*The students of A' and B' class of the Lyceium of Panou Schools during the school year 2017-2018, in collaboration with Professor of Economics **Konstantinos Kamaras** and the professors EPAS **Theodoros Tomaras, Linda Alexopoulou** and **Nadia Maraziotis** investigated the differences in living standards between the countries in EU for the EPAS program **("The Young people vote .. Europe")**. The results of their research were translated into English in collaboration with the English teacher **Christina Zacharopoulou** and, after being transformed into powerpoint, was presented to the students of the Lyceum at a special event.*

EUROPEAN UNION: STANDARD OF LIVING BETWEEN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The European Union is a financial and political union of twenty seven European Nations. It was founded on 1st November, 1993 introduced by the treaty of Maastricht based on the European nations of the time. The National accounts consist a source of many known financial indicators. The indication GDP is the common used measurement unit of the economy, while indicators such as the GDP are widely used to compare the living conditions or to monitor the economic convergence or deviation within the European union.

The GDP is the sum of all commodities and goods which economy produces within a year, expressed in monetary units. In other words it is the total value of all goods (tangible and intangible) produced within a country, in a year, even if part of it was produced by productive units belonging to foreign residents.

Within the European Unit, the increase of the actual GDP showed many differences, not only chronologically but also between the members of the EU. After shrinking in all member states except Poland in 2009, the financial growth, returned in 23 members, in 2010 whereas the same situation resumed in 2011. However, in 2012 this evolution was reversed, as less than half (13) of the members, recorded a new economic growth. In 2013 most of the members recorded another increase. The members that recorded a positive change rate were 17 in 2013, and increased to 25 in 2014, and 27 in 2015. The only member with a negative percentage of change was Greece in 2015, which recorded a reduction by 0,2%, after an increase by 0,4% in 2014 and six successive reductions of its economy during the period 2008-2013. For the first time in 2016, after 2007 no member state has mentioned any drop in GDP, while the 27 members mentioned an increase, whereas Greece was stable. The highest percentage of increase was recorded by Ireland (5,2%) and Malta (5,0%) in 2016, while the lowest percentage –apart from the 0,0% percentage in Greece- was the increase by 0,9% in Italy and by 1,2% in France and Belgium.

The GDP is the most important indicator, with whom we can measure the financial prosperity of an economy. It is not the ideal one but it is the best we have. If we divide the GDP of a year with the country's population of the same year, we have the per capital real GDP, that measures an individual's income (on average) in the economy.

Real per capita gross national produce

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$$\frac{Real\ gross\ national\ products}{population}$$

The real per capita GPD gives the product which would correspond to each resident of an economy, if the sharing was equal. As it is evident, the smaller the unequal distribution the more reliable measure is per capital GPD and visa versa. The positive and at the same time the most important is that the GPD takes into consideration the change in population and that's the reason why it is used to measure economic performances over time, and is used among countries for international comparisons. As we see per capita GDP is influenced by the real GPD and the countries population.

Although, every country in the EU is unique. This means that for example GPD and the increase of population could be very different for each country. Every country has its own approach to politics as well as education. The EU has 508 million residents, the 3rd biggest population after China and India.

Countries	Population	%
Malta	429344	0,08
Luxembourg	562958	0,11
Cyprus	847008	0,17
Estonian	1313271	0,26
Latvia	1986096	0,39
Slovenia	2062874	0,41
Lithuania	2921262	0,57
Croatian	4225316	0,83
Ireland	4628949	0,91
Slovakia	5421349	1,07
Finland	5471753	1,08
Denmark	5659715	1,11
Bulgarian	7202198	1,42
Austria	8576261	1,69
Sweden	9747355	1,92
Hungary	9855571	1,94
Portugal	20174822	2,04
Czech Republic	10538275	2,07
Greece	10858018	2,14
Belgium	11258434	2,21
Neverlands	16200726	3,32
Romania	19870647	3,91
Poland	385614	7,47
Spain	46449565	9,14
Italy	60795612	11,96
USA	64875165	12,76
French	66415161	13,06
German	81197537	15,97
Total population	**508450856**	**100%**

The increase in the European population results from the combination of natural growth (the number of births exeeds the number of deaths) and net migration (the number of people setting in the EU in higher than the number of those who leave it). At the same time, the population of Europe is aging, as life expentancy is rising and fewer children are born. We can compare the countries of the European Union to their standard of living by measuring the prices of goods and services of each country in relation to income by using a common artificial currency called “Purchasing Power Unit” (PPS). Comparing per capital GDP in PPS gives a picture of living standards across the EU.

Bulagria	47
Romania	55
Croatian	59
Latvia	64
Hungary	68
Ploand	68
Greece	73
Lithulania	75
Estonia	76
Slovakia	77
Portugal	78
Cyprus	82
Slovenia	83
Malta	84
Czech Republic	85
Spain	91
Italy	96
France	107
Finland	110
Belgium	119
Sweden	123
Germany	124
Denmark	125
Austria	130
Netherlands	131
Ireland	134
Luxembourg	266

The dispersion of per capita GDP in the EU member states remains ultra-impressive, Luxembourg has by far the highest per capita GDP of all countries exceed by more than 2,5 times the average in the EU-27 and almost 6 times the GDP of Bulgaria, which is the poorest EU member state according to this indicator. A particular feature of the of the Luxembourg economy, which explains to some extent the very high per capita GDP of the country that it occupies a large number of foreign residents, who contribute to its GDP but are not included in the permanent population. The Netherlands occupies the second place among the EU member states, but this performance in undermined by two EFTA member States, Norway and Switzerland. Ireland maintains its position among the richest EU member states.

Generally, northern and central European countries have higher per capita GDP from southern European countries.

The standard of living in European union is improved by protecting the environment by encouraging job creation, limiting inequalities and by linking isolated areas with infrastructure development. In the countries of northern Europe, this effort is bigger and more organized than that of southern Europe. That's why the standard of living is better in Nothern Europe. In terms of education, it improves the qualification of workers so that they can cope better with ever increasing competition. The level of expenses on education varies from country to country. In northern Europe the expenses are higher than those in southern Europe. Indeed, they spend a lot in northern Europe for the development and application at new technologies on education, something that is not happening in the Mediterranean countries. Also the motivations given to students in northern Europe are many. Education and the importance given to it by northern European countries is another reason to have a better standard of living than the others.

In summary, other reasons why northern Europe has a better standard of living is the best organization in the following areas:

-Work and retirement with fair pay
-Education and youth
-Health care
-Rights of consumers
-Travel and transportation
-Family and the Law of the Northern European Union
-Great financial assistance to start-ups
-Lower VAT & taxes
-Closer to European standards and cleaner European culture
-Recruitment and social protection of staff
-Less imports and more exports because they have great world-renowned industries
-Financing and support for households and businesses
-Observance of environmental rules by citizens and penalties imposed by the state