empirical data including a second Summer School, and the final phase of the project will be dedicated to the dissemination and publication of the results.

A graphic representation of the organisational set-up of the POLITIS project helped to visualize the roles played by all of the member organisations and in fact the student researchers. At the heart of the project lie the coordinating centre at the IBKM in Germany, and the two partner institutes: the Greek ELIAMEP and the Italian EUI. Feeding into this mechanism are the NGO partner CCME, itself an umbrella organisation based in Brussels, and a network of country experts, as well as two scientific advisors. Whereas the CCME gives practical advice in all phases of the project, it was explained that the national experts mainly supported the first phase of POLITIS by drawing up country reports which serve as an informational base. Professors R. Leiprecht and Bo

Strath function as scientific advisors in the POLITIS team, based on their wide experience of migration studies and studies on the concept of Europe respectively.

Finally, Dr. Vogel elaborated on the part of the 70 student partners who are to carry out part of the research and the actual interviewing of immigrant activists in their countries of study. Participants were informed that the competitive call for students, which had been launched in September 2004 across all 25 EU member states, had received over 250 valid applications by the final January 2005 deadline. Selection criteria included the individual characteristics of each applicant, their academic potential, but also their ability to demonstrate a credible interest in the POLITIS project, the quality of their application essay and some other factors, related to the two stated research objectives.

As Dr. Vogel presented, the resulting group of student partners, participating in the Summer School, was representing 41 nationalities, with at least one student studying in each of the 25 EU member states and only a small minority of EU nationals. In a group composed of around two thirds of women, roughly one third of the participants are doctoral students whilst the large majority is pursuing advanced studies. A simple exercise helped to visualize the characteristics of the group. When asked to stand up according to region of origin, field of study, level of studies and prior experience with qualitative interviewing, the diversity as well as commonality amongst the student partners was illustrated.

In continuation, Dr. Vogel highlighted the Summer School as an innovative and interactive event for research and training purposes, as opposed to traditional summer school approaches focused on mere schooling of participants. A brief overview of the programme was given, recalling students their tasks to conduct, transcribe and if necessary translate three interviews with civically active immigrants in their country of study, to be submitted to the research team at the very latest by January 15<sup>th</sup> 2006. It was also remarked that a second Summer School would hold the opportunity to gather again in July 2006 in Germany, in order to exchange, discuss and evaluate the experiences and results of the research carried out by then.

The following morning's session provided some additional details on the structure of the **Summer School Programme**, as well as definitions of the key concepts that would subsequently be used during the Summer School.

The term "immigrant", defined for the purpose of research as a first generation immigrant born outside the current 25 EU member states and who has migrated as a young adult, having in any case a clear personal migration experience. Secondly, "active civic participation" was explained as meaning here an activity that either gives voice to societal concerns (through mainstream organisations), that voices specific concerns of immigrant groups (through ethnic organisations), or that provides solidarity and self-help. It was stressed that interviewees should be civically active on a medium to long term basis, continuously contributing substantial amounts of time and energy to these activities.

## **B) Foundational Sessions**

The programme continued with a **presentation on Intercultural Communication** by Dr. Vogel. She highlighted that each person has a mental framework of communication shaped by language and culture, which can lead to misunderstandings and communication problems when persons with differing frameworks interact. As an

example and for the benefit of communication during the Summer School, she asked both native and non-native speakers of English to be aware of these difficulties and to facilitate mutual understanding. Additionally, it was pointed out that cultural differences also impact on non-verbal communication and further reading was made available.

With a simple **exercise** Dr. Vogel supported her point. First the group was shown a lemon and asked to describe it. Qualities attributed to it were yellow, oval, juicy and both big and small. Whereas the group seemed to coincide on the first three adjectives, there was some debate about the relative size of the lemon.

As a second step, the students were divided in random groups of three, and each group was assigned one lemon to describe it in a way that they would be able to recognize it later, picking it out from all other lemons. After a few minutes, the lemons were collected and some descriptions were read out. Clearly, the descriptions were much more specific and differentiated than the generic group description of a lemon. In fact, all groups were able to easily recognize their lemon.

