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**MEET  
NEIGHBOURS 2**

# „THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER STUDY“ GENERAL ANALYSIS



Evropski  
pokret  
Srbija  
Leskovac

The document "GENERAL ANALYSIS" was made by EMinS-Leskovac within the project "MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS 2", Work Package No. 2 - Intellectual Result 1. "THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER STUDY". This document was created within the Erasmus + Program.

The purpose of this document is to provide partners and the interested public with relevant knowledge about the main problematic areas that lead to hatred and division between the participating countries - REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA, REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA, REPUBLIC OF GREECE, REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND REPUBLIC OF SERBIA. Also, the purpose of this analysis is to shed light on mythologies that glorify their own and belittle others, and on this basis to enable the engagement of relevant actors to suppress, remove and overcome xenophobic prejudices and stereotypes.

This document is based on the respective National reports which were prepared by the project partners:

- NGO "Center for Educational Initiatives" (CEI), Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria;
- NGO "The Association of 3D Youngsters", Craiova, Republic of Romania;
- NGO "Center for Educational and Development Initiatives INNOVA LAB", Bitola, Republic of North Macedonia;
- NGO "Institute for Educational and Youth Studies (EGECED)", Izmir, Republic of Turkey;
- NGO "Youth Center of Epirus" (YC Epirus), Ioannina, Republic of Greece;
- NGO "European Movement in Serbia" Leskovac (EMinS Leskovac), Leskovac, Republic of Serbia.

The document was prepared by the EPuS-Leskovac multidisciplinary team in the period March - June 2023.

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# **„ THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER STUDY “**

## **GENERAL ANALYSIS**

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This document was created within the project "MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS 2", Work package no. 2 - Intellectual result 1. "The Image of other Study".

The preparation of this document represents the final stage in the realization of a set of complex activities of qualitative and in-depth study of the main problematic areas that lead to hatred and division between the participating countries. By shedding light on mythologies that glorify their own and denigrate others, this analysis provides a credible cognitive basis for work on suppressing, removing and overcoming xenophobic prejudices, stereotypes and other cultural barriers.

The goal of the General Analysis is to summarize the results of national analyses on the key aspects of quality intercultural communication and the development of intercultural sensitivity of young people from the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Romania.

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# **1. DESKTOP ANALYSIS - SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND ENVIRONMENT FOR INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION (A.1A)**

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The goal of this segment of the General Analysis is to collect, identify and interpret relevant data about the school as an institution which, through its curricula and specific disciplinary forms, should socialize young people in accordance with the official value-normative system, and to ensure the correct use of identification markers. The subject of analysis is the school as a pillar of the educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Romania.

For this purpose, an examination of official, powerfully enlightened figures of national opinion and their relationship to the idea of citizenship and statehood, was carried out through a discursive and content analysis of curricula, textbooks and teaching aids of the humanities subjects History and Literature.

1.1. REPUBLIC OF SERBIA - The aim of teaching history in the educational system of the Republic of Serbia is to contribute to the understanding of historical space and time, historical processes and flows, as well as to the development of national, European and world identity and the spirit of tolerance among students. Young people, noticing cause-and-effect relationships, build an understanding of historical processes and flows, the role of prominent figures in the development of human society, knowledge of national and general history, as well as the history of neighboring nations and states. History is defined as:

- a subject that explains concepts from social theory and practice to students (state, ruler, democracy);
- a subject that provides the basis for building a national identity;
- science that should educate for democracy, peace and tolerance, by explaining terms such as: war, peace, elections, parties, opposition, historical process;
- a science that should provide elementary political literacy and political culture;
- a science that provides the basis for the adoption of national, regional and world cultural values.

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In Serbia, history is a compulsory subject studied in primary and secondary education. Regarding history curriculum, it can be said that there is a full balance between national history, Balkan history and world history. This type of balance is present in all school grades, and the general studying principle is going from earlier to later events. Teaching history starts with the World and Central Balkans prehistory. From this time, the most famous historical monument is related to the discovery of the oldest organized settlement in Europe (Lepenski Vir, Đerdap Gorge, Danube), which dates back to 8000 years ago. The history of the ancient century comes next (the ancient East, ancient Greece, the Hellenistic era, Rome, the fall of the Western Roman Empire). The study of ancient century is followed by the Middle Ages in its early phase (Europe and the Mediterranean; Serbs and their environment), when the Serbian state experienced its peak under the rule of Nemanjić, i.e. when the Kingdom of Serbia was proclaimed in 1217, and the autocephalous Serbian archbishopric was proclaimed in 1219. In the late Middle Ages, special emphasis was placed on the era of the Ottoman conquests. Then, the rise of Europe from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is studied, as well as the history of the Serbian people under foreign rule from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Main revolutions are also covered (Industrial revolution, political revolution in France, the Civil War in the USA, the great powers, the Eastern Question and the Balkan peoples). And finally, the era of modern history (the formation of the Serbian state, the Balkan wars, World War I and II, the world after World War II and Yugoslavia in that period).

When it comes to the approach to history, the approach of the Germanic-Viennese school of history prevails in schools. According to this approach the Serbs settled the Balkan Peninsula in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, there is an autochthonous school of history according to which Serbs have always lived in the Balkans and this can be evidenced by the time calculation according to the old Serbian calendar. In addition to domestic authors, this second point of view is also represented by many foreign authors (Nestor Kijevski, Syprien Robert, Laonik Halkokondilo, Ami Bue, Abel Ovelac, etc.).

The essence of the national identity of the Serbs is contained in the understanding that the one who sacrifices his life for the truth and justice of God, has sacrificed the greatest that he could and had, and - he won. When it comes to Serbian symbols, they are mostly related to Orthodox-Christian identity, to ruling dynasties, folk customs and traditions. The central spiritual symbol of the Serbs and Serbia is represented by the Saintsava's ideal. Special symbols of the Serbs are also represented by legal monuments - the Nomocanon of Saint Sava (1219) and the Code of Dushan (1349). In contemporary history of Serbia, a special place is occupied by prominent figures such as: scientists - Nikola Tesla, Mihajlo Pupin, Nobel

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laureate writer - Ivo Andrić, and today our best athletes in the world: Novak Đoković and Nikola Jokić.

1.2. REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA - In the educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria, the educational program formulates the task and responsibility of teachers to make students aware that (1) as citizens of Bulgaria, they (2) have formed their identity in the European context. This is why young people's awareness of Bulgarian and European identity, human rights and civic obligations is enriched and developed. From the 5th to the 10th grade, when compulsory secondary education ends, the history program is constructed in 2 three-year cycles. The first two years of each cycle are based on the principle of synchronous study of national, world and European history. Both cycles end with the study of only national history (grades 7 and 10).

In Bulgaria, the history textbook is an instrument for the transmission of selected knowledge that maintains values, traditions, norms and myths. There are different perspectives through which this is achieved:

- The Romantic perspective approach (19th century), which encourages people to connect emotionally with their country's past and to see themselves as part of a larger national community with a shared cultural heritage.
- Empirical or factual approach (after the middle of the 20th century), which presents the teaching of history as imparting knowledge based on critical thinking.
- A competence-based approach, which looks at history as a tool for shaping civic competences among young people. This approach recognizes that history is not only relevant to the past, but also has significance for the present and the future.

The first two approaches view history as a key tool for building national identity, while the third emphasizes education as a means of building a form of collective identity that goes beyond national identity.

Regardless of the school grade, the beginning of Bulgarian history can be found in deep antiquity, even in prehistoric times, so the population and its heritage living in the "Bulgarian lands in prehistoric times" are part of the modern Bulgarian state. From the Bulgarian point of view, the natural and only recognized competitor in the dispute over Antiquity are the Greeks, who firmly and sustainably control Antiquity. Other neighbors - Turks, Romanians,

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Serbs - are absent from the curricula and lessons related to the history of the Old World. The case of ancient Macedonia is interesting - according to the textbook, on the one hand, the ancient Macedonians were not Greeks - they spoke a different language, but on the other hand, the textbook does not provide any possibility for modern Macedonians to find legitimacy for their antiquity in the way Bulgarians do with the ancient Thracians. The Middle Ages have a special role in shaping the modern Bulgarian identity. Here, important narratives for identity are the participation of Khan Tervel as the savior of Europe, Constantinople and Christianity from the Arab expansion in 717-718, the expulsion of the Avars from Central Europe and the establishment of the Bulgarian-Frankish border during the time of Khan Krum, the transformation of Bulgaria into the third European empire alongside Byzantium and Francia, and most importantly, the thesis about the Bulgarian contribution to the Slavic world - the contribution of the medieval Bulgarian state for the success of Cyrillic Methodius' project and the spread of Christian literature translated to the West and to the East.

In the perception of Bulgarian historians, the Middle Ages once again gave Bulgarians a sense of superiority over their neighbors. "Bulgarian history" starts from the beginning and only the history of the Greeks can compete with the Bulgarian national myth. Romanians and Macedonians are absent from textbooks as a state narrative. The Turks appear at the end of the Middle Ages, and Serbia as a political factor in the Balkans has only been spoken of since the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the time of Stefan Nemanja. The emphasis is on the fact that the Serbian rulers sought their legitimacy through the Bulgarian state and church.

The so-called "golden age" of Bulgarian culture from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, during the time of the first Bulgarian Christian ruler Prince Boris (851-893) and his son Emperor Simeon (893-927), is important not because the borders of Bulgarian state spread over three seas, but because of the influence of the Bulgarian medieval culture in the Slavic world.

1.3. REPUBLIC OF TURKEY - In the education system of the Republic of Turkey, the state creates and distributes a unique curriculum, leaving teachers with no choice but to use the textbooks provided to them. All textbooks strictly follow the national curriculum, and teachers are given detailed instructions on how to teach the subjects. History textbooks in Turkey emphasize that the history of the Turkish people extends beyond the borders of the Republic of Turkey and can be traced back to Central Asia. Textbooks maintain a thesis on Turkish history from the 1930s. According to this thesis, Turkish history is the story of a continuous Turkish-Muslim nation that has existed since the arrival of the Turks in Anatolia

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in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, this thesis posits that the birthplace of Turkish nationalism was in Central Asia. The term "Turks" in textbooks refers to individuals who can trace their origins back to Central Asia. In addition, history textbooks highlight the adoption of Islam by Turks as a key aspect of Turkish being, and describe Turkish national identity as a fusion of ethnic and religious elements.

Milas (1995) reached the following conclusions about history education in Turkey. History textbooks show only about 5% interest in world and European history outside of Turkish and Islamic history. With this ethnocentric approach, the emphasis is placed on "Turkish" history, due to which students become alienated from world history and cannot understand Ottoman and Turkish history in the context of world history. The students don't know to which centuries the Alexander, Roman, Byzantine and Seljuk Empires belong. This is because history is not presented within meaningful relationships and continuities.

According to Gürleyen (1998), the history taught to high school students in Turkey is a specific version of history created in the 1980s and influenced by Kemalist and Turkish-Islamic Synthesis ideologies. Consequently, the textbooks contain elements of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis discourse, particularly evident in the textbooks developed after the 1980 military coup d'état to promote Kemalism among students. Textbooks portray this era as a time of progress and modernization, and the achievements of the Republican government are presented as fundamental principles that must be preserved for the survival of the nation. Students are taught to become Turkish nationalists, dedicated to the history of a strong national identity, a brave army and a strong state tradition while adhering to Atatürk's principles and secularism. However, the type of secularism these textbooks promote does not exclude Islam. According to this view, the ideal citizen values nationalist, religious, secular and statist ideals.

The textbooks used in Turkey promote a specific idea of citizenship based on the Turkish language of ethnicity and Islamic religion. As a result, individuals who do not belong to any group are excluded from the collective identity. This nationalist attitude still prevails in current textbooks, with little or no recognition of minority groups such as Jews, Armenians, Greeks or Assyrians. According to Çayır (2015), the current textbooks used in Turkey have not undergone significant changes in depicting the national self and ethnic minorities. Textbooks continue to assume that all individuals in Turkey are of Turkish nationality and practice Islam, thus maintaining an ethno-religious concept of national identity. According to some scholars (Gür and Çelik 2013), the Turkish government took steps towards the

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democratization of the educational system by recognizing minorities. Furthermore, in 2005, Turkey reformed its curriculum to align with EU norms. These actions were seen as indicators of progress towards acknowledging the diversity of the Republican nation. Unfortunately, these actions were not fully implemented.

According to Tunçay (2015), the scope of history textbooks should be expanded in three ways: geographically, the history taught should not be limited to the history of Turks or Turkey, but should include comparative global history. Regarding the time dimension, the topics covered should not be limited to the First World War, the Turkish War of Independence and the early Republican period. Finally, a holistic approach to history should be adopted, including culture, economy and society, rather than a narrow political history based on memorizing persons and names and emphasizing wars and territories conquered or lost.

1.4. REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA - In the educational system of the Republic of Romania, the history curriculum covers both national and world history, with a balance between them. The proportion of national history varies by level of education, but is generally taught alongside world history across the curriculum. At primary and secondary levels, the focus is on the basics of Romanian history, including its geography, the ancient Dacian civilization and the main events and figures of Romanian history. The emphasis here is on building a thorough understanding of Romanian history and culture. As students progress to higher levels of education, the curriculum expands to include a more detailed analysis of different periods.

Throughout the Romanian history curriculum, there is a clear emphasis on the concept of the nation. The curriculum emphasizes the idea of the Romanian people as a unique and distinct entity, with a common culture, language and history. This is reinforced by events and figures considered central to the development of the Romanian nation. The curriculum emphasizes ancient and medieval history, with a special focus on the Dacian civilization and the period of Romanian history spanning from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The emphasis on these periods is due to their importance in shaping Romanian identity and culture. However, contemporary history is also taught, including the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a focus on Romania's role in the First and Second World War, as well as the country's transition to democracy after the fall of communism. When it comes to the history of neighboring countries, the history curriculum includes information about neighboring countries and their historical narratives, but the level of detail varies. For example, the Romanian history curriculum includes significant coverage of the history of the Ottoman Empire. Hungarian

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history is also included in the curriculum, with a special emphasis on the conflicts and political relations between the two countries.

The earliest period covered in the curriculum is the pre-Roman period, during which the Dacians inhabited the region that would later become Romania. The next period covered by the curriculum is the Roman occupation, which lasted from 106 to 271 AD. This period stands out as the time when Romania first came into contact with Western civilization. The medieval period is given considerable emphasis, especially the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This period is characterized by the rise of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which eventually became part of the modern Romanian state. The heroic figure of Vlad Tepes, also known as Dracula, is often mentioned in this period, as he was seen as a symbol of resistance to foreign domination. Other notable figures from this period include Stephen the Great (one of Romania's greatest rulers), Mircea the Elder (warrior against the Ottoman Empire). The modern period, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, is also given significant emphasis in the Romanian history curriculum. This period was marked by the struggle for national independence and the establishment of the modern Romanian state. Key figures from this period include Alexander Ioan Cuza (united the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, and Ion Antonescu (prime minister of Romania during World War II).

One of the most revered heroes in Romanian history is none other than the legendary Vlad Tepes (known as Dracula), and is considered a hero for his unwavering loyalty to his country and his people. Another prominent figure is Michael the Brave, who was the prince of Wallachia and Moldavia at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He is known for his efforts to unite the two territories into a single state. Another important figure in Romanian history is Stephen the Great, who was the prince of Moldavia at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was remembered for his military campaigns against the Ottoman Empire. Another hero who is often mentioned in the history curriculum as a symbol of resistance is Avram Iancu. He played a key role in the Revolution of 1848, which sought to overthrow the ruling Habsburg dynasty and establish an independent Romanian state. Nicolae Ceausescu was the leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989. Although his rule was marked by corruption and human rights abuses, Ceausescu is remembered for his efforts to modernize the country and promote Romanian culture on the world stage.

1.5. REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA - In the educational system of the Republic of North Macedonia, history is a separate subject studied as a part of primary education and remains a compulsory subject throughout secondary education. Also, on the final exams,

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history is one of the subjects that can be chosen. The history curriculum in the educational system is cyclical, i.e. generally, the entire curriculum is studied once in primary education, and then the same historical content is repeated in secondary education, but with a broader content, adapted to the age of the students. The history curriculum includes the entire history of mankind and deals with the most significant events related to world history, the history of the Balkan peoples and the national history of the Macedonian people and nationalities living in the Republic of North Macedonia. No particular emphasis is placed on one period of history: prehistory, ancient history, the Middle Ages, modern history, and 20<sup>th</sup> century history are all covered equally. The least content is about the history of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is certainly a weakness of the history curriculum.

In all periods covered by the textbooks, events significant for the history of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Turkey (Ottoman Empire) are adequately presented. In the ancient period, the history of Ancient Greece is the most represented, in the Middle Ages, the history of Bulgaria and Serbia, while in modern history, the Ottoman Empire occupies the largest space, but also the creation of Balkan states. In the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most attention was paid to the history of Albania, the Balkan Wars and the two world wars. The national narrative is an integral part of the history curriculum. It has been developing since the creation of the first states on the Balkan Peninsula, from the Old Macedonian state. But the creation of the Macedonian nation, as a separate one, was most prominent in the Middle Ages, with the arrival of the Slavic tribes. A special place belongs to the period of creation of the Ohrid Archbishopric as a separate autocephalous church. Medieval national history is based on the struggle to reject Ottoman rule and obtain basic rights for the Christian population.