Dr. Vogel went to show that we use both generic categories (such as lemons are yellow and oval) and very specific details in our mental framework and in our communication. She pointed out that in science, generic categories may be outdated and can be modified by the observation of details. She also explained that generalisation is part of our mental processes, built on observing (two lemons are yellow and oval) and then formulating a rule (all lemons are yellow and oval).

On the other hand, we also accentuate, emphasizing differences within general categories (lemons are generally yellow and oval but some might be greenish and more rounded). Generalisations may be flawed in that they tend to emphasize the differences between categories and play down the differences that exist within them. The term “social category” was introduced as a generalisation common to the understanding of many people, often used and reinforced by mass media.

It was then underlined that, whilst generalisation of objects is less ambiguous, the characterisation of persons by categories can be discriminating and harmful. The speaker told an anecdote in order to illustrate the use of national stereotypes, a term she identified as a social category for people from the same nation state. She emphasized that stereotypes can be both positive and negative and often relate as much or more to the person using the national stereotype, than to the person described by it. Effectively, stereotypes tend to be influenced by the desire to distinguish oneself (positively) from others and can reinforce a sense of belonging and shared identity, which in turn could facilitate communication and productivity within a group.

A third key term was introduced in addition to “social category” and “national stereotype”. A “prejudice” was defined as very problematic and harmful since it is a stereotype associated with emotions and resistant to change.

With heightened awareness of the elements that play into intercultural communication, the students were then asked to perform a **Distant Couple Exercise**. For the exercise, always two students were paired in couples from different countries of origin and study and were assigned the task to individually write down three national stereotypes for the countries of study and origin of both partners. They would then compare their notes and discuss the stereotypes before returning to the plenum. The purpose of this exercise was

to raise awareness about perceptions that student researchers might be confronted with during the interviewing process and to show ways to respond to these stereotypes.

At the ensuing plenum discussion issues raised included the role of media in the formation of stereotypes, the way political or economic conditions in a country can affect its image, the differentiation between stereotypes assumed as “historical” or “conventional” and personal experience which may confirm or contradict those generic stereotypes.

More specifically, students expressed that it might be hard to overcome communication barriers since their interlocutor might not confront them with a negative image they nevertheless may hold. Also, stereotypes may distort conversation in an indirect way, through assuming the other person holds a certain stereotype about ones country of origin, or any other part of ones identity (e.g. gender, religion, skin colour).

It was concluded that whilst stereotypes inevitably exist and social categories form part of our thinking, it is essential when engaging in intercultural communication, to be aware of these factors and especially steer clear of prejudices. Furthermore, aside from cultural influences and language barriers, any conversation (interview) is inevitably affected by personality traits and the specific situation in which it is held.

As a second part of the Foundational Sessions, students were divided into eight **focus groups** of approximately eight students each, to exchange their perceptions of the EU and Europe. For the purpose of comparative analysis, there were two groups with EU students only, two groups composed of female students only, one group composed with male students only and three that were mixed.

Each group was to comment on three sets of statements relating to: a) the concept of Europe, b) central features of Europe and c) exclusion and diversity in Europe. The statements were modified excerpts from the students’ essays on “What does Europe mean to you personally?” that had been submitted when the student researchers had applied to participate in the POLITIS project in December 2004.

The focus group discussions were moderated by a member of the POLITIS team and also videotaped for further analysis by the POLITIS researchers. Amongst the topics touched upon were the division of Europe into geopolitical entities, especially the concept of Western Europe versus Eastern Europe (former Soviet block). In this context, debate also concentrated on the impact of enlargement of the European Union and national identity. European values were discussed as well as the role of the European Union as a unifying force for the continent, its competencies and the effectiveness of EU legislation. Students also pointed to the role of religion on the continent and within the EU, as well as discussing gender issues and human rights standards.

The wide diversity of personal backgrounds of the participants and their academic qualifications allowed for highly differentiated debates that carried on even after the 45 minute assigned discussion time. Some ad hoc conclusions drawn were that especially outside Europe, the EU was seen to be equivalent to Europe and that non-EU nationals tended to have a more positive picture of the EU than EU nationals.

The second day of the Summer School was brought to a close by the lecture on “**Representing Migrants’ Interests at the European level**”. The representative of the

CCME, Ms. Doris Peschke, elaborated on her first-hand experience of lobbying for migrants' interests at European institutions.

She first explained the nature of CCME and the notion that Abrahamic religions conceive migration as a normal phenomenon and teach that migrants should be welcomed. She then stressed that the Churches represented by CCME also generally work for the more marginalised sectors of society and therefore concentrate on assisting refugees and irregular immigrants.

Even prior to the extension of EU competencies to include migration policy, the CCME was active in lobbying and enjoys representation at the Ministerial Committee of the Council of Europe. Ms. Peschke explained that the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Social Charter were key legal instruments as a base for protecting migrants' interests.

Only since the 1990s has Brussels become a more important decision-making centre regarding migration policy. Ms. Peschke pointed towards a supposed policy change away from very restrictive immigration policies in most EU 15 to a more open and comprehensive approach manifest in the 1999 Tampere programme. Since the 1990s, anti-racism and anti-discrimination measures have also been priorities on the political agenda. The speaker remarked that, whilst previously migration was dealt with as part of economic and labour affairs, now it has been firmly integrated into the Justice and Home Affairs sector. She briefly explained the results of the Tampere programme, the nature of its follow-up measure the Hague Programme, and also mentioned some of the concrete legislative acts that have been a focus of action for the CCME, such as the Directive for Family Reunion.

Ms. Peschke described the lobbying process in Brussels as a constant interplay of action and reaction which involves identifying stakeholders at the different institutions, decision-making processes and points of intervention as well as monitoring and networking.

Time for questions was used by a number of students to learn more about the CCME, its outreach and to discuss different points brought up throughout the talk. Some of the issues mentioned touched upon the way migrants change the Churches and religious landscape in Europe, the effectiveness of lobbying efforts at EU and national level and the role migrants themselves play in lobbying activities.

### **C) Focus Sessions on civically active immigrants in the EU 25**

Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou provided some in depth information in her talk "Understanding Active Civic Participation" relating this concept to the POLITIS project. She set out to explain the idea behind the POLITIS research as follows.

She argued that there is a general trend to civic apathy in European countries, regarding not just the more traditional forms of activism in trade unions or political parties, but also the "modern" forms of engagement, for example in the feminist or environmental movements. At the same time, international migration is on the rise and foreign born population is growing in European countries. It is in fact expected, that both civic apathy and migration will continue to rise in Europe.

The POLITIS project aims to explore the potential of these immigrants concerning civic activism. It examines both the condition as migrants and the interrelation with the host societies. In this sense, immigrants could be expected to have less potential to become

civically active due to their often unfavourable socio-economic situation. To the contrary, immigrants could develop a greater potential for civic activism due to the networking experience that is inherent to most migration processes, which are generally channelled at the local and ethnic level. POLITIS thus aims to identify the factors that transform potentially active persons into engaged civic activists.

Dr. Triandafyllidou then proceeded to identify the target group of the POLITIS project. She defined it as members of the foreign born population, who moved to the EU countries as young adults or adolescents and have therefore consciously experienced living in two countries. It was stressed that these immigrants, (students were reminded that this term may have negative connotations and should be used carefully), must have been born outside the current 25 EU member states in order not to touch upon issues of EU enlargement within the POLITIS research.

It was also clarified that neither the reasons for immigration nor the legal status of an individual were disqualifying factors in identifying the civically active immigrants to interview. While it was remarked that legal immigrants tend to be more visible and likely to be civically active, it was also noted that often the legality status could not be clearly determined and students were recommended to rather take into account the length of stay of the potential interviewee (around five years). The speaker further specified that co-ethnic migrants were to be included into the target group and that students should take a sociological approach when applying the criteria to identify potential interviewees.

Dr. Triandafyllidou then explained how active civic participation was defined within the POLITIS framework. She said that whereas it is often related to active citizenship, meaning the people's capacity to take an active role in public affairs through formal or informal networks, institutions or the media, its definition applied to the POLITIS research tries to go beyond this concept. Effectively, students should be looking out for immigrants who clearly voice societal concerns and persons who organise self-help activities that are unmistakably public and visible as such.

Some debate and questions followed in the wake of this definition, regarding the terminology and nature of activities to be defined as civic activism for the purpose of the POLITIS research. Queries regarded the possible confusion of civic and civil activities, connecting to notions of citizenship, as well as the classification of religious worship and activities.

The lecture continued to explicate that civic participation of immigrants in effect varies between countries, as do the general patterns of activism in each society, which can be more or less distinguished depending on factors such as political culture. The speaker informed that most existing studies on immigrant activism focus on political participation and membership in different kinds of organisations. They often do not differentiate, however, between active members who hold positions or regularly perform tasks and passive membership. The novelty of the POLITIS approach therefore lies in the focus on the "activation process", that is to say, the why, how and when immigrants become civically active.

Dr. Triandafyllidou singled out three main elements that are thought to impact on this process and will be subject to analysis: a) individual resources (material and immaterial) b) the societal opportunity structure and c) the motivational factor including material and immaterial rewards. She specified each category, defining individual resources as the socio-demographic characteristics of the individual, i.e. their age, marital status,

educational level, income level, legal status but also prior experience as activists. The societal opportunity structure refers inter alia to the immigrants' rights, the transparency and accessibility of official channels, institutional and discretionary aspects or language barriers, attention is to be paid to the real-life conditions encountered by the immigrants. Finally, activists invest time, energy and possibly money and may even incur risks due to their activism. The motivation to become active despite these costs, could consist of material rewards for themselves or their group or immaterial (e.g. status, sense of emotional satisfaction, overcoming marginalisation etc.) and could be linked to external factors in the country of settlement or origin (historical links, political situation, humanitarian crises etc.).

Dr. Triandafyllidou indicated that the activation process is not necessarily linear but might have ruptures due to personal or external circumstances impacting on the activist's life. One of the aspects that will also be carefully examined is the relationship between activism in ethnic and mainstream organisations.

Both during and after the talk questions arose regarding how to select interviewees and how to interpret the definitions provided by the speaker. Many of these questions could be answered in reference to the Interviewer Manual that had been distributed with the initial information pack and it was pointed out that each student could approach their assigned research team member with specific queries. Nonetheless, as there seemed to be a desire for conceptual debate, the research team scheduled an additional optional session for the following day.

Following the lecture on active civic participation was the **Country Groups Discussion exercise**. Students were asked to debate the situation of immigrants and immigrant activism in their countries of study, working in eight groups. The discussions were based on the 25 country reports that had been published by national experts in each of the EU member states. Each student partner had read three previously assigned reports including the one for his / her respective country of study. The resulting eight country groups were: (a) Austria, Hungary, Cyprus; (b) Estonia, Greece, Netherlands; (c) Belgium, Portugal, Czech Republic; (d) Denmark, Italy, Malta; (e) Ireland, Germany, Lithuania; (f) Finland, France, Slovakia; (g) Slovenia, UK, Sweden; (h) Poland, Spain, Latvia.

Groups were asked to name a moderator and a person who would note down the discussion's results. Within a set timeframe, and with little supervision by the POLITIS team members, the students worked on a set of three questions. They had been asked to identify for all three of their respective countries a) the most civically active immigrant group and the reason for this activism, b) the main obstacles for immigrants' involvement in public life, and c) a special element or feature relevant for immigrants' involvement in public life. The discussion was meant to be comparative, i.e. each question was to be discussed regarding all three countries rather than debating the issues separately for each of the assigned countries. Students were encouraged to share their own experience and opinions when commenting on the information provided by the expert reports.

Naturally, debate evolved differently in each of the eight groups, with some groups easily falling into discussion whilst others were more hesitant at first. Elements that influenced the conversations' flow in all groups were the aptitude of the moderator and, above all, the ability of group members to contribute personal experience to the discussion, thus verifying or contradicting the country reports.

Indeed, there sometimes were strong differences in opinion amongst students studying in the same country vis-à-vis the three sets of questions. This was the case for Ireland, Germany, Greece and Spain, whilst regarding countries such as Malta, Austria and Finland, students tended to be more in agreement in terms of identifying civically active groups or obstacles to civic activism. Discussions got well under way in all groups, so much so that they struggled to remain within the two hour time limit of the exercise.

Issues raised and the answers to the initial questions were diverse, depending largely on the specific circumstances in each country. Topics generally touched upon included migration policies and the lack thereof, the role of mass media, of culture and religion, xenophobia and racist discrimination, language barriers, as well as aspects of gender and the socio-economic status of immigrant groups.

When the results of the teamwork exercise were noted down on posters and put up in the conference centre hall, some concurrence also became evident. Much mentioned reasons for active participation in public life were the legal status and the length of stay of any specific immigrant group across all member states. Cultural and linguistic affiliation with the host country was seen to increase both scope for active civic participation and acceptance of immigrant activists (especially in the case of co-ethnics).

On the contrary, many student groups remarked the language barrier and the lack of permanent, legal stay as primary obstacles to the civic involvement of immigrants. For virtually all member states, (with the notable exception of Austria and to some degree Sweden), migration policy was criticised as hindering active participation, reaching from overly restrictive or vague policies to the total lack of policy or the lack of its correct implementation. Only for Latvia did students not identify “any visible obstacles” to immigrants’ civic activism.

In response to the third question, students did single out very distinctive features for each country, for example Italy seems to be the only country where sports associations (namely football clubs) play an important role in immigrants’ involvement in society. It was also stated that multiethnic organisations are an important way of voicing immigrants’ concerns in Italy, whereas in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic a lack of solidarity was noted between immigrant communities. In various countries (Poland, Latvia, Spain) the collaboration between home-grown NGOs and immigrant associations was said to benefit integration into society and the image of immigrants.

Clearly, the working groups were able to give interesting answers to the questions posed and the public exposure of the results allowed for students to inform themselves, compare the outcome of discussion and develop an initial overview of the situation of immigrant activism in all 25 EU member states.

#### **D) Practical Training Sessions on the interviewing process**

The remaining Summer School sessions were dedicated to training student researchers on the actual procedure of identifying, contacting and interviewing civically active immigrants for the POLITIS project in their respective countries of study. The previously distributed interviewer manual served as a base and further reference material was handed out.

In her lecture on **Sampling Immigrant Activists**, Dr. Vogel firstly reiterated that the target group for the research purposes are first generation immigrants who have a clear migration experience and were born outside the current EU 25. These persons should continuously devote substantial amounts of time to voicing societal concerns, voicing specific concerns of immigrants or organising self-help and solidarity. It was noted that they would generally be people who hold some sort of position within an organisation and are currently active, though students should evaluate on a case by case basis.

As concerning the sampling strategy of immigrants, students were asked to concentrate on the local level (for reasons of comparison) and also to prioritize members of their own ethnic or national group, as far as possible. This point raised some debate, but it was explained that the main aim was to assure the interview could be held in the mother tongue or preferred language of the interviewee.

Dr. Vogel further specified that students should attempt to interview one political activist, e.g. a local city councillor, and one immigrant involved in an ethnic organisation. The third interviewee should contribute to a diversification regarding factors such as gender, age and type of activism. In any case it was made clear again that the sampling of activists would require discussion and approval by the research team on an individual basis.

For the subsequent practical exercises, and to facilitate coordination and further communication, students were then grouped to work with their designated contact person from the POLITIS research team. The division was as follows: students studying in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden were to address any further queries to Dr. Norbert Cyrus (back up Dr. Vogel). The responsible researcher for Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Spain and the UK is Dr. Ruby Gropas (backup Dr. Triandafyllidou). In charge of the remaining countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia is Dr. Ankica Kosic (backup Dr. Triandafyllidou).

In the first **training session on recruiting civically active immigrants** for the POLITIS project, students had the chance to go over and discuss the guidelines of how to research the target group and how to make first contact with potential interviewees. Recommended steps include some background reading on the target group, observance of media to identify active immigrants and reference to the country reports for prominent immigrant activists.

Researchers explained that student partners should facilitate a prioritised list of five potential interviewees with brief descriptions for approval. Students divided into groups of three to discuss initial ideas of whom to contact and / or how to investigate interviewees in their country of study. The discussion raised awareness of potential obstacles and the ways to overcome them as students contributed their own experience and ideas on how to find active immigrants. It also encouraged coordination and networking amongst students from the same country of study but with different target groups.

It was explained that the student researchers should only proceed to contact potential interviewees when these have been commonly agreed upon with their assigned researcher. Questions generally concerned how to present oneself and the POLITIS project and how to establish initial contact (email, fax, telephone, personal meeting).

A role-play exercise helped students to simulate the situation of a first phone call to a potential interviewee. The interviewer presented the project, the scope of the interview and the reasons for selecting the interviewee in question. The role of the interviewee was to ask questions about the project and the interviewer, to then agree or not to an interview. One student observed the role-play and students then alternated roles. Students thus got a feel for the situation of interviewer and interviewee and received feedback on their performance. Guidelines on how to present POLITIS and a reference letter were also provided to all students. In general, students were asked not to overwhelm the interviewee with detailed project information but to openly answer questions and to facilitate the dissemination of the results to interested immigrant activists.

A break between sessions was used for an **optional conceptual debate** with Dr. Vogel. However, most of the initial doubts and reservations expressed by some students on the previous day, seemed to have vanished in the course of the training sessions. A discussion with some six students referred to the difficulty to clearly define active civic participation, and to draw clear lines between ethnic and majority issues. It then addressed the way ethnic and mainstream activism can overlap, also referring to the differences between first and second generation immigrants. Some of the students who had worked in the field also shared their experiences giving a valuable insight into their countries of study.

As a next step, Dr. Cyrus gave a **lecture on interviewing guidelines and techniques** which was again backed by an interactive training session. He explained that this part of the Summer School Programme aimed to familiarize students with qualitative research, deepen their sensitivity for the POLITIS project and its target group as well as to familiarise students with the techniques needed to perform the research. He stressed that for qualitative interviewing the personnel is important since the quality of the interviews depends largely on the skills of the interviewer. Secondly, the personality of the interviewers matters, since interviews pose an emotionally demanding situation which can be affected by the interviewer's reactions in a positive or negative way.

Dr. Cyrus described the use of qualitative research as a tool to explore shared meanings in the social processes and to formulate generalisations in that sphere. Qualitative interviewing can be a useful instrument then, to explore the shared meaning that people develop in a certain environment.

The speaker further clarified the role of qualitative interviewing for the POLITIS project. He underlined that POLITIS does not aim to give a full picture of civic activism in the EU 25, nor does it aim to study individual biographies. POLITIS aims to analyse the social practice of civic activism among first generation immigrants and to identify the elements that create this social practice as well as to reconstruct its social working.

It is therefore crucial to be open and to gain open access to the lived experience of this social practice. The experiences of the interviewees form the "raw material" for the research undertaken. It is desirable to sample a wide variety of these experiences in order to deduct patterns of the activation process. With the insight into what turns people into civic activists, good practices could then be deduced, since the underlying assumption is, that a civically active society is better than a passive society.

Dr. Cyrus then gave some advice on how to conduct the interviews and how to meet the sometimes difficult requirements of good qualitative interviewing. First of all students were reminded to listen carefully to what the interviewees say and how they say it. This way it is less likely to miss out on opportunities to probe deeper and to truly understand the meaning of what was said. Students' attention was also drawn to the technique of probing during the interviews in order to find out more about the factors that influence this process. At all times interviewers should keep in mind a clear target to guide the conversation but still give space to the interviewee through open questions and flexible reactions. It was also stressed that there is a fine line between emphasizing with the interviewee and losing objectivity.

Finally a point was raised about the self-image of the interviewer. Students were reassured that they should not feel in any way guilty or embarrassed in their role as an interviewer. In an ensuing discussion researchers and students with experience in qualitative interviewing shared their views and valuable tips with the group.

The plenum then split into the three big working groups again, for further **practical training**. With the help of their assigned researcher, groups went through the **interviewing guidelines**, getting familiar with its structure and the questions to be asked. Students had the chance to comment on all parts of the script and the purpose of the different sections was clarified. Although a complete interview must contain all four main questions, the researchers restated that each interview will take a different direction and interviewees should allow space to their interlocutor, whilst carefully guiding them through the interview. However, the time limit of one and a half hours should in no case be exceeded. Issues that are not directly related could be discussed before or after the formal interview, but the interview itself must be tape-recorded. In this context students expressed doubts about the overt use of the tape recorders, thinking that interviewees may object to the taping. Researchers and fellow students gave advice on how to convince interviewees to be taped and added that in their experience, this has not tended to be a great problem. Finally each student was handed their tape recorder, three tapes and batteries.

The training sessions continued with **practical exercises and case-studies on interview conduction**. Students were split again into selected groups of three or four so that each group had one member with significant interviewing experience. Two students would then simulate an interview, whilst the other members of their group would observe and take notes. The interviews were tape-recorded to familiarize students with the technical equipment and to keep a record of the interviews. Interviewees were incited to vary their cooperation along the interview, blocking or facilitating it in order to create a nearer to real situation. After a while, students would swap roles. Finally they would exchange their views and observations about the interviews before sharing their experiences with all members of the working group. Specific issues addressed were the way interviewers (re)conducted the conversation and dealt with interruptions, as well as their own perception of their role and the difficulties they came across (multitasking, concentrating, measuring time). Students thus had the chance to expose themselves to the interviewing situation and to reflect on this experience. Lively discussions followed the role-play.

In continuation, a training session on **interview transcription and translation** was held. Here technical details were explored and students discussed the information given in the Interviewer Manual. At first, they were familiarized with the template to be used for interview transcription. A short protocol is required for each interview, describing briefly the interlocutor and the context of the interview. Students are also asked to comment on the atmosphere and fluidity of the interview and can include any additional information they feel is relevant.

One of the exercises was to translate the main interview questions into their own language, to compare their translations and to exchange tips. It was emphasized that students should do a word by word transcription and translation, and that they should take special care not to change the meaning of what was said in the course of this process. Additional handouts were provided with examples of false and correct transcriptions.

The student partners were soon able to put theory into practice, as they were requested to create a short protocol for the interview they had simulated earlier, as well as to transcribe a part of this interview. Students who had shared one interview were asked to compare their protocols and transcriptions to identify possible divergences of interpretation. Again students benefited from an overall working group discussion that concluded the practical training session.

#### **E) Concluding and Evaluation Session**

In a final **rounding up and evaluation session**, all students and the research team gathered in the plenum. The core POLITIS research team reiterated some of their initial expectations and confirmed that they had been met. All members of the research team, but mostly the student researchers were thanked for their positive input and they were encouraged to now carry out the research tasks they had been assigned.

Any additional contribution or further involvement by the Summer School participants was welcomed, provided the conditions of the POLITIS project were respected (privacy, copyright, etc.). For instance, participants were encouraged to use POLITIS as a platform to undertake their own individual research on related concepts and issues, to work as a network across the EU and eventually to also become involved in the dissemination phase of the project. It was further noted that the analysis and preliminary conclusions that would be drawn from the transcribed interviews by the core POLITIS research team, will be presented to the student researchers at the second Summer School for feedback and discussion.

The Summer School programme came to a close when students were requested to fill in an anonymous evaluation sheet, regarding the quality of each session, their overall opinion of the Summer School and any suggestions for the follow-up Summer School in Germany in July 2006.

#### **Final Remarks**

As shown by the present report, the Summer School Programme evolved around different thematic aspects, which built on each other. After generally introducing student researchers to the POLITIS project and the Summer School itself, the programme pursued more and more in depth reflection and training on several key points. Firstly, and

as a base also for the groups' interaction during the Summer School, students were made aware of the difficulties and specifics of intercultural communication. They also had to reflect on their own perceptions of Europe and the European Union, contrasting their views with those held by students from very different backgrounds. Lectures and group discussion gave students a solid understanding of the reality of immigrant activism in the EU. Finally a substantial part of the programme was dedicated to improve the understanding students had of the aims, scope and methodology of the POLITIS project. Initial doubts and confusions were progressively clarified in sessions on active civic participation and intensive practical training regarding the process of selecting interviewees, conducting and processing the interview. All sessions were highly interactive and gave room to debate on a wide variety of issues, which was often continued during the free time.