The most important place in the history curriculum is occupied by historical events related to the twentieth century, that is, the first attempt to create an own state through the Ilinden Uprising in 1903, the Balkan Wars which are depicted in the context of the national narrative in North Macedonia as a national tragedy, due to the division of territory and military operations in these areas. The First World War was presented as a continuation of the Balkan wars and as a war in which the Macedonian people were mobilized by the two belligerent sides in the war, and therefore represents a fratricidal war. The period between the two world wars is presented as a dark period of assimilation in the states that divided the territory of Macedonia after the Balkan wars. The Second World War was presented as an anti-fascist but also a war of liberation with a special emphasis on the creation of the Macedonian state within the federal Yugoslavia.

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The heroes used in the national narrative are usually fighters, soldiers, politicians, less often poets, writers, and very rarely women. Alexander the Great, who is also a part of Greek ancient history, is certainly the most significant figure from antiquity. From the Middle Ages, Karposh and Skanderbeg, Gotse Delchev, a fighter for national freedom and the creation of the Macedonian state. Many religious figures such as the Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius, their students Kliment and Naum Ohridski, writers Grigor Prlichev, Krste Petkov Misirkov, Kocho Racin occupy a very important place in national history. There are two events which have a special place in national history: first, the Ilinden Uprising in 1903 and the creation of the Republic of Krushevo, and second, the creation of the first parliament in 1944, with which the Macedonian state was formed.

1.6. REPUBLIC OF GREECE - In the educational system of the Republic of Greece, the overall emphasis is on national history, with relatively less information about other countries and regions of the world, especially in the books of the first and last grade of high school. Greece is studied in more detail, including various cultural aspects of the time (religion, art, language, sciences, etc.). The ancient Roman period is also studied in considerable detail, distinguishing between the Western and Eastern Roman Empires. Significantly smaller chapters of the book are attributed to other people with whom the Greeks had connections - Mesopotamia, Egypt, Phoenicians, Jews etc.

The history book of the second high school grade describes medieval and modern history from the perspective of Greece. Various periods of Greece are emphasized (Byzantine, Ottoman, and Latin). Countries and cultures of those who Greece had contact with the most are described, noting the end of ancient Rome, Arabs, Slavs, Bulgarians, dynasties of Merovingians and Carolidians, south of Europe, Asia Minor, Serbs, Italians, Ottomans, Russians, and Cypriots. In addition, external mentions of modern history are present in five relatively short chapters dealing with the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the North American Revolution and the French Revolution plus Napoleon times.

In the last grade, the world history of the modern and contemporary period is mainly described from a Greek perspective, or includes major world events, such as the crisis of the Habsburg Empire, the Crimean War, the Balkan Wars, ethnic movements in Southeast Europe, the First World War, the period in Greece and other regions between the world wars, European colonies abroad, World War II with particular emphasis on the role of Germany. It is important to note that the humanities, economics and IT classes of the last year of high

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school study only Greek modern and contemporary history, with nearly zero mentions of other countries.

The content of the books is generally balanced between different time periods. Since the second year covers two main periods, the Middle Ages and most of the modern era, it is evident that both of these periods are studied in less detail compared to the ancient and modern periods. Also, after consulting with a history teacher, it was pointed to us that in reality the most studied periods are the Roman and Hellenistic eras of the ancient world, the Ottoman period and the Greek revolution in 1821. When it comes to modern history, there is no specific time for studying the material that follows the Second World War.

The greatest mention of any neighboring territory and country in Greek history books is attributed to Ancient Rome. Another large neighbor that is heavily described in the book is the Ottoman Empire, specifically referring to their occupation of Greek territory from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the Greek Revolution of 1821. Other, much less important, mentions of neighbors can be found in history books: Bulgaria in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, regarding their struggle against the Byzantine powers and the organization of the Bulgarian state; Bulgaria and Serbia are also mentioned as recipients of cultural influence from the Byzantine Empire, especially in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries; Constantinople is mentioned during the periods of Byzantine and Ottoman rule; the territories and people of Turkey are mentioned throughout the Ottoman era; the territories and people of the Balkans are mentioned throughout the Byzantine era; The Balkan Peninsula is mentioned and described as a whole in several areas, especially in the periods of Middle and Modern ages; Serbia is described starting from their victory over Skopje in the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; the Serbian Revolution of 1804 is mentioned; Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian and Turkish national movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are described; The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 are described in detail, mentioning all participating countries and the main battles; Bulgaria and Serbia are mentioned during the First World War, Turkey is mentioned in the context of the Cypriot-Turkish issues starting in the 1960s.

Greek national identity is based on a common cultural heritage and major historical events shared by people and territories within mainly the modern territory of Greece. Greece as a nation was established in 1830, a few years after the Greek revolution against Ottoman power, and a year after the national border of Greece was first established. Symbols of national identity are: Pericles - politician and general of ancient Athens; Kylon - politician and general in ancient Greece; Philip II - king of Macedonia; Alexander the Great - Greek

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conqueror and founder of ancient Alexandria; Warriors and political heroes of the Revolution of 1821 – T. Kolokotronis, J. Karaiskakis and others, as well as the only female heroine – L. Bouboulina; E. Venizelios - Greek leader of the liberation and democratic movement, Prime Minister of Greece, also known as "The Creator of Modern Greece"; A. Papanastasiou - politician, father of democracy; J. Metaxas, victorious leader of Greeks in the WWII, K. Karamanlis - prime minister, 20th century, paved the path for Greece to the EU and many more.

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## **2. FOCUS DESKTOP ANALYSIS (A.1A + A.1B)**

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The objective of this segment of the General Analysis is to collect, identify and interpret relevant data on:

- key events through which the time-space continuum of national history is built, as well as "promised places" of military glory (battlefields), spirit (monasteries, churches), memory (monuments) and nature, and community heroes (warriors, protectors, martyrs, creators);
- the influence of other interpretive factors that young people are exposed to in everyday life, especially when it comes to the influence of the media;
- non-institutionalized social environments and groups in which there is potential to articulate a collective identity in the national and civic direction (environmental activists, bloggers, etc.).

For this purpose, a cycle of workshops, focus group interviews and essays writing, on key aspects of the national history of Bulgarians, Turks, Romanians, Macedonians, Greeks and Serbs was carried out.

2.1. REPUBLIC OF SERBIA - In order to assess the opinion of the Serbian youth, the following activities were conducted:

- Two workshops on the topics "Imagine Europe" and "Rewrite history", with students of the Medical High School in Leskovac. The strongest impression from these workshops is the great interest of young people from both groups to freely discuss

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this topic, to express their views and to hear others, to confront different arguments. A distinctive image created by students from a group "The European Phoenix" speaks about their perception of a Europe, that may have burned down, but can be reborn



and rise from its own ashes. This was shown by the arrangement of icons-symbols. In the center, Olympic flame was placed (the one that unites all people and nations), and around it, great men of science and art were lined up. All of them formed a ring which consisted of different national symbols standing friendly next to each other. In remote corners, completely

isolated, there were ideologues, conquerors and those who wanted to conquer the world through war.

- Two workshops on the topics "Imagine Europe" and "Rewrite history", with young adults (aged 19-30, NGO activists from Leskovac). In general, all changes in the events proposed by the youth led to the outcome that the war would not have occurred at all, but that all disputes between nations would have been resolved through skillful diplomacy. The discussion that took place after the presentation of their proposals stands out as very interesting. A group of young activists connected the events related to Serbia from the time of the First World War with later events, in which they recognized the similar behavior of the great powers towards Serbia until today. Their story goes like this:
  - The assassination of Prince Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip was not the cause to start the First World War, but only the occasion, while the causes are deeper and did not come from the Serbian side.
  - The Austro-Hungarian monarchy sent Serbia an ultimatum that simply could not be accepted.
  - A similar ultimatum, an offer that could not be accepted, was sent by the West to Serbia in Rambouillet, which was followed by the bombing of Yugoslavia.
  - A similar agreement was offered to Serbia not so long ago. This "agreement" demanded that Serbia gives up a part of its territory, the part that represents its soul, cradle and sanctuary, which cannot be accepted. How long?

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- The conclusion of the young man from the group: "It is clear to me that they are big and powerful and also very cunning when they try to convince us that we should be blamed for all the suffering we are going through, that they consider us very naive and that we will not figure out what's really happening in the background. But it is not clear to me why they do not understand that international relations based on mere force and violence, can destroy not only Serbia and Serbs, but also the whole world. It is unsustainable. Maybe now is the right moment for a radical change. All problems and disputes can be resolved peacefully, through dialogue and mutual respect. This world should be given a chance to survive, the moral evolution of humanity should continue. We can all be better, let everyone do their best."
  
- Three focus group interviews with history teachers (6), high school students (12) and young NGO activists (9). It is noticeable that all these groups think about their country, neighbors and the EU as vitally important issues, because they are aware that all these international relations directly affect the quality of life they live, and not only in terms of a high or low standard of living. Values, tradition, culture and identity are very important to everyone. Everyone would like the relations between the nations to be better, and they would also like the relations between the Serbs to be better and to overcome the divisions between the people. The biggest disagreement between these groups is related to perceptions of teachers and young people about how much young people read, how much they know about national and general history, how much they are interested in learning about the past. Teachers believe that young people are not interested enough in history and especially in learning history on a scientific basis. Instead, they are more informed through the Internet, social networks and the media. Young people, in fact, showed a great interest in investigating what really happened in order to understand the time in which they live today and to understand which direction should be taken further.
  
- Online questionnaire "Me and Europe", conducted with 121 respondents (high school student and young adults aged 15-30). The analysis of the answers given by young people shows what they think about themselves and others, what is their perception and what are their attitudes toward the world around them. The results of the analysis are as follows:
  - 42.98% of respondents disagree with the statement that the differences between Serbian and European cultures are unimportant, while 53.72% of respondents

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disagree with the statement that "there are no significant differences between the cultures of the partner countries." Also, 80.99% of young people agree with the statement that it is essential to preserve and defend one's beliefs when interacting with people from European cultures.

- 39.67% of respondents agree with the statement that the differences between Serbian and European cultures are minimal, 37.19% disagree, while 23.14% of respondents are neutral. At the same time, regarding the readiness to understand and respect European values, even if they differ from their own, as many as 93.38% of respondents express a positive attitude.
- 75.21% showed willingness to adapt their communication and behavior in interaction with people from European cultures, for effective communication and cooperation, while almost half of respondents (46.28%) want an inclusive and diverse society, and are ready to integrate elements of European cultures into their own.
- Although there has been a noticeable increase in Euro-skepticism among young people in recent years, there is still a strong desire for their country to become a member of the EU. The fact is that the vast majority of respondents want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula, a group of 59.50 % of respondents. According to young people, the assumptions of good relations between the Balkan countries in the future are: economic cooperation (54.54%), mutual respect and a sense of closeness (52.89%) and showing empathy and friendship with other Balkan peoples (43.80%). The five characteristics that best describe a European are: "High standard of living" (60.33%), Human rights (59.50%), Environmental protection and sustainable development (56.20%), Democracy (48.76%) and Freedom (42.15%).
- An overwhelming majority of young people agree with the statement that food is what unites the Balkan peoples, 80.16%. Among the young people in Serbia, there is a belief that perhaps all the nations of the world have good national cuisines, but the best food by far is in the Balkans!
- 70.25% of respondents agree with the statement that differences in religion have contributed to conflicts among the Balkan peoples, 10.74% disagree, and 19.01% are neutral.

2.2. REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA - The tools that were used to form conclusions on the topic were: i) A survey conducted among 142 high school students and young adults aged 15-30 and ii) Two thematic workshops held in two high schools among students aged 16-18 and two groups of young adults aged 20 and over.

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These results also reflect the impressions received from workshops with students and young adults on the topic "Imagine Europe". In all groups, a dividing line is evident according to geographic location. In the center of the puzzle is the "ideal other" in the form of United



Europe, on one side are the images of faces and events related to Western Europe, and on the other side are the symbols associated with Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula. The images coming from the East, Russia, are also present. The young people notice the serious infiltration

of politics into people's lives, which they associate with wars - in this case, in the face of Napoleon. In general, we can say that for the students, the idea of a united Europe remains at the level of a mechanical combination of two worlds with different histories and cultural backgrounds. This could be attributed to the still strong influence of textbooks and the lack of sufficient social experience.

The reasoning and decisions that came from the workshop reflect the participants' greater social experience. Here, in both groups, there was a desire for symbols to be structured outside of their geographic origin by being united around certain themes, between which there are transitions, or arranged concentrically and thus equally distant from selected symbols, representing common civil and European values, which are in the center of the composition.

During the second workshop, both groups did not express a desire for change, although they energetically discussed the topic and knew the facts well. Here, their experience as citizens of Europe and the possibility of free movement was interestingly demonstrated. Instead of dramatizing the lost territories, which they still considered unfair, they showed the pragmatism of contemporary European youth, who are accustomed to mobility and know that they can easily visit any territory and thus compensate for its loss - "Look where the Black and Aegean Seas are. What is important is that, as Europeans, we can go where we want." It was also interesting to note the opinion that the wars that have destroyed Europe have actually shown the way to overcome the tragedy - the unification of Europe.

In order to determine the perception of young people in Bulgaria on key aspects of national, Balkan and European history, online questionnaire "Me and Europe", was conducted with

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149 respondents aged 15-30. The analysis of the answers given by young people shows us the following:

- The percentage of those who disagree and agree on the question of whether cultural differences with Europeans are unimportant is almost identical, around 20%. But, 37% are considered neutral on this issue.
- More than two-thirds believe that there are significant differences between Balkan cultures - 67% to 20%. A small percentage is neutral.
- From 45% to 30% of Bulgarian youth believe that they have to defend their cultural values when they are in the company of other young Europeans. However, Bulgarians are more optimistic about such a need in the Balkan environment - 37% versus 31%.
- When asked if they feel better as Europeans, a high percentage of Bulgarian youth, 42 percent, have a neutral opinion. However, the percentage of those who consider themselves better in their Bulgarian identity dominates the European identity - 39% against 21%.
- A higher percentage of young Bulgarians, 44% compared to 29%, believe that cultural differences with Europeans can be overcome through communication and interaction.
- Young Bulgarians consider themselves tolerant, try to understand another person, even if they differ in values and beliefs - almost 90%.
- 47% of participants believe that it is important to integrate elements of European identity into their own identity in order to build a common European one.
- 51 percent have a neutral position on the issue of EU enlargement with countries from the Balkan Peninsula, but among those who express a position, a positive position dominates.
- As for the idea that religion has mostly brought conflict, 55% approve of this statement compared to only 10% who disapprove.
- "High standards", "human rights" and "democracy" are the three most frequently used concepts that describe a young Bulgarian's idea of a European. On the other hand, the three concepts that describe the idea of Bulgarians are extremely negative - "low standards", "racism", and yet "freedom".

2.3. REPUBLIC OF TURKEY - In order to assess the opinion of the youth of Turkey on key aspects of national, Balkan and European history, the following activities were conducted:

- Workshop "Imagine Europe" attended by 23 young adults and high school students. Students and young adults were divided into groups of 4-5 people. Twenty-five cards with 15 symbols representing Europe, five representing partner countries, and five representatives of Turkey were distributed to each group. First, they were asked to

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create a story by placing the cards they had in their hands. After that, they were asked



to explain why they made such an arrangement with the cards. The first group stated that they did not place the cards in the center of their narratives. Instead, they grouped the cards they found in relation to each other. They placed all the cards symbolizing Turkey on the far right. They also added a card with the Cyrillic alphabet next to

the cards related to Turkey. As a reason, they claimed that Turkey was a Balkan country since the Ottoman period. The second group divided the cards into three groups. Cards symbolizing Turkey were placed in the upper left corner and the cards representing Europe to the right of the card of the Maiden's Tower in Istanbul. A special group was created for Europeans, the Parliament and the founders of the EU. In the center they placed the Olympic torch and Tolstoy's War and Peace. Picasso, Mozart, Erasmus, Copernicus, the Cyrillic alphabet and saints were placed around these central cards. The third group did not make a distinction for symbols specific to Turkey. They arranged together all the places, locations and monuments that they considered to be historically significant. They placed the Eiffel Tower next to Anıtkabir, the Colosseum next to the Mevlana Museum and the Romanian Peace Monument next to the Adiyaman statues. The fourth group placed Anıtkabir, which is located in the capital and has historical significance for the Republic of Turkey, where Ataturk's mausoleum is located in the center. They also placed other symbols of Turkey around Anıtkabir. In the end, they put places and monuments that they found important near the center and historically significant figures and the founders of the EU on the edges of their picture. Unlike other groups, this group did not sharply separate national, Balkan and European symbols from each other. Instead, all the cards were arranged in a related manner.

- The workshop "Rewrite history" was realized as a continuation of the first workshop. A total of 21 essays were written. Participants were asked to explain which events they historically saw as turning points in the First World War. Analysis of the essays shows the following:

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- Most participants believe that the prevention of the assassination, which triggered the start of the First World War, could have prevented the war and allowed the Ottoman Empire to better protect its existing territories;
  - One essay argued that the Christian religion, with its policy of expansion, was responsible for the world's wars. In three essays was stated that Romania, Greece and Bulgaria should not have entered the world war. History could have taken a different course if these countries had not entered the war. Some essays also believe that the main problem is not in Europe, but that America financed the war. It was argued that the differences between the Balkans and Europe do not prevent coexistence, but that colonial states threaten peace by using nationalist movements as a tool. In some essays, the establishment of the Arab League was assessed as a threat, and it was emphasized that it must be prevented for the sake of world peace.
- Implementation of the "Me and Europe" questionnaire, total of 117 respondents aged 14-30. The key findings based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (often called the "Bennett Scale" model) are:
    - There is no statistical difference between males and females in the total score of the scale and denial, defense, minimization, adaptation, and integration sub-dimensions;
    - According to the age of the participants, there is no statistically significant difference in the sub-dimensions except for the Defense sub-dimension. However, when the averages of the defense sub-dimension are examined, it is seen that there is a considerable difference between the averages of youth in the 14-18 age group ( $X=3.45$ ) and the youth in the 19-30 ( $X=2.98$ ) age group;
    - 22.90% of respondents believe that economic cooperation and exchange can contribute the most to good relations between the Balkan countries. This is followed by cultural cooperation (19.30%), intercultural education in schools (18.00%), increasing awareness of mutual respect and a sense of closeness (14.10%), and regional association based on common needs and interests (12.50%);
    - 15.90% of respondents believe that freedom is one of the characteristics that best describes a European. This is followed by: human rights (15.70%); high standard of living (15.00%); democracy (13.10%); environmental protection and sustainable development (12.20%); equality (8.60%), security (7.50%) etc.

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- 17.40% of the respondents believe that the low standard is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of Turkey. Then comes: conflict (13.00%), care for the vulnerable (11.00%), cooperation (10.80%), dictatorship (9.60%), racism (8.20%), freedom (7.80%), democracy (5.80%), human rights (5.00%), etc.
- Two focus group interviews with 23 people (students and young adults) were conducted to compare the quantitative data from the questionnaire 'Me and Europe' with the qualitative data. Most interviewees defined 'being European' as having a broad perspective on the world, being economically prosperous, and having stress-free access to better living conditions. They could not distinguish between being a European Union citizen and being European and defined EU citizenship more based on having specific standards. European values were defined not so much by Europe's cultural and intellectual heritage but rather by its high standard of living and freedoms. While Europeanisation was viewed positively as a means of attaining Europe's high living standards, the European lifestyle was criticized as imitative. Their definition of Europe based on high living standards and freedoms aligns with the quantitative findings in the survey results. The proposal for removing borders within Europe was not received positively, as it was emphasized that each country's unique differences must be preserved. Among the factors threatening Europe, terrorism and the interests of other imperial countries were listed, while among the factors threatening Turkey, more emphasis was placed on internal problems. High living standards, human rights, and freedoms were listed as the defining characteristics of Europeans. Turks were defined as having economic issues, low living standards, conflicts and struggles. In this sense, qualitative data from the group interview is consistent with quantitative data from the questionnaire. The teachers recognized the significance of developing opinions on relevant subjects encompassing politics, economics, and cultural affairs within the framework of their country. They noted that students frequently disseminated their viewpoints to their peers. Social media served as the principal vehicle for students to track the latest news, with a predilection for following topics of interest on this platform. Nevertheless, the findings from the interview also revealed that a subset of students demonstrated a complete detachment from current issues. We asked the teachers about their students' tendency towards national history and the origins of their interest in this subject matter. The teachers who emphasized their students' interest in recent history expounded on the reinforcing role of television series and social media in increasing this interest.

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2.4. REPUBLIC OF ROMANIA - In order to determine the perception of Romanian youth on key aspects of national, Balkan and European history, the following activities were conducted:

- Workshops "Imagine Europe" - The workshops were organized with young people from the community and students from the National College "Elena Cuza" Craiova



and the school "Nicolae Balcescu" Craiova. At these workshops, young people had the opportunity to imagine the Europe they want using 15 images from Europe selected by the project partners and one image from each project partner and five images related to Romania and Romanian culture. During the workshops, it was observed that most of the participants were familiar with the Romanian and European images selected for the activity, but not so much with the Balkan ones. The Balkans were placed on the edge of "image". Also, it was observed that some young people decided to create images based on themes such as culture, personalities and buildings, and we even had a

group that decided to create an "image" where "good" characters and "bad" characters were separated.

- Workshops "Rewrite History" - During the workshops, different opinions were obtained from the participants. In summary, most of the participants mentioned that they would change WWI in a way that prevents it from occurring, or in a way that would end the war very briefly after it has begun. Some students said that they would have liked that Romania was more active in the war and took more territory from neighboring countries, mentioning the territories currently under the administration of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Below are summaries of some of the essays:
  - I think that if I could change anything about World War I, I would try to prevent it from happening entirely. So much suffering and destruction could have been avoided if people had found a way to resolve their conflicts peacefully. I would try to gather the leaders of the countries involved and encourage them to talk things out and find a way to compromise;
  - If I could go back in time and change something about World War I, I would try to ensure that women played a more active role in the peace negotiations. Maybe

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- then they would be more focused on building a more peaceful and just world. I would try to encourage more women to get involved in politics and diplomacy;
- If I could change anything about World War I, I would try to prevent the use of chemical weapons;
  - I would prevent Gavrilo Princip from assassinating Franz Ferdinand;
  - I would like the leaders of the warring nations to take more seriously the peace efforts that were made throughout the war;
  - I believe that the First World War was caused by the rise of nationalism in Europe, so I would make the European Union faster.
- Questionnaire "Me and Europe ", 116 respondents (high school students and young adults). Analysis of the obtained data says the following:
    - the differences in answers between young adults and high school students have similar qualitative characteristics;
    - 64.8% of young adults and 54.9% of students strongly disagree and disagree with the statement that the differences between Romanian and European cultures are unimportant, while over 65.0% of them disagree with the statement that the differences between members of the Balkan nations are unimportant. Consequently, over 50% of respondents strongly agree, or agree, that it is essential to defend own cultural values when interacting with people from European cultures.
    - 66.7% of young adults and 55% of students do not agree with the statement that it is better to be Romanian than European;
    - 92.6% of young adults and 92% of students agree with the statement that, when communicating with people from European cultures, they try to respect their values, beliefs and behaviors, even if they differ from their own. The same applies when it comes to dealing with the cultural differences of the Balkan peoples.
    - 82.2% of young adults and 87.6% of students completely agree, or agree with the statement that adapting one's own behavior is essential for communicating with people from European cultures.
    - 61.6% of young adults and 59.4% of students do not want to avoid their cultural practices and expectations in order to fit into the cultures of the Balkan peoples;
    - 77.8% of young adults and 66.1% of students completely agree, or agree, that integrating and incorporating elements from European cultures is key to building a more inclusive and diverse community or society.

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- 46.3% of young adults and 46.8% of students completely agree, or agree with the statement that similarities and mutual influences of Balkan cultures have a positive effect on the inclusion of these cultures in their own.
  - 83.3% of young adults and 83.9% of students completely agree, or agree, that the EU should expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula.
  - 47.3% of young adults and 62.9% of students completely agree or agree with the statement that differences in religion among Balkan nations have contributed to conflicts or divisions between Balkan societies.
  - 57.4% of young adults and 46.8% of students believe that visiting and getting to know each other are key to developing good relations between the Balkan peoples. Economic cooperation (48.1% of young adults and 51.6% of students), cultural cooperation (53.7% of young adults and 50% of students), intercultural education in schools (51.9% of young adults and 43.5% of students), increasing awareness of reciprocity (51.9% of young adults and 51.9% of students), etc.
  - among the five basic characteristics of Europeans, respondents recognize: human rights (75.9% of young adults and 91.9% of students), democracy (74.1% of young adults and 62.9% of students), freedom (66.7% of young adults and 71% of students), protection of environment (48.1% of young adults and 43.5% of students) and equality (44.4% of young adults and 48.4% of students).
  - Among the five basic characteristics that best describe Romanians, respondents recognize: democracy (57.4% of young adults and 50% of students); freedom (55.6% of young adults and 71% of students); low standard of living (51.9% of young adults and 50% of students); cooperation (55.6% of young adults and 50% of students); conflict (40.7% of young adults and 33.9% of students)
- Interview with teachers - In general, students in smaller classes are more interested in history than those in larger classes. Students in Romania start learning history in primary school, in the fourth grade and since it is a new subject at the beginning, they are very excited. As they grow older, their interest declines. They like data from the Middle Ages the most. At the beginning, students are very interested in learning information about national history. Social media promotes other aspects and values and education is not promoted in the media as it should be.
  - Interview with students and young adults. Analysis shows that respondents:
    - clearly distinguish the term "European" from the term "EU citizen";
    - they believe that "being European" is a unifying factor;

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- The EU mostly respects the proclaimed values;
- they want borders to exist within Europe;
- they believe that the EU should expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula;
- they believe that a sense of social responsibility, love of freedom, a good standard of living, democracy and a rich culture best describe a European;
- they believe that hospitality, joyful people, entertainment culture, good cuisine and natural beauty best describe the members of the Balkan nations;
- they believe that globalization and the phenomenon of uncontrolled migration can negatively affect the ethnic, cultural and social aspects of our continent;
- they believe that the emigration of qualified labor outside the country due to insufficiently good living standards at home is the most dangerous for their own country;
- they believe that raising awareness of common values, promoting strategic partnership between these countries and encouraging cultural exchange can contribute the most to good relations between the Balkan countries in the future.

2.5. REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA - In order to determine the perception of North Macedonian youth on key aspects of national, Balkan and European history, the following activities were conducted:

- Workshops "Imagine Europe" - A group of high school and university students was part of the "Imagine Europe" workshops. They were given the task to create a map of Europe, using different photographs that represent European history and tradition, Balkan and Macedonian culture and history. The students were divided into three groups, two groups with high school students and the third group with older students (young adults). They debated the position of N. Macedonia in the European framework, and each group arranged pictures and presented Europe in a different way. The first group of students was mainly guided by the geographical origin of the images. They arranged the photos on the map of Europe relying on national and cultural values. Second group of high school students thought differently. They arranged the photos chronologically and presented the development of Europe from antiquity to the present day. The third group looked for connections. One of the connections was cultural influence - the appearance of the Cyrillic alphabet and its spread. The central place was Tolstoy's work War and Peace, noting that Europe is

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always on the edge of war, as it is today, but also peace, which brings prosperity and well-being.



- Workshops "Rewriting history" – A group of young adults 19+ years old, was given a period of two weeks to think and write an essay explaining their vision of the end of the First World War. Then, the same group of young adults joined forces with high school student and they all participated in two workshops where they discussed the war,

its consequences and shared their views on the end of the war. Each of the ten essays created by the young adults is unique and presents its own point of view, but all of them were guided by historical facts. Each essay analyzes the changes that the war could have brought, had it had a different ending. In each essay the First World War was presented as an inevitability of the time in which it happened. In some of the essays, the position of the Balkans and the fate of all Balkan nations, which are opposed to each other in this war, was considered. The group discussion can be best summed up by a quote from one of the essays most frequently used in the debate: "Never think that war, however necessary or justified, is not a crime."

- Group interviews with students and young adults - Interviews were conducted with two groups, younger group (aged 14-18) and the older group (aged 19-27). Both groups were asked the same questions, based on the "Me and Europe" questionnaire. Both groups gave very similar answers:
  - both groups clearly distinguish the term "European" from the term "being an EU citizen";
  - both groups consider "being European" to be a unifying factor;
  - among younger group the prevailing attitude is that the EU respects its values, while older group emphasize consistency in respecting those values;
  - the prevailing opinion in both groups is that Europe should not become a single country, but on the other end, borders between countries should not exist.

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- all respondents from both groups are in favor of the EU continuing to expand by including the Balkan countries;
  - the most frequently chosen values, among respondents up to the age of 27, that best describe European were: freedom, high standard, conflict, human rights and equality. The younger students chose: education, democracy, non-discrimination, free market and freedom.
  - five things that best describe N. Macedonian, according to the older group were: corruption, patriotism, conflict, low standard and history prevail. Among younger students, the most common terms were: patriotism, poor standard of living, tradition, food, loud people, music etc.
  - both groups believe that the biggest danger for Europe at the moment is war, economic crisis and lack of cooperation;
  - both groups expressed that the biggest national threats are - the emigration of young people outside the country and the aging of the nation, followed by corruption, the politics of neighbors, power-loving politicians.
  - both groups believe that better mutual knowledge and cooperation, overcoming stereotypes, respect for diversity, increasing cultural ties and less history can contribute the most to good relations between the Balkan countries.
- Group interviews with teachers - A group of seven teachers, who teach languages and literature, as well as history teachers, were interviewed. Analysis of their responses shows the following:
    - teachers' opinions are divided about students' interest in history;
    - interest in history is mostly encouraged through the media, then comes family, and finally the last place takes the school and the teacher who teaches history.
    - most teachers think that students read a lot, but when asked whether students are interested in reading school textbooks and authors from the curriculum, the answers are different.
  - Questionnaire "Me and Europe", 162 respondents divided in two groups (age 14-18, and 19-29). Analysis of the answers shows the following:
    - 66.8% of young adults and 53.7% of students "do not agree at all" or "disagree" with the statement that there are no significant differences between the Balkan cultures. At the same time, 70.7% of young adults and 81.4% of students "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that the defense and protection of one's culture is essential in interaction with people from Europe. Also, 67.9% of

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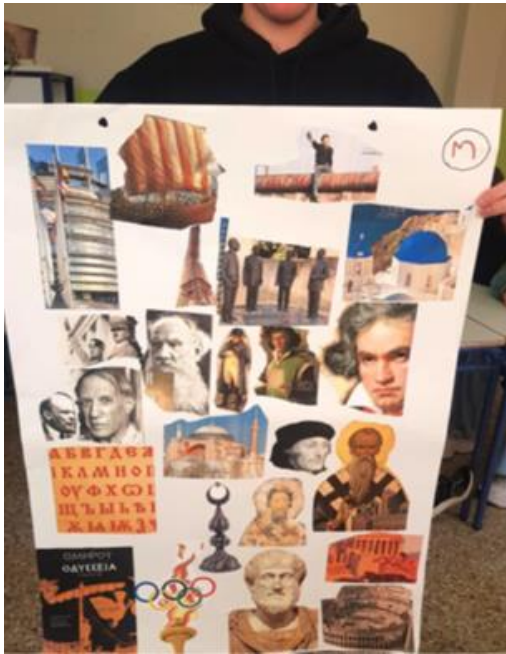
- older group and 72.2% of younger group "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that one must defend his own culture and tradition when meeting a member of another Balkan nation.
- 79.2% of older group and 81.4% of younger group "completely agree" or "agree" that when interacting with people from European cultures, they try to understand and respect their values, even if they differ from their own. At the same time, 83.8% of young adults and 70.4% of students "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that adjusting one's behavior is essential for successful communication with people from European cultures.
  - 67.7% of students and 66.7% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement "I want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula";
  - 87.1% of students and 77.8% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" that food is a point of connection between the Balkan's people;
  - 75.9% of students and 77.7% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" that the differences in religions between the Balkan nations have contributed to the conflicts and divisions.
  - Students believe that better mutual knowledge (66.1%), raising awareness of mutual closeness (50%) and economic cooperation can contribute the most to good relations between the Balkan countries. The situation is similar among young adults.
  - Characteristics that best describe a European, according to students are: human rights (69.4%), cooperation (58.1%), freedom (54.8%), equality (48.4%), a high standard of living (48, 4%). Young adults choose: human rights (77.8%), high standard of living (77.8%), freedom (57.4%), security (48.1%) and environmental protection (40.3%).
  - Five characteristics that best describe the term "Macedonian" according to students are: low standard of living (82.3%), conflict (72.6%), democracy (69.4%), freedom (64.5%) and racism (40.3%). According to young adults: low standard of living (84.9%), freedom (58.5%), conflict (58.5%), security (32.1%) and racism (32.1%).

2.6. REPUBLIC OF GREECE - In order to determine the perception of Greek youth on key aspects of national, Balkan and European history, the following activities were conducted:

- Two "Imagine Europe" Workshops - The Youth Center of Epirus organization conducted two Imagine Europe workshops, the first of which was with 25 high school

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students aged 17 to 18, with the participation of 5 history teachers and other relevant teachers who participated in the interviews conducted immediately after workshops. The second workshop was with 12 young adults (students and active individuals)



aged 18-24. Working in groups made it possible to visualize and clarify key aspects of national, Balkan and European history from the perspective of the Republic of Greece. Images of the Eiffel Tower, the island of Santorini, Hagia Sophia, the Acropolis, the Colosseum, Aristotle, the Cyrillic alphabet, the European Parliament, Odyssey, among others, are used as symbols. Beethoven, the Olympic Games, Islamic symbols, Christian saints, Erasmus, Picasso, Lenin, Napoleon are also among the most important historical symbols. They depicted an undesirable part of Europe with pictures of the Berlin Wall, Lenin, Napoleon, Mussolini and Hitler.

During the first workshop, students were separated in 4 groups. The first group explained that they grouped pictures in 3 main categories. At the bottom, they placed points of interest, such as the Eiffel tower, Santorini island, Hagia Sophia... In the middle, they placed historical moments or historically significant symbols. And finally, on the top of their poster, they placed important historical figures or most important historic symbols. The second group aligned the images alongside two main categories - symbols to which they can connect their reality with (Olympic games, Aristotle, Acropolis...), and symbols with which they can't relate and wish they were not symbols of Europe. In some transitioning areas, they placed a couple images they felt indifferent about (Tolstoy, colosseum, Erasmus, Copernic...). Participants from 3rd group decided to create a pyramid of symbols. As a base, they placed ancient symbols of the Europe. On the second level, religious images were assorted, representing beliefs and values of people. On the third level, participants placed historic personalities that had a large impact on the development of Europe. And finally, on the top, there are places that are worth visiting, both for beauty or discovering and learning. Group four had a challenging time to assemble the symbols of Europe in a cohesive manner forming a clear result of thought and cooperation. During the second

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workshop two groups were formed. Participant from the 1st group quickly set an overall plan of their representation of Europe. As the base, they placed the European Commission and also personas that they see as founding fathers of Europe. Further, they grouped other symbols of Europe in categories of historical elements, artists, influential people, and symbols they relate to Greece. Members of the 2nd group struggled to find a common agreement on the image of Europe. They created a poster mostly based on visual aesthetics. Furthermore, they wrote Neighbors Next Door over the poster, indicating neighborly relations among the European countries, and they used satire towards visual representation of Hitler.

- Interviews with young people - The interviewees were 5 high school students aged 17-18, 5 young adults aged 18-25 and 6 high school teachers. A total of 16 people were interviewed. Highlights from the interviews with young people show that:
  - 100% of respondents made a clear distinction between the term "European" and the term "being an EU citizen";
  - 70% of respondents answered yes, when it comes to recognizing "being European" as a unifying factor;
  - 70% of respondents said that the EU respects its values;
  - 100% of respondents answered that they want borders within the EU;
  - 80% of respondents would like the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula;
  - Five things that best describe a European are: liberal spirit, human rights, education, gender equality, right to vote;
  - Five characteristics that best describe a Greek are: hospitality, austerity, liveliness, strong patriotism, independence;
  - The biggest threats to Europe are: influx of refugees, tensions between countries, alienation from national identities, energy dependence, tensions between powerful and weaker countries within the EU; accession of other countries to the EU.
  - Greece is most threatened by - economic crisis, corruption, division among citizens, other countries such as Turkey, low self-esteem and incompetent politicians;
  - In the future, relations between the Balkan countries can be improved by solidarity, clarity about boundaries, creation of conditions for common goals such as peace, cooperation, economic prosperity, cooperation etc.

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- Interview with high school teachers - The key findings of the conducted interview with teachers are:
  - Students seem to be interested in social issues, international events and overall contemporary issues, however often their natural interest and excitement are overpowered by social media, technology and the harsh reality they face;
  - Most students are interested in national history and national identity. However, they often lose some of their interest, especially due to the fact that history is studied in schools in a way that is not great for young people. Interest usually comes from family upbringing, visits to museums and historical sites, movies.
  - Although students are occupied with the compulsory school and exams preparation, some students read additional literature, both in Greek and English, mostly by well-known and contemporary writers.
- Essay workshops on "Rewriting History" - 10 high school students aged 16-17 and 2 young adults aged 18-30 participated in the essay writing workshop. Some of them wrote in pairs, and some individually after a discussion on the topic. Finally, 8 essays were produced with varying degrees of reflection and proposed changes. The key observations are:
  - Most of the essays pointed out that history repeats itself in some ways, so we should learn from it, especially when it comes to major events like World War II;
  - Several essays suggested that cooperation rather than competition was the key to a better future;
  - Several essays pointed out that relations between the Balkan countries were strained due to nationalism, competition and brutal battles of the past, as well as being on different sides during World War II;
  - It is important to strengthen transnational and inter-Balkan cooperation, to overcome the strong sense of nationalism that even today drags people to the point of fanaticism in many regions;
  - History repeats itself because we don't learn from our mistakes;
  - The events that should be avoided or handled with great sensitivity refer to: the outcome of the Asia Minor campaign, the genocide and the uprooting of the original homes of Ionia, Pontus and other regions where the Greeks were; the domination of great powers over other countries, colonialism, all of the "discovery of America".
- Online questionnaire "Me and Europe" - 112 respondents (44 young adults aged 18-30 and 68 high school students aged 16-17). The analysis of the received answers reveals the following:

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- Answers did not show significant differences between age groups, although differences were visible in several questions;
- 36.3% of young adults and 38.2% of high school students "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that cultural differences between their own and European culture are unimportant. At the same time, 58.8% of high school students and 27.2% of young adults "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that there are significant differences between their own and other Balkan cultures. Also, 76.5% of students and 52.3% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that it is essential to defend one's own culture in interaction with people from European cultures, while 60.3% of students and only 27.3% of young adults agree with that statement, when it comes to interaction with members from other Balkan cultures.
- 60.3% of high school students and 56.8% of young adults "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that it is better to be Greek than European.
- 64.8% of high school students and only 27.3% of young adults "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that there are minimal cultural differences between their own culture and that of Europeans, and that they can be ignored in mutual communication. At the same time, 76.4% of students and 68.2% of young adults "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that the cultural differences between the Balkan nations are small and can be ignored.
- 82.4% of high school students and 100.0% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement "When interacting with people from European cultures, I try to understand and respect their values, beliefs and behaviors, even though they differ from my own". At the same time, 61.8% of high school students and 93.2% of young adults respect diversity, when faced with the cultural differences of other Balkan nations. Also, 79.5% of high school students and 75.0% of young adults think that it is necessary to adapt their behavior when communicating with people from European cultures. On the other end, 42.7% of high school students and 36.4% of young adults "completely disagree" or "disagree" with the statement that it is necessary to adjust their behavior or to avoid their own cultural practices when interacting with members of other Balkan cultures.
- 35.3% of high school students and 56.8% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that integrating elements of European culture into their own culture is key to building an inclusive community and society.
- 54.4% of high school students and 36.4% of young adults want to see other Balkan countries in the EU.

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- 70.5% of high school students and 84.1% of young adults "completely agree" and "agree" with the statement that food is a point of connection between the Balkan countries. At the same time, 72% of high school students and 68.2% of young adults "completely agree" or "agree" with the statement that religious differences have contributed to conflicts between Balkan countries.
- High school students believe good relations between the Balkan nations in the future can be improved by: economic cooperation and exchange (58.8%), visiting and getting to know other countries (48.5%) and intercultural education in schools (42.6%). Young adults recognize the importance of: increasing awareness of mutual respect, (61.4%), economic cooperation and exchange (56.8%) and intercultural education in schools (52.3%).
- According to the high school students, the 5 main characteristics of Europeans are: democracy (69.1%), human rights (64.7%), freedom (54.4%), equality (50%) and safety (36.8%). In this regard, young adults highlighted: human rights (81.8%), democracy (72.7%), freedom (70.5%), cooperation (43.2%), safety (43.2%) and environmental protection (43.2%).
- According to the high school students, the 5 characteristics that best describe term Greek are: democracy (63.2%), freedom (54.4%), racism/discrimination (54.4%), human rights (47.1%) and conflicts (42, 6%). In this regard, young adults recognized the importance of: low living standards (65.9%), freedom (56.8%), democracy (52.3%), conflict (52.3%) and racism/discrimination (47.4%).

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## **3. "ME AND EUROPE" QUESTIONNAIRE**

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### **3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1.1 Research problem**

Quality intercultural communication is the basis for solving the problem of xenophobic prejudices, stereotypes and other cultural barriers that exist between individuals, social groups and nations whose material and spiritual goods, as well as ethical and social values, differ. The starting point in that process is the recognition of intercultural sensitivity - the ability of an individual, a certain social group (e.g. youth), or society as a whole to accept existing differences, to understand, accept and appreciate those who come from other cultures. The assumption is that, without building understanding, mutual respect, dialogue and non-discrimination between members of different cultures - there is no quality intercultural communication, nor overcoming possible conflicts and reducing tensions between them. Progress in this process is systematically ensured within the framework of intercultural education, which implies the questioning of deep-rooted attitudes, beliefs, views of the world, and the development of the ability to see from the perspective of "others and different".

The ability to accept diversity is something that does not develop intuitively. It is learned and acquired, in a process where individuals are the ones who meet, not cultures. Certainly, in order to build sustainable relations with members of other cultures, we need to get to know

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ourselves and our culture first. Especially to illuminate that segment of our culture that speaks of our own intercultural sensitivity, our ability to accept diversity. How do we perceive and interpret cultural differences? What are our explicit and implicit beliefs about members of other cultures? Are we and how ready are we ourselves to build our understanding of others? How capable are we to recognize and appreciate the values and virtues of those who are different from us? How ready are we to conduct dialogue and exchange opinions with members of other cultures? Without the right answer to these and similar questions, it is impossible to meet intercultural sensitivity, and above all to fight existing prejudices, stereotypes, xenophobia, and on that basis to build sustainable bridges towards other cultures. This is especially true for those cultural actors whose role in that process is to trace paths for quality intercultural communication.

### **3.1.2 Objectives**

The general goal of this research is to examine the main characteristics of intercultural sensitivity of young people from Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

The specific objectives of the research are:

- Examine and analyze the differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity of young people with regard to belonging to different countries
- Examine and analyze differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity of young people with regard to EU membership
- Examine and analyze differences in the level of intercultural sensitivity of young people with regard to different countries and EU membership.

### **3.1.3 Methodological aspects of research**

Within the framework of intercultural theory, numerous concepts have been developed that should explain the success of people in interaction with members of other cultural groups. These concepts primarily relate to intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity,

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intercultural understanding and cultural intelligence. The analysis of different models and approaches to intercultural research shows that the models differ in terms of emphasis on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral domains, and in terms of the inclusion of these domains. Milton J. Bennett's influential Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (M. J. Bennett, 1986<sup>1</sup>) was applied in this study, where the development of intercultural sensitivity is a process through which we learn to recognize and face basic differences between cultures, differences in the way they perceive the world.

The main concept of Bennett's model is what he calls "differentiation", i.e. how one develops the ability to recognize differences and live with them. "Differentiation" refers to two phenomena: first, that people look at the same thing in different ways; and others, that "cultures differ from each other according to the way in which they maintain different patterns of differentiation, that is, views of the world." This second aspect refers to Bennett's view of culture as the way in which people interpret reality and the way in which one should observe the world around him. This interpretation of reality, or worldview, is different from culture to culture. The model was developed in the context of intercultural communication, that is, in an interdisciplinary field influenced by psychology, sociology and anthropology. According to this model, a person within each of the stages of development constructs, that is, interprets events and cultural differences in a qualitatively different way, describing the developmental stages along which people can progress towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of intercultural differences. The assumption is that there is a one-way development progression in the form of successive phases/stages.

Sometimes called the "Bennett Scale" (see diagram at left), this model describes how people perceive, interpret, and communicate across cultural differences. The model includes the assumption of a change in the quality of cultural differences along the ethnocentrism-ethnorelativism continuum. According to Bennett, ethnocentrism implies that the beliefs and

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, M. J. (1986). Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Cross-cultural orientation: new conceptualizations and applications* (pp. 27–70). Lanham, MD.: University Press of America

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worldview adopted through primary socialization are not reexamined, i.e. they become the norm by which others are judged. Ethnorelativism, on the

other hand, implies the experience that cultures can only be understood through comparison, that is, that there are no universal norms and standards for evaluation. By moving from ethnocentric (denial, defensiveness, and minimization) to ethno-relative worldviews (acceptance, adaptation, and integration), people can progress toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. What is also important is that the ethnocentric phases are characterized by avoiding facing the phenomenon of differences, while in the case of ethno-relativistic phases, it can be about active search and interest in differences.

For this research, a special questionnaire called "ME AND EUROPE" was created, which consists of 19 questions, each of which is aimed at illuminating one of the 6 stages of the development of the intercultural sensitivity of the respondents, within which six different ways of perceiving and experiencing cultural differences are distinguished. In this sense, the questions are phase-structured as follows:

### DENIAL PHASE

Denial is at the base of the ethnocentric view of the world and means that a person denies that there are different views of reality in the world. This denial may be based on isolation, when there has been little or no opportunity to confront different points of view, when there is no such experience. Denial can also be based on separation, where differences are deliberately separated, where an individual or group deliberately puts up barriers between people, so as not to face their differences. Therefore, separation, at least for the moment,

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acknowledges that there is diversity and for this reason is developmentally above isolation. Racial segregation, which is currently still present in the world, is an example of separation. The main obstacle to development and the issue that needs to be resolved at this stage is the tendency to avoid cultural differences, which is a consequence of the few and insufficiently specific categories for designing experiences with cultural differences. Someone who scores high on this question is in the initial stage of developing intercultural sensitivity, when there is still no awareness or will to recognize the influence of culture on communication and behavior.

The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 1. Do 'being European' and 'being an EU citizen' have the same meaning for you?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

Question 2: Do you think that "being European" is a unifying factor?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

## DEFENCE PHASE

Cultural differences can be seen as threatening, because they offer an alternative to one's observation of reality, i.e., one's identity. That is why, in the defense phase, diversity is recognized, but it is fought against. The most established strategy of that struggle is denigration, where a different view of the world is evaluated as negative. Stereotyping and

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its extreme form, racism, are examples of a belittling strategy. The other side of disparagement is superiority, where only the positive features of one's own culture are emphasized, while other cultures are given little or no importance, which implies their lesser value. Sometimes a third strategy is introduced as a response to the threat of coming into contact with diversity. Bennett calls it a "reversal". Inversion means that a person views another culture as superior and at the same time completely disparages his own cultural heritage. At first glance, this strategy may seem more culturally acceptable, but in practice it represents the replacement of one center of ethnocentrism (one's own cultural origin) with another. Someone who scores high on this issue may exhibit polarized views, i.e. being aware of and valuing one's cultural identity, but also being resistant to or rejecting other cultures. The common feature of the denial phase and the defense phase is that the person perceives that the differences are threatening, but the strategies for overcoming this experience are different.

The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 3: Do you think that the EU respects its values (rule of law, human rights, non-discrimination, free market, private property...)?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

Question 4: Are you proud to be European?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

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Question 5: Do you want Europe to have no borders and become a single country?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not

## THE MINIMIZATION PHAZE

Diversity is recognized and can no longer be fought with strategies of belittling and superiority, but attempts are made to diminish its importance. Similarities are emphasized and presented as far outweighing cultural differences, which are thereby portrayed as insignificant. Bennett emphasizes that many organizations understand that what he calls minimization is actually the final stage of intercultural development and work to create a world that shares common values and viewpoints. These common points of view are based primarily on physical universalities - the biological similarity between people. We all have to eat, digest food and die. However, if culture is viewed only as an extension of biology, its meaning is diminished. Someone who scores high on this question is aware of cultural differences, but does not find them significant in communication and interactions.

The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 6: Do you want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

Question 7: Do you think Russia should become a member of the EU?

- Definitely yes

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- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

The very transition between an ethnocentric and an ethnorelativistic view of the world represents a kind of "paradigmatic turn" from the belief in universal values to the relativity of values. Ethnorelativist viewpoints are characterized by a shift from a position in which one's own culture is perceived as central to experiencing reality to a position where it is placed in the context of the existence of other cultures that represent alternative and equally valuable ways of perceiving reality.

## ACCEPTANCE PHAZE

This acceptance begins, first, by accepting the view that there are different ways of verbal and non-verbal communication in different cultures and that all of these ways deserve respect. Then, this acceptance extends to the acceptance of different worldviews and different values. This implies, first of all, knowing one's own values and observing those values as products of one's own culture. Values can rather be explained as a process and means of interpreting the world around us than as something that someone "owns". Even values that influence the disparagement of a certain group can be seen as something that has the function of helping the bearers of those values in organizing their experience and understanding the world they live in, which of course does not exclude our critical opinion about those values. Someone who scores high on this question is aware of cultural differences and is willing to respect them in communication and behavior.

The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 8: Are European history and culture better than those of other continents?

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- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

Question 9: Is it better to be Bulgarian/Greek/Macedonian/Romanian/Serbian/Turkish (each partner specifies here) than to be European?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

## ADAPTATION PHASE

Adaptation is the opposite of assimilation, because assimilation implies taking on different values, worldviews and behaviors at the expense of giving up one's own identity. Adaptation, on the other hand, is the process of adding, supplementing. One learns a new way of behaving that is more in line with different views of the world and is added to one's personal behavioral repertoire. This is most clearly visible in the acceptance of new styles of communication. In this context, culture is seen not as something static, but as a process that develops and has its own course. One of the most important elements of adaptation is empathy. Empathy is explained as the ability to experience situations different from those that are consistent with our cultural identity. It is an attempt to understand someone else by taking his/her point of view. In the stage of pluralism, empathy is enhanced and the individual can rely on several different frames of reference or on multiple cultural frames. Often, the development of these frameworks requires a person to live in a different cultural context for a long period of time. Diversity is then seen as a normal part of one's own identity which is composed of two or more cultural frameworks. Someone who scores high on this question has an awareness and willingness to adapt to cultural differences in communication and behavior to facilitate effective cross-cultural interactions.

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The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 10: Choose 5 things that best describe a European?

- Freedom
- Democracy
- Human rights
- Nature protection
- Care for the socially weak
- Equality
- High standard
- Low standard
- Security
- Cooperation
- Conflict
- Racism
- Dictatorship

Question 11: Choose 5 things that best describe a Bulgarian/ Greek/ Macedonian/ Romanian/ Serbian/ Turkish (each partner states here)

- Freedom
- Democracy
- Human rights
- Nature protection
- Care for the socially weak
- Equality
- High standard
- Low standard
- Security

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- Cooperation
- Conflict
- Racism
- Dictatorship

## INTEGRATION PHASE

Since in the adaptation phase there are several different cultural frameworks in one person, the integration phase implies an attempt to integrate different cultural viewpoints into one. It does not represent the re-establishment of a single culture or contentment that there is a peaceful coexistence between different worldviews. Integration requires continuous questioning of one's own identity in relation to the experience we gain throughout life. It can lead to an individual being integrated into the community, but not belonging to any culture. Contextual assessment, as the first stage of integration, means the ability to observe different situations and views of the world from different cultural frameworks. In all other phases, evaluation is avoided in order to avoid ethnocentric evaluation. In the stage of contextual assessment, an individual can, depending on the circumstances, move from one cultural context to another. The assessment made in this way has the quality of relativity. Bennett gives an example of an intercultural choice: "Is it good to talk openly about mistakes you or someone else made? In the context of American culture this is good, while in most cases in Japan it is not. However, sometimes it is good to use the American approach in Japan and vice versa. The ability to use both styles is part of adaptation, while moral consideration of the cultural context when making choices is part of integration." As a final stage, constructive marginalization is explained by Bennett as something to be achieved, but not as the end of learning. For an individual, this implies a state of complete self-awareness, of not belonging to any culture where he/she becomes an outsider. Reaching that stage enables real intercultural mediation and the possibility to act in different, culturally shaped, views of the world. Someone who scores high on this issue is aware and values the benefits of cultural exchange and integration in the process of building a more inclusive and diverse society.

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The questions from the questionnaire that shed light on this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents are:

Question 12: Which is better?

- Partnership
- Each for himself

Question 13: Should Europe have a united army?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Rather not
- Absolutely not

Question 14: What threatens Europe the most?

- Financial and economic crisis
- Emigrant waves and rivers of refugees
- American politics
- Russian politics
- Environmental disaster
- War

Question 15: What threatens your/our country the most?

- Corruption
- Energy dependence
- Environmental disaster
- Rivers of refugees
- Flight of young people to the west
- War

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Question 16: What, in your opinion, can contribute to good relations between the Balkan countries in the future? (more than one answer is possible)

- Economic cooperation and exchange
- Cultural cooperation
- Intercultural education in schools
- Non-interference by the great powers
- Regional association based on common needs and interests
- Raising awareness of mutual respect and a sense of closeness and togetherness
- Visiting and getting to know other Balkan countries better
- Showing sincerity, empathy and friendship towards other Balkan peoples

Question 17: What can contribute to good relations between the Balkan countries in the future?

- Economic cooperation and exchange
- Cultural cooperation
- Intercultural education in schools
- Non-interference of the great powers
- Raising awareness of mutual respect and a sense of closeness and togetherness
- Regional cooperation based on common needs and interests
- Visiting and getting to know other Balkan countries better
- Showing sincerity, empathy and friendship with other Balkan peoples

Question 18: Choose five of the listed characteristics that, in your opinion, best describe a European.

- Freedom
- Democracy
- Human rights
- Nature protection

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- Care for the socially weak
- Equality
- High standard
- Low standard
- Security
- Cooperation
- Conflict
- Racism
- Dictatorship

Question 19: Choose five of the listed characteristics that, in your opinion, best describe a Bulgarian/Greek/Macedonian/Romanian/Serbian/Turkish.

Question no. 19. has the same offered answers as question no. 18.

### 3.1.4 Research variables

Dependent and independent variables were examined with a survey questionnaire. The dependent variables refer to 16 statements that examine six different ways of perceiving and experiencing cultural differences, inherent in different stages of the development of intercultural sensitivity. Independent variables refer to general data about the respondent, which include the country where the respondents live, EU membership, age and gender.

### 3.1.5 Description of the sample

The research sample consists of young adults (18-30) and high school students (14-18) from Bulgaria, Serbia, Turkey, North Macedonia, Greece and Romania, a total of 718 of them. The number and national structure of the respondents are given in the following table:

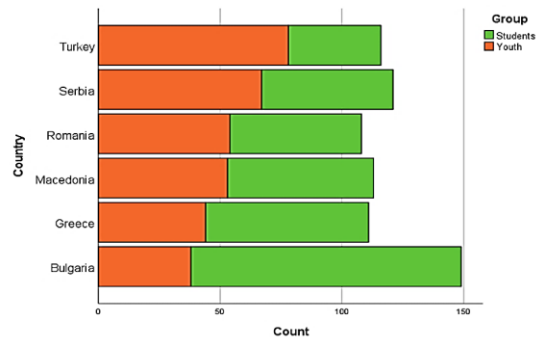
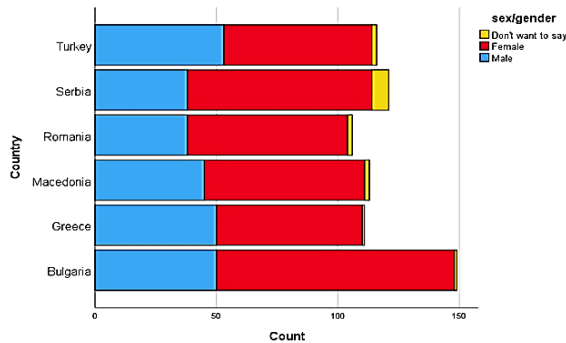
Country	Number of respondents	% participation
Republic of Bulgaria	149	20.75
Republic of Serbia	121	16.85
Republic of Turkey	116	16.16
Republic of North Macedonia	113	15,74

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Republic of Greece	111	15.46
Republic of Romania	108	15.05
Total	718	100.00

Out of a total of 718 respondents, 427 or 59.47% are women, 274 or 38.16% are men, while 15 or 2.37% did not want to express themselves on this issue. When this characteristic of the sample is observed by country, there are certain differences. Among the respondents, the lowest participation of men was recorded in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia, slightly higher in North Macedonia, followed by Greece and then Turkey, with a note that among the respondents in all cases there was a relatively higher participation of women compared to men.

Regarding the age of the respondents, 384 or 53.48%, are young adults (18-30), while 334 or 46.52%, are high school students (14-18). The age structure of the sample by country reveals that the highest participation of high school students was recorded in Bulgaria, and the lowest in Turkey and Serbia.



## 3.2 RESEARCH RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

### 3.2.1 Intercultural sensitivity with regard to belonging to the country

#### 3.2.1.1 Denial phase

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
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Bulgaria	2.91	0.989	149
Greece	2.99	1.116	111
N. Macedonia	2.96	1.012	113
Romania	2.30	1.232	108
Serbia	2.88	1.275	121
Turkey	2.96	1.182	116
Total	2.84	1.153	718

The analysis of the obtained results shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the Denial Phase, Dependent Variable 1: **Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are unimportant, and everyone**

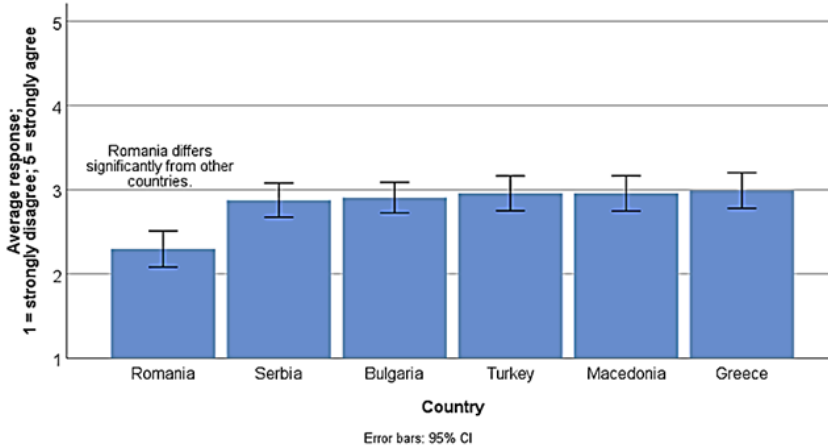
**should conform to one set of cultural norms and values**, at the level of the entire group of respondents is 2.84, with the standard deviation of 1.153 (see the table on the left). Only Romania, compared to all other countries, recorded an average value of 2.30, which is lower than the entire group average. All other countries have a slightly higher value than the entire group average, namely: Serbia – 2.88; Bulgaria – 2.91; Turkey and North Macedonia – 2.96; Greece – 2.99. It should be also noted that Serbia has the highest standard deviation, while the Bulgaria has the lowest. If we look at the range of the given arithmetic means, the largest arithmetic mean (Greece, 2.99) is 23% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Romania, 2.30).

The obtained data indicate that young people from Romania have a stronger perception of cultural diversity compared to their peers from Serbia, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Turkey and Greece (see graph below). This indicates that young people from Romania have a more developed awareness and a stronger will to recognize the influence of culture on communication and behavior. According to these research results, young people from Romania are closer to a position where their own culture is not perceived as central to experiencing reality. This also indicates that their peers from other countries are more "ethnocentric", that they have more prevalent experiences of the type "all people perceive the world in the same way as I do", i.e. view that all people share the same beliefs and norms. It should be also pointed out that the insufficiently differentiated categories through which a person conceives his experience with diversity are not exclusively related to cultural issues, but also to the implicit assignment of "subhuman status", i.e. to the idea of inherently superior

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and inferior groups. The main obstacle to development and the issue that needs to be resolved at this stage is the tendency to avoid cultural differences, which is a consequence of the few and insufficiently specific categories for designing experiences with cultural differences.

1 Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are unimportant, and everyone should conform to one set of cultural norms and values.



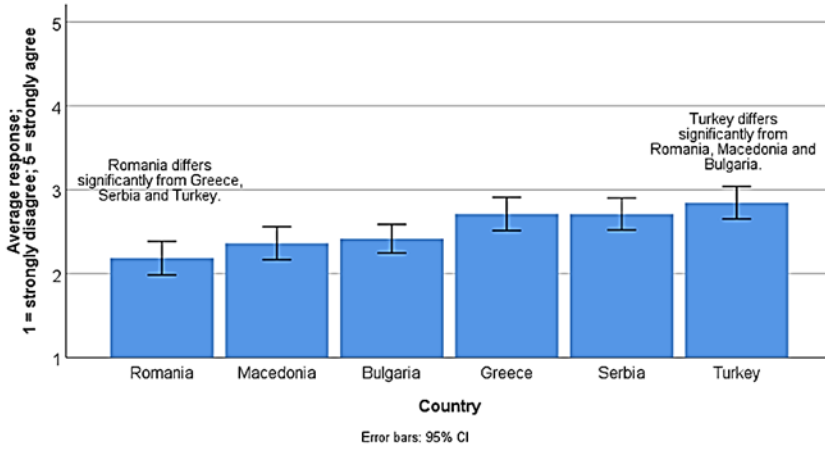
The next Dependent Variable with the help of which the basic characteristics of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents for the Denial Phase are illuminated is „**There are no significant**

**differences between Bulgarian/ Greek/ Macedonian/ Romanian/ Serbian/ Turkish cultures.** “(Dependent Variable 2.) The analysis of the obtained data shows that the value of the arithmetic mean at the level of the whole group is 2.54, with a standard deviation of 1.084 (see the table on the left). A comparison of this result with each country shows somewhat different mutual relations compared to the results obtained from the previous claim. Respondents from Romania recorded the lowest value of the arithmetic mean on this issue as well, which is 2.19. However, unlike the previous claim, where they were the only group that recorded a below-average result, they are joined this time by respondents from North Macedonia (2.36) and Bulgaria (2.42). Respondents from Serbia and Greece (both groups 2.71 each) and Turkey (2.84) recorded the above-average value of the arithmetic mean on this issue. If we look at the range of the given arithmetic means, for this question the largest arithmetic mean (Turkey, 2.84) is 23% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Romania, 2.19).

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The obtained data indicate that young people from Romania - also in this case - compared

2 There are no significant differences between Bulgarian/ Greek/ Macedonian/ Romanian/ Serbian/ Turkish cultures.



to other respondents, have a stronger perception of cultural diversity compared to their peers from other countries (see graph below). This time, it is more pronounced compared to the results of the respondents from Greece,

Serbia and Turkey, and significantly less compared to the respondents from North Macedonia and Bulgaria. What is the same in both cases is the ethnocentric position of Greece, Serbia and Turkey, with the fact that in both cases this position is most strongly expressed by respondents from Turkey. It should be kept in mind that in such cases diversity is not experienced, or is experienced in the form of broad, slightly differentiated categories of "others": foreigners, migrants, etc. The ambivalent position of North Macedonia and Bulgaria regarding the first and second questions indicates the need to, in further work with respondents from these countries, examine in more detail the representation and differentiation of specific categories when designing experiences with cultural differences. In this sense, the use of existing experiences and experiences of cultural diversity of young people from Romania represents a kind of opportunity to work on the development of intercultural sensitivity as a basis for quality intercultural communication.

### 3.2.1.2 Defense phase

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.13	0.984	149
Greece	3.69	0.980	111
N. Macedonia	3.95	0.953	113
Romania	3.31	0.944	108

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Serbia	3.97	0.785	121
Turkey	3.41	1.173	116
Total	3.56	1.025	718

Analysis of the obtained results for the Defense Phase, Dependent Variable 3: **It is essential to defend and**

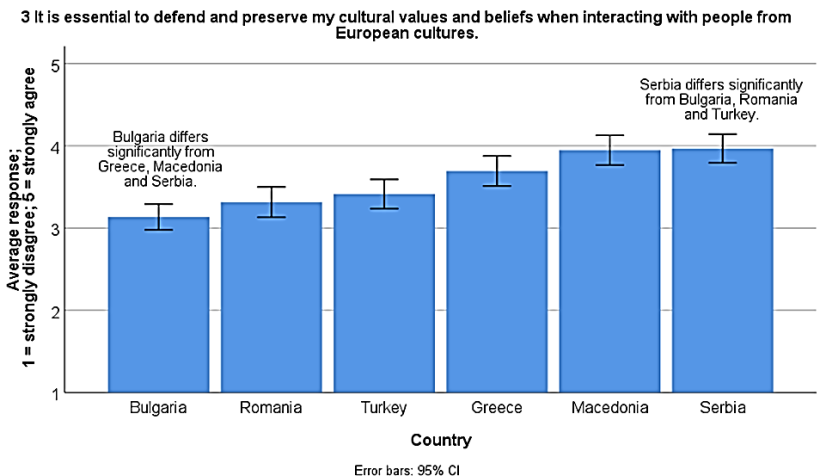
**preserve my cultural values and beliefs when interacting with people from European cultures**, shows that the arithmetic mean for the entire group of respondents is 3.56, with a standard deviation of 1.025 (see the table on the left). A comparison of this result with the results achieved by each country and these results with each other indicates the following. Respondents from Bulgaria (3.13), Romania (3.31) and Turkey (3.41) recorded below-average arithmetic mean values for this question. Other groups of respondents record above-average values of the arithmetic mean, with respondents from Greece having the result of 3.69, respondents from North Macedonia - 3.95, and respondents from Serbia - 3.97. If we look at the range of the given arithmetic means, in this question the largest arithmetic mean (Serbia, 3.97) is 21% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Bulgaria, 3.13).

The obtained data indicates that the respondents from Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey tend less toward the ethnocentric defense against the influence of those differences that are perceived as threatening their own worldview and identity, compared to respondents from Greece and North Macedonia and especially Serbia. At the same time, this indicates that respondents from Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia more often resort to negative evaluation of "others" in defense of their own worldview and identity. And this is often perceived as the superiority of one's own cultural group. The bottom line is that - according to the data obtained - young people from Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia are less able than other respondents to perceive certain, obvious cultural differences. The categories they form in that process are more general compared to analogs of other groups and with a less developed understanding of the value and influence of the context in which the differences arise. Members of these groups of respondents more often find themselves in a situation where they perceive "others" as those who in some way threaten the interests of their own group (e.g., in employment, receiving social assistance). But also as those who need help to start living in a way that approaches the lifestyle of a superior group. Members of minority

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groups in this phase try to protect their own experience of identity from the threat of assimilation. The resolution of this phase implies the recognition of humanity equally to all people regardless of differences.

Analysis of the obtained results for the Defense Phase, Dependent Variable 4: **I need to defend my cultural practices and traditions when I meet with a person from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish culture** (each



	Average response	Standard deviation	Number of respondents
Serbia	3.32	1.020	111
Turkey	3.05	1.208	116
Total	3.22	1.099	718

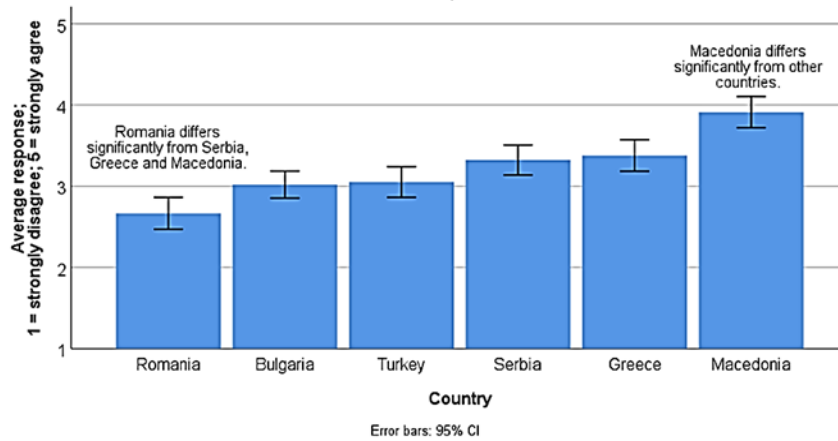
partner will remove their nation's name from the list here), shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the entire group of respondents is 3.22, with a standard deviation of 1.099 (see the table below). For this question, respondents from Romania had the

lowest value of the arithmetic mean – 2.67, followed by respondents from Bulgaria (3.02) and Turkey (3.05). Observed in relation to the results for the previous dependent variable, the respondents from Romania and Bulgaria only switched places, and they, together with the respondents from Turkey, still represent a group that has below-average results for these two statements in relation to the value of the arithmetic average for the whole group. Above-average results were recorded by respondents from Serbia (3.32), Greece (3.38) and, especially, respondents from North Macedonia (3.91). In this question, the largest arithmetic mean (North Macedonia, 3.91) is 32% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Romania, 2.67).

The obtained results confirm that respondents from Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey form a group that, in this regard, is less faced with the desire for ethnocentric defense against the

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4 I need to defend my cultural practices and traditions when I meet with a person from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures (each partner will remove their nation's name from the list here).



influence of those differences that are perceived as threatening to their own view of the world and identity. Also, when it comes to this aspect of intercultural sensitivity, respondents from Serbia, Greece and, especially, North

Macedonia find themselves in a situation where they often resort to negative evaluation of "others" in defense of their own worldview and identity. The results show that they are less able than other respondents to perceive certain, obvious cultural differences. In the same way, the categories they form in that process are more general compared to analogs of other groups and with a less developed understanding of the value and influence of the context in which the differences arise. Also, it should be pointed out that resolving this phase implies recognition of humanity to an equal extent to all people, regardless of differences.

Analysis of the obtained results for the Defense Phase, Dependent Variable 5: **It is better to be Bulgarian/ Greek/ Macedonian/ Romanian/ Serbian/ Turkish** (each partner

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.30	1.085	148
Greece	2.20	0.861	111
N. Macedonia	2.93	0.997	113
Romania	2.09	0.849	108
Serbia	3.03	1.271	121
Turkey	2.98	1.312	116
Total	2.79	1.169	717

specifies here) **than to be European**, shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the entire group of respondents is 2.79, with a standard deviation of 1.169 (see the table on the left). Observed by individual groups of respondents, the lowest value of the arithmetic mean was recorded by the

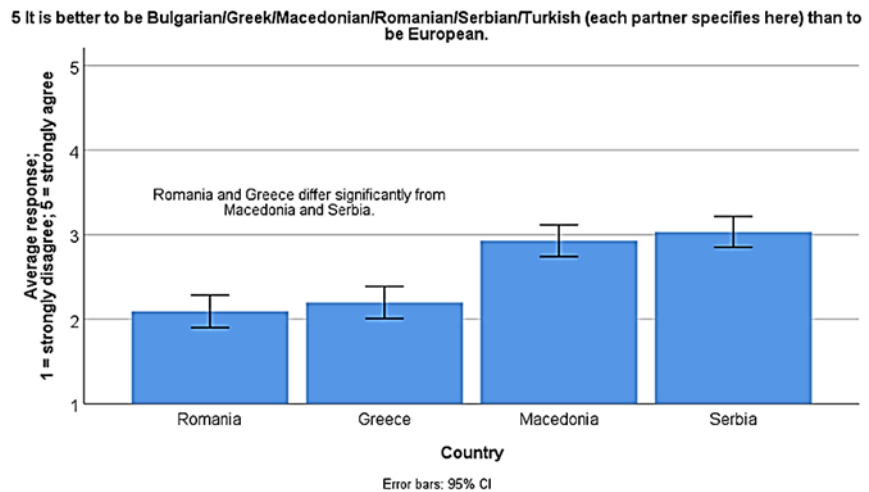
respondents from Romania (2.09), while below average values in relation to the average of

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the whole group were also recorded by the respondents from Greece (2.20). All other groups of respondents have above-average values compared to the entire group average, namely: North Macedonia - 2.93; Turkey – 2.98; Serbia – 3.03; and Bulgaria – 3.30. In this question, the largest arithmetic mean (Bulgaria, 3.30) is 37% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Romania, 2.09).

The obtained data indicates that respondents from Romania are also in a situation where they are less faced with the desire for ethnocentric defense against the influence of differences that are perceived as threatening their own world view and identity (see graph on the right). They are joined



here by the respondents from Greece, which significantly changes their position in relation to the position that was assigned to them within the previous two dependent variables. On the other end, the position of respondents from Bulgaria and Turkey, who recorded below-average arithmetic mean values for the previous two dependent variables, has also significantly changed. Now they are classified in a group that more often resorts to negative evaluation of "others" in defense of their own view of the world and their own identity. These ambivalent results for Bulgaria and Turkey require that in the course of developing a strategy for solving this phase, the positions of Bulgaria and Turkey<sup>2</sup> should be examined in more detail. When it comes to the position of North Macedonia and Serbia, they are compatible with the positions achieved within the previous two dependent variables.

<sup>2</sup> See an overview of inconsistencies in the application of the Questionnaire "I and Europe".

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### 3.2.1.3 Minimization phase

Analysis of the obtained data for the Minimization Phase, Dependent Variable 6: **Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are minimal and can be**

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.28	1.108	149
Greece	3.08	0.964	111
N. Macedonia	2.92	1.062	113
Romania	3.11	1.053	108
Serbia	2.98	1.095	121
Turkey	2.78	1.200	116

**ignored or overlooked in communication and interactions**, shows that the results contain illogicalities that resulted from inconsistencies in the formulation of question no. 6

from the Questionnaire "Me and Europe". Descriptive statistics for dependent variable 6 are given in the table above. Therefore, this aspect of the intercultural sensitivity development of the respondents will be illuminated by the analysis of the results and the interpretation of other questions related to the minimization phase.

Analysis of the obtained data for the Minimization Phase, Dependent Variable 7: **Differences in values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian and Turkish cultures are small and insignificant,**

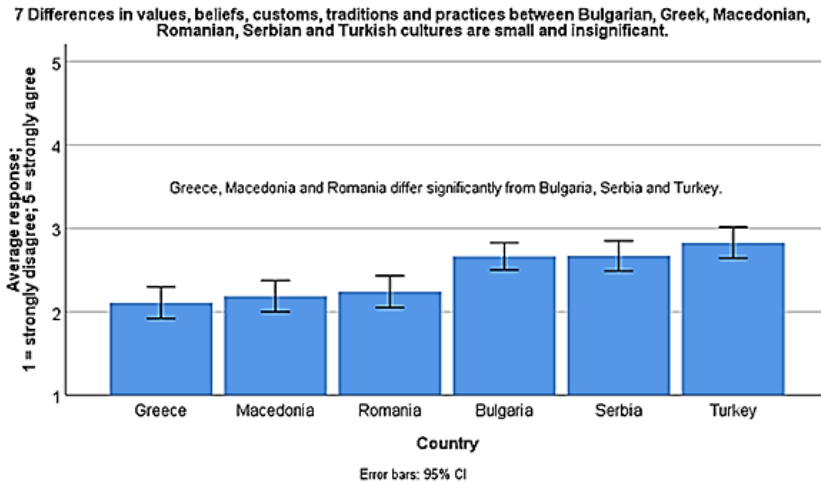
Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	2.66	1.011	149
Greece	2.11	0.994	111
N. Macedonia	2.19	0.892	113
Romania	2.24	1.003	108
Serbia	2.67	0.995	121
Turkey	2.83	1.159	116
Total	2.47	1.046	718

shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the whole group is 2.47, with a standard deviation of 1.046 (see the table on the left). Observed by individual groups of respondents,

respondents from Greece (2.11), North Macedonia (2.19) and Romania (2.24) recorded the lowest, and at the same time below-average values of the arithmetic mean. Data for other groups of respondents shows that respondents from Bulgaria (2.66), Serbia (2.67) and Turkey (2.83) have above-average results. The largest arithmetic mean (Turkey, 2.83) is 25.5% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Greece, 2.11).

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The obtained data shows that respondents from Greece, North Macedonia and Romania find themselves in a situation where they minimize and even trivialize the differences between people, or overemphasize the similarities and universality of various phenomena, less often



than other respondents. This is more often expressed by respondents from Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey. One of the characteristics of respondents who are in this stage of development of intercultural sensitivity, is

that they believe that culture is of secondary importance in relation to biological similarities between people, or that all people are similar in terms of their needs, motivation to achieve success, striving for freedom and individuality, religious experience, etc. Undoubtedly, the manifestation of these beliefs is more present in respondents with a higher value of the arithmetic average, and in this case, this refers to respondents from Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey. This also applies to the use of various economic, religious, political and psychological concepts, which can be found in the most diverse situations (e.g. "all people are God's children", "everyone would like to live in a democracy", etc.), where it is neglected that here, too, it is about imposing one's own cultural frame of reference. The resolution of this phase implies a shift from a position in which one's own culture is perceived as central to experiencing reality to a position where it is placed in the context of the existence of other cultures that represent alternative and equally valuable ways of perceiving reality.

### 3.2.1.4 Acceptance phase

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Analysis of the received data for the Acceptance Phase, Dependent Variable 8: **When interacting with people from European cultures, I try to understand and respect their values, beliefs, and behaviors, even if they differ from my own**, shows that the

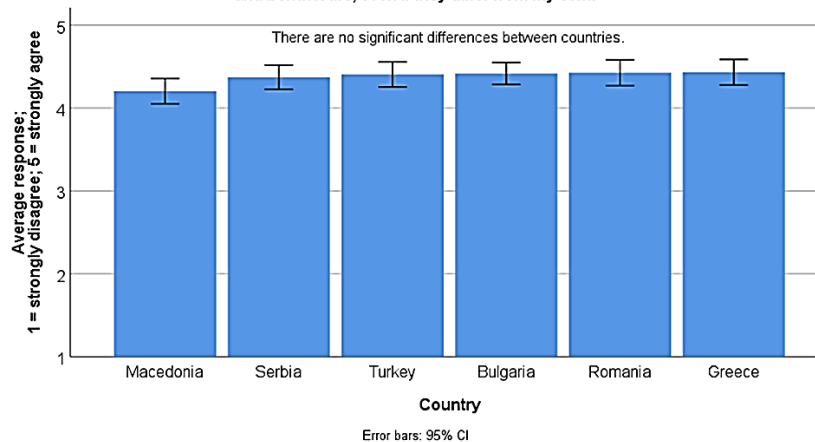
Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	4.42	0.772	149
Greece	4.43	0.816	111
N. Macedonia	4.20	0.918	113
Romania	4.43	0.919	108
Serbia	4.37	0.672	121
Turkey	4.41	0.854	116
Total	4.38	0.826	718

value of the arithmetic mean for the entire group of respondents is 4.38, with a standard deviation of 0.826. Observed by individual groups of respondents, respondents from North Macedonia

(4.20) and Serbia (4.37) recorded a slightly lower value of the arithmetic mean. Other groups of respondents recorded above-average values, namely: Turkey – 4.41; Bulgaria – 4.42; Greece and Romania - 4.43. In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Greece and Romania, 4.43) is only 5% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (North Macedonia, 4.20).

The obtained data shows that the respondents have a uniform perception of cultural differences. According to the results for this dependent variable, they perceive their own culture and worldview (beliefs, values, norms) as something as complex as any other culture.

8 When interacting with people from European cultures, I try to understand and respect their values, beliefs, and behaviours, even if they differ from my own.



This means that the respondents clearly perceive differences in terms of behavior, norms governing behavior, as well as key values.

It also means that they have an understanding and appreciation of existing

differences in values, that is, "value relativism" itself. When they negatively evaluate other people's actions, they are aware that the person or group they are negatively evaluating is as complex as their own. They also come to understand that differences that they value

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negatively, from the perspective of another culture, can be valued positively and that this is also a legitimate and understandable position. People in this phase often have the experience of "ethical paralysis", as a consequence of accepting the position of value relativity.

Analysis of the received data for the Acceptance Phase, Dependent Variable 9: **When**

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	4.17	0.777	149
Greece	3.96	0.762	111
N. Macedonia	3.88	0.853	113
Romania	4.54	0.603	108
Serbia	4.20	0.737	121
Turkey	4.17	0.837	116
Total	4.15	0.790	718

**confronted with cultural differences between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures, I try to find common ground and**

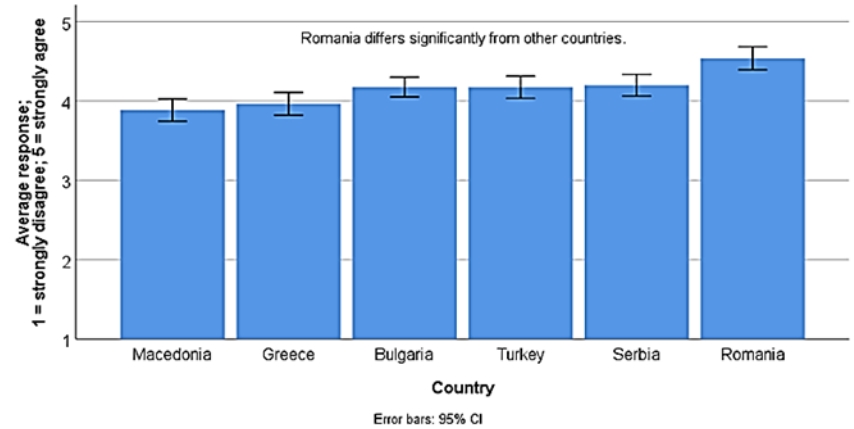
**appreciate diversity**, shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the whole group is 4.15, with a standard deviation of 0.790 (see the table). Observed by groups, respondents from North Macedonia (3.88) and Greece (3.96) recorded below-average values of the arithmetic mean, while above-average values were recorded by respondents from Turkey and Bulgaria (4.17), Serbia (4.20) and, especially, Romania (4.54). The largest arithmetic mean (Romania, 4.54) is 16% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (North Macedonia, 3.88).

In contrast to the results obtained within the previous dependent variable, the data for this dependent variable shows that within the entire group of respondents there are certain differences in the ability to accept diversity. In this sense, the data obtained for this dependent variable shows that respondents from Romania (mostly), and then also respondents from Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey, have a slightly greater ability to accept cultural differences compared to respondents from North Macedonia and Greece. Namely, they perceive their own culture and worldview (beliefs, values, norms) more fully than others as something just as complex as any other culture (see chart above). This further means that, in comparison to respondents from North Macedonia and Greece, they perceive differences more clearly in terms of behavior, norms governing behavior, as well as key values. Also, this means that they have a somewhat more complete understanding and a somewhat greater

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appreciation of the existing differences in values, that is, "value relativism" itself. When they negatively evaluate other people's actions, they have a slightly more developed awareness that the person or group they are negatively evaluating is as complex as their own. Also, they have clearer understanding that differences that they value negatively, from the perspective of another culture, can be valued positively and that this is also a legitimate and understandable position. Respondents who come from North Macedonia and Greece experience "ethical paralysis" more often, as a consequence of accepting the position of value relativity.

9 When confronted with cultural differences between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures (each partner will remove their nation's name from the list here), I try to find common ground and appreciate diversity.



It should be noted that within this dependent variable there was a change in the original position of Greece, which indicates the need to examine the reasons for this in more detail.

### 3.2.1.5 Acceptance phase

Analysis of the received data for the Acceptance Phase, Dependent Variable 10: **It is essential to adapt and adjust my communication and behavior when interacting**

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.55	0.955	149
Greece	3.95	0.872	111
N. Macedonia	3.88	0.825	113
Romania	3.85	1.012	108
Serbia	3.84	0.904	121
Turkey	3.88	0.938	115
Total	3.81	0.928	717

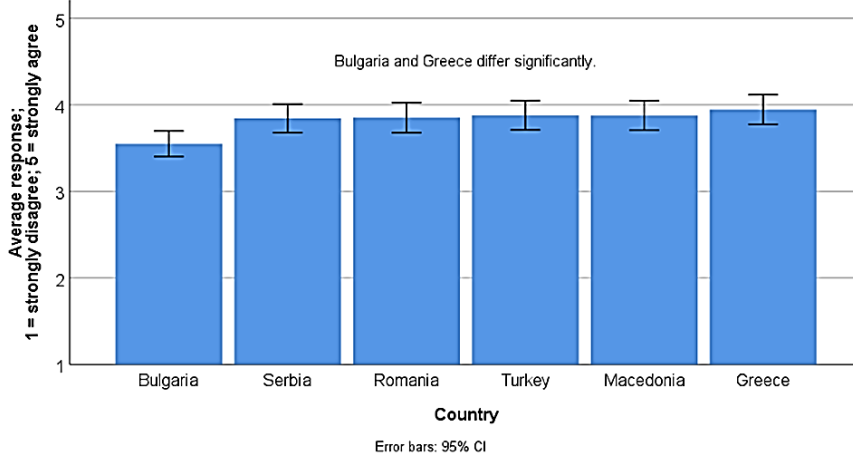
**with people from European cultures to communicate and collaborate with them effectively,** shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the whole group is 3.81, with a standard deviation of 0.928 (see the table on the left). Observed by groups of respondents, above-average values

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of the arithmetic mean are recorded by all groups of respondents, except for respondents from Bulgaria (3.55). Respondents from Greece (3.95) recorded the highest value of the arithmetic mean for this dependent variable, followed by respondents from North Macedonia and Turkey (3.88), Romania (3.85) and Serbia (3.84). The largest arithmetic mean (Greece, 3.95) is 10% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Bulgaria, 3.55).

The obtained data indicates that the respondents began to build an understanding of diversity characteristic of other cultural frameworks, and to develop competencies in interaction with persons whose cultural origins differ. Respondents from Greece advanced a

10 It is essential to adapt and adjust my communication and behaviour when interacting with people from European cultures to communicate and collaborate with them effectively.



bit more on this path, followed by groups of respondents from North Macedonia and Turkey, as well as respondents from Serbia. According to the obtained data, respondents from Bulgaria are somewhat behind the average in

this regard. In this complex process, a common cultural meaning is established. If this continues then the basis for the development of biculturalism, i.e. multiculturalism, will be created. It is crucial in this process to develop the ability to understand another's worldview, which is the essence of empathy. The next step in that process is mutual adaptation, where cultural actors can experience themselves in "other people's shoes", while maintaining their own identity.

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.36	1.000	149

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Greece	2.80	1.025	111
N. Macedonia	2.46	0.982	113
Romania	3.02	0.995	108
Serbia	2.90	1.060	121
Turkey	2.54	0.976	115
Total	2.87	1.051	717

Analysis of the received data for the Acceptance Phase, Dependent Variable 11: **In my interactions with people from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian,**

**Serbian, and Turkish cultures, I tend to adapt my behavior or communication style to fit in with these cultures by avoiding my cultural practices and expectations,**

shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the whole group is 2.87, with a standard deviation of 1.051. (see the table). Observed by groups of respondents, the highest arithmetic value was recorded by respondents from Bulgaria (3.36), followed by respondents from Romania (3.02) and Serbia (2.90). Respondents from North Macedonia and Greece recorded below-average values in this regard. In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Bulgaria, 3.36) is 27% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (North Macedonia, 2.46).

The obtained data for this dependent variable are based on the inconsistent application of the Questionnaire "Me and Europe" in certain phases of the work. For these reasons, their correct interpretation is not possible. In the given situation, we will use the knowledge about the characteristics of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents, which we obtained while considering the dependent variable no. 10.

### 3.2.1.6 Integration phase

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Analysis of the obtained data for the Integration Phase, Dependent Variable 12: **Integrating and incorporating elements from European cultures into my own is crucial to building a more inclusive and diverse community or society**, shows that the value of

the arithmetic mean for the whole group is 3.41, with a standard deviation of 0.960 (see the

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.37	1.022	149
Greece	3.34	0.889	111
N. Macedonia	3.28	0.891	113
Romania	3.85	0.759	108
Serbia	3.26	1.023	121
Turkey	3.39	1.006	115
Total	3.41	0.960	717

table on the left). Observed by individual groups of respondents, the above-average value is recorded only by respondents from Romania, while all other groups of respondents recorded values that are below the average for the entire group, namely:

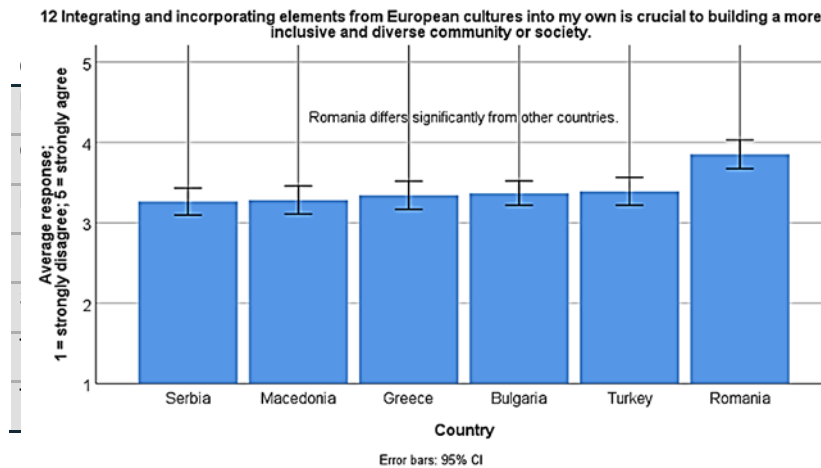
Turkey - 3.39; Bulgaria - 3.37; Greece – 3.34; North Macedonia – 3.28; Serbia – 3.26. In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Romania, 3.85) is 15% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Serbia, 3.26).

The obtained data shows that the respondents from Romania are in a position to experience different situations and views of the world from different cultural frameworks. They can, depending on the circumstances, move from one cultural context to another. Further development of the intercultural sensitivity of this group of respondents goes in the direction of real intercultural mediation and creation of opportunities to act in different, culturally shaped, views of the world. In relation to this position (see graph on the left), other respondents must make further efforts to integrate different cultural viewpoints into one. On the other end, this speaks of the mutually compatible positions of these two groups of

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respondents. It is an opportunity to meet the needs for intercultural learning of one and the other group within the framework of joint engagement.

Analysis of the obtained data for the Integration Phase, Dependent Variable 13: **Since**



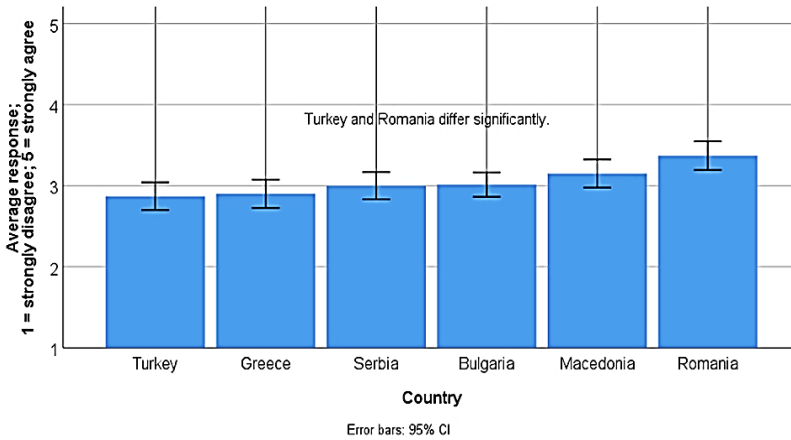
**Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures intersect and influence each other in terms of language, customs, traditions, and values, I try to integrate aspects of these cultures**

**into my own**, shows that the arithmetic value for the entire group of respondents is 3.05, with a standard deviation of 0.948 (see the table on the left). Observed by groups of respondents, respondents from Romania (3.37) and North Macedonia (3.15) recorded the above-average value of the arithmetic mean. Other groups of respondents have below-average results in this regard, namely: Bulgaria (3.01), Serbia (3.00), Greece (2.90) and Turkey (2.87). In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Romania, 3.37) is 15% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Turkey, 2.87).

The obtained results show that even with this dependent variable, respondents from Romania have a leading position when it comes to the ability to move from one cultural framework to another. In this regard, respondents from North Macedonia join them. The

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13 Since Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures intersect and influence each other in terms of language, customs, traditions, and values, I try to integrate aspects of these cultures into my own.



Country	Average response	Standard deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.32	0.864	149
Greece	3.45	0.970	111
N.Macedonia	3.85	1.063	113
Romania	4.02	0.710	108
Serbia	3.59	1.202	121
Turkey	3.18	1.144	115
Total	3.55	1.041	717

position of the other groups of respondents is unchanged compared to the one determined within the consideration of dependent variable 12.

Analysis of the obtained data for the Integration Phase, Dependent Variable 14: **I**

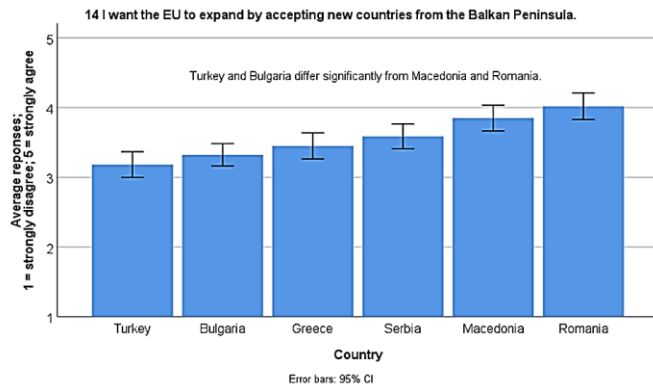
**want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula**, shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the entire group of respondents is 3.55, with a standard deviation of 1.041 (see the table on the left).

Observed by groups of respondents, respondents from Romania (4.02), North Macedonia (3.85) and Serbia (3.59) recorded an above-average value of the arithmetic mean. Other groups of respondents recorded below average values, namely: Greece (3.45), Bulgaria (3.32) and Turkey (3.18). In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Romania, 4.02) is 18% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Turkey, 3.18).

The obtained data confirm the leading position of respondents from Romania in terms of the ability to act from multiple cultural frameworks. Respondents from North Macedonia and Serbia show a somewhat lower, but still above-average level of intercultural sensitivity in this regard. The position of the other groups of respondents on this segment of the

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"ethnocentrism-ethnorelativism" continuum remained unchanged compared to the previous



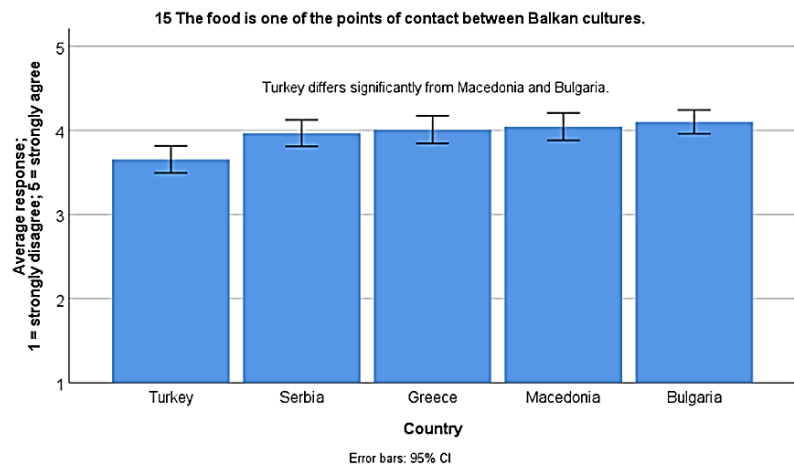
considerations.

Analysis of the obtained data for the Integration Phase, Dependent Variable 15: **The food is one of the points of contact between Balkan cultures**, shows that the value of the

arithmetic mean for all respondents is 3.96, with a standard deviation of

0.893<sup>3</sup> (see the table above). Observed by groups of respondents, above-average values are recorded by all groups except for respondents from Turkey (3.66). Respondents from Bulgaria (4.10), are followed by respondents from North Macedonia (4.04), Greece (4.01) and Serbia (3.97). In this question the largest arithmetic mean (Bulgaria, 4.10) is 10% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Turkey, 3.66).

The obtained data mainly speaks about the ethnocentric position of respondents from Turkey. This ethnocentric position of respondents from Turkey is present in all places within this segment of intercultural sensitivity (see graph on the right).



<sup>3</sup> The analysis does not include data for Romania, since the Romanian partner did not include this question in the survey.

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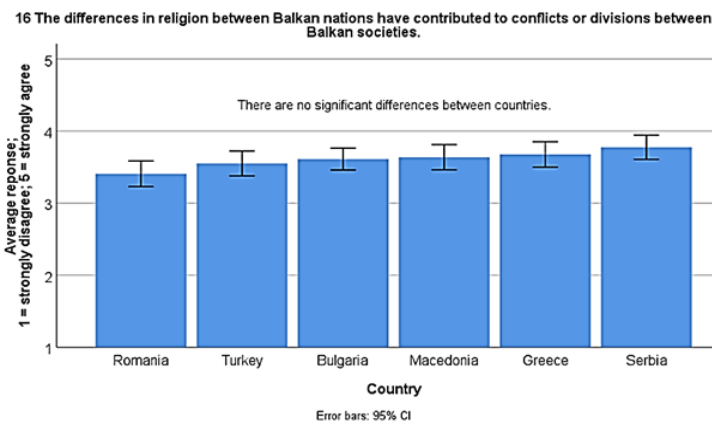
Analysis of the obtained data for the Integration Phase, Dependent Variable 16: **The differences in religion between Balkan nations have contributed to conflicts or divisions between Balkan societies**, shows that the value of the arithmetic mean for the

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Bulgaria	3.61	0.928	149
Greece	3.68	0.936	111
N.Macedonia	3.64	0.936	113
Romania	3.41	0.918	108
Serbia	3.78	0.899	121
Turkey	3.55	1.041	116
Total	3.61	0.947	718

whole group is 3.61, with a standard deviation of 0.947 (see the table on the left). Observed by groups of respondents, respondents from Serbia (3.78), Greece (3.68), North Macedonia (3.64) and Bulgaria (3.61) recorded an above-average or average value of the arithmetic mean.

Respondents from Romania (3.41) and Turkey (3.55) recorded below-average values of the arithmetic mean. The largest arithmetic mean (Serbia, 3.78) is 10% higher than the smallest arithmetic mean (Romania, 3.41).

The obtained data requires a more detailed analysis of the changes in the "ethnorelative"



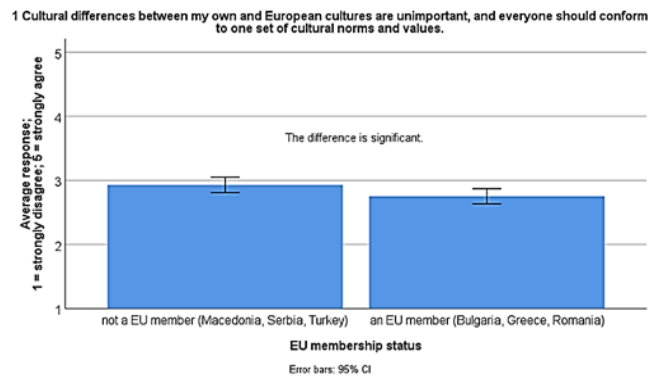
position of the respondents. The results for this dependent variable brought a complete replacement of positions of the basic groups of respondents, compared to the previously described situation.

### 3.2.2 Intercultural sensitivity with regard to EU membership

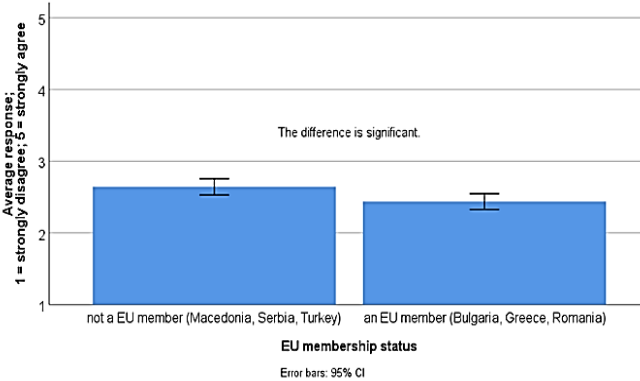
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### 3.2.2.1 Denial stage

The obtained data for dependent variables No. 1 and No. 2 (see the graphs to the right and below) suggests that young people from EU member countries have a stronger experience of cultural diversity compared to their peers from non-EU countries. The fundamental obstacle to



2 There are no significant differences between Bulgarian/ Greek/ Macedonian/ Romanian/ Serbian/ Turkish cultures.



development and the issue that needs to be resolved at this stage is the tendency to avoid cultural differences. This is a consequence of a small number and insufficiently specific categories for conceptualizing experiences with cultural differences. The compatible position of the two main groups of

respondents provides an opportunity for joint engagement to achieve progress in the development of intercultural sensitivity of both groups.

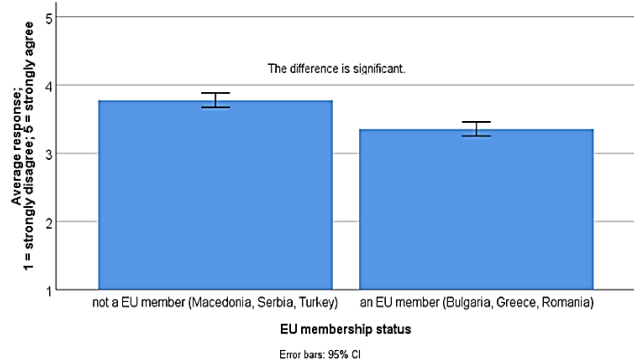
### 3.2.2.2 Defense phase

The obtained data for dependent variables No. 3, No. 4 and No. 5 (see the graphs to the right and below) suggests that respondents from Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece, compared to respondents from Turkey, North Macedonia, and Serbia, significantly less resort to ethnocentric defense against the influence of those differences perceived as threatening to their own worldview and identity (see the graph on the left). This means that respondents coming from non-EU countries resort significantly more often to the negative valuation of "others" in defense of their own worldview and identity. The essence is that respondents

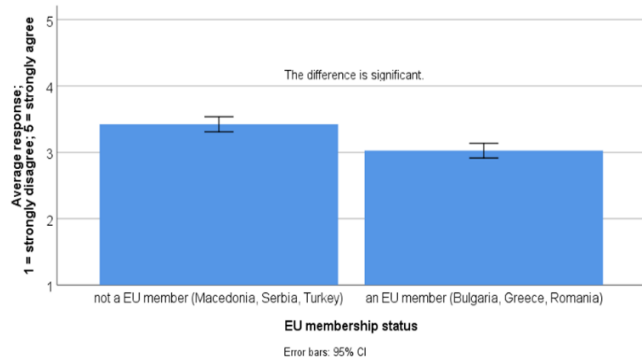
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from these countries are insufficiently equipped to perceive certain, obvious cultural differences, especially when compared to respondents from EU countries. The categories they have formed in this process are considerably more general compared to analogous ones in other groups and with less developed understanding of the values and influence of the context in which the differences arise.

3 It is essential to defend and preserve my cultural values and beliefs when interacting with people from European cultures.



4 I need to defend my cultural practices and traditions when I meet with a person from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures (each partner will remove their nation's name from the list here).



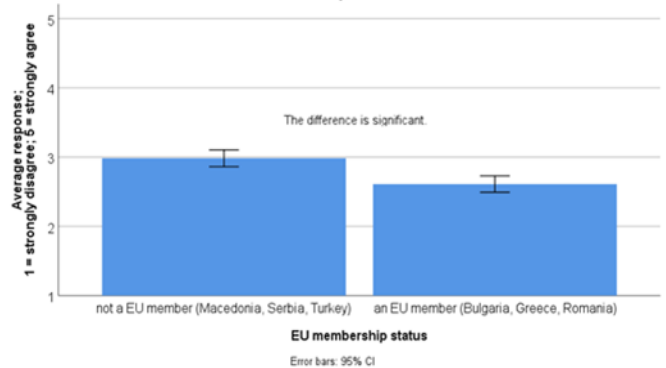
Members of these respondent groups more often find themselves in a situation where they perceive "others" as those who in some way threaten the interests of their own group (e.g., in employment, receipt of social assistance). The compatible position of the two main groups of respondents, provides an opportunity for joint

engagement to achieve progress in the development of intercultural sensitivity of both groups.

### 3.2.2.3 Minimization phase

The obtained data for dependent variables No. 6 and No. 7 (see the graphs to the right and below) suggests that respondents from non-EU countries are significantly more often in a situation where they diminish, and even trivialize differences among people, or overemphasize similarities and the universality of various phenomena. At the same time, they

5 It is better to be Bulgarian/Greek/Macedonian/Romanian/Serbian/Turkish (each partner specifies here) than to be European.



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much more frequently argue from the standpoint that culture is of secondary importance compared to biological similarities among people, or that all people are similar in terms of the needs they have, motivation for success, the pursuit of freedom and individuality, religious experiences, etc. The

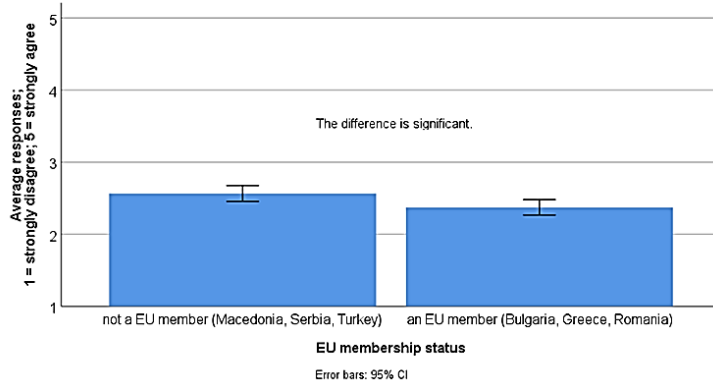
resolution of this phase implies a shift from the position where one's own culture is perceived

6 Cultural differences between my own and European cultures are minimal and can be ignored or overlooked in communication and interactions.



as central to experiencing reality to a position where it is placed in the context of the existence of other cultures that represent alternative and equally valuable ways of viewing reality. Mutual cooperation between the two main groups in improving intercultural sensitivity opens up the possibility for progress of both.

7 Differences in values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian and Turkish cultures are small and insignificant.



### 3.2.2.4 Acceptance phase

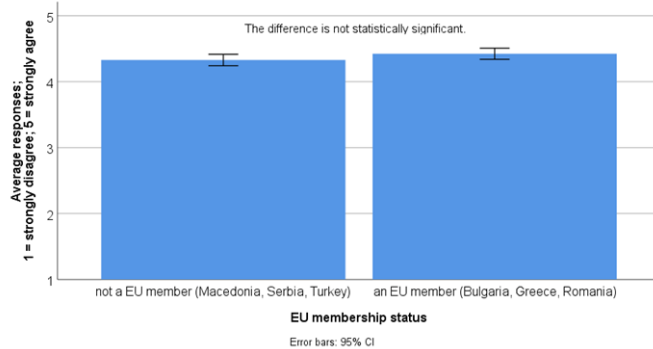
The obtained data for dependent variables No. 8, No. 9, and No. 10, (see the graphs below) suggests that respondents coming from EU countries experience their own culture and worldview (beliefs, values, norms) as something equally complex as any other culture. They somewhat more clearly than their peers from non-EU countries perceive differences in terms

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of behavior, norms governing behavior, as well as key values. Also, they exhibit a somewhat better understanding and greater appreciation of existing differences in values, or "value

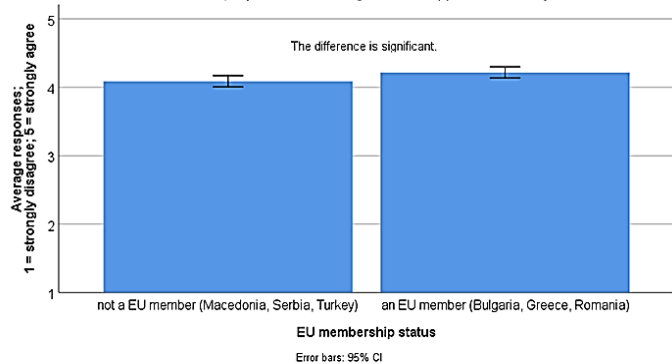
8 When interacting with people from European cultures, I try to understand and respect their values, beliefs, and behaviours, even if they differ from my own.



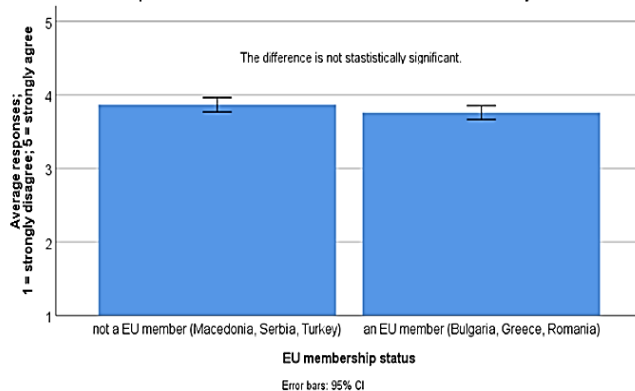
relativism" itself. When negatively evaluating others' actions, they have somewhat clearer idea that the person or group they are negatively evaluating is as complex as their own. They naturally understand that differences that are negatively valued, from the perspective

of another culture, can be positively valued, and that it is also a legitimate and understandable position. Finally, they are less often confronted with the phenomenon of "ethical paralysis," which is a consequence of accepting the position of value relativity.

9 When confronted with cultural differences between Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures, I try to find common ground and appreciate diversity.



10 It is essential to adapt and adjust my communication and behaviour when interacting with people from European cultures to communicate and collaborate with them effectively.



### 3.2.2.5 Adaptation phase

The obtained data for dependent variables No. 11 and No. 12 (see the graphs to the right and below) suggests that respondents from EU countries excel in building understanding of the diversity of

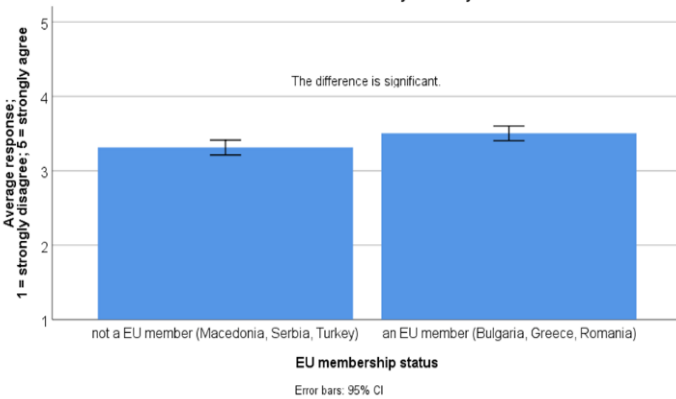
other cultural frameworks. They, significantly more than their peers from non-EU countries,

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have been involved in processes where competencies, resulting from interaction with people with different cultural origins, are being developed. In this complex process, they have learned new ways of behavior that are more in line with different worldviews and which are added to their personal repertoire of behaviors. Also, in this

process, they have gained the ability of empathy, i.e., understanding of another's worldview, the ability to experience a situation different from the one that is in line with their own cultural

12 Integrating and incorporating elements from European cultures into my own is crucial to building a more inclusive and diverse community or society.

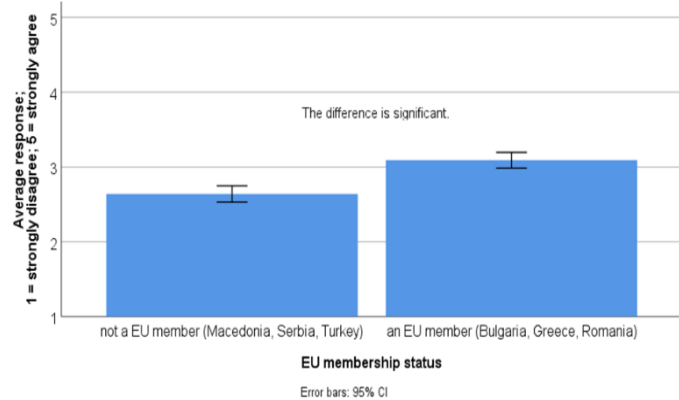


identity. And finally, they - to a greater extent than their peers from non-EU countries - can rely on multiple cultural frameworks.

**3.2.2.6 Integration phase**

The obtained data for dependent variables No. 12, No. 13, No. 14, No. 15, and No. 16 (see the graphs to the right and below) suggests that respondents from EU countries, more often than their peers from Serbia, North Macedonia, and Turkey, attempt to integrate various cultural perspectives into one. This involves constant questioning of their own identity in relation to the experience gained through life. In such situation, they can more easily develop the ability to view different situations and worldviews from different cultural frameworks. This means that they, depending on the circumstances, can move from one cultural context to another. This implies that respondents from Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece have much stronger incentives to direct their own development towards achieving a state of cultural development that can be described as "non-belonging to any culture where

11 In my interactions with people from Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures (each partner will remove their nation's name from the list here), I tend to adapt my behaviour or communication style to fit in with these cultures by avoiding my cultural practices and expectations.

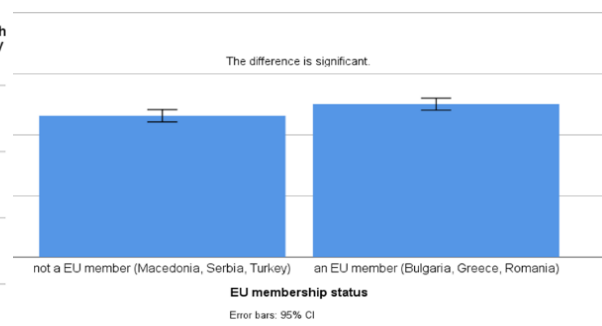
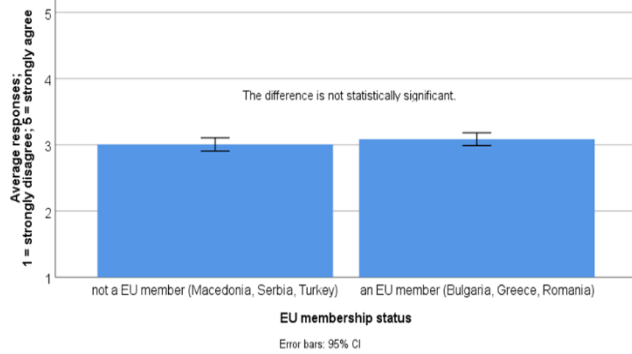


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he/she becomes an outsider". Achieving

12 Integrating and incorporating elements from European cultures into my own is crucial to building a more inclusive and diverse community or society.

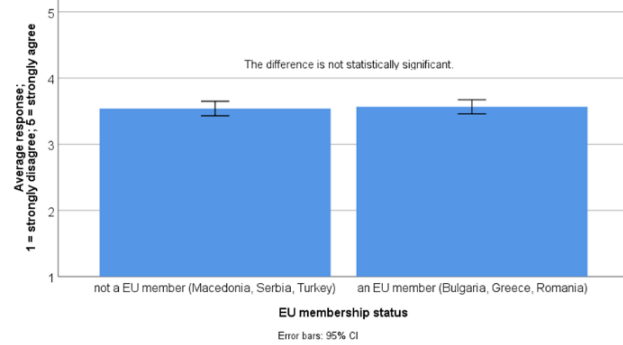
13 Since Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish cultures intersect and influence each other in terms of language, customs, traditions, and values, I try to integrate aspects of these cultures into my own.



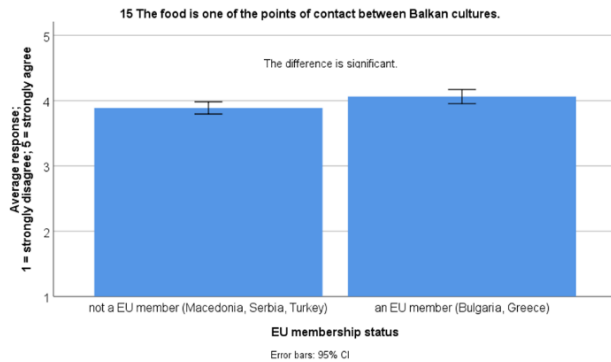
this state enables true intercultural mediation and the possibility to act in

different, culture-shaped, views of the world. It should also be emphasized here that the data for dependent variable No. 15 do not contain responses from respondents in Romania (not entered in the Questionnaire), and that with dependent variable No. 16 we get results where the two

14 I want the EU to expand by accepting new countries from the Balkan Peninsula.



main groups of respondents swap their previous positions on the "ethnocentric-ethnorelative" continuum.



### 3.2.3 Intercultural sensitivity

#### with regard to state affiliation and EU membership

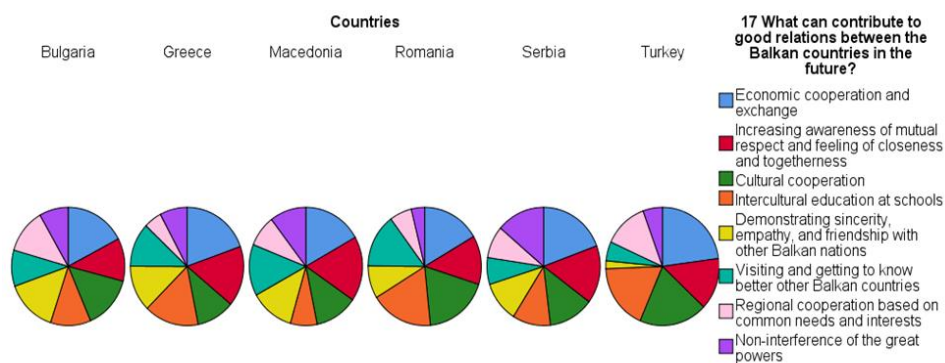
The obtained data for dependent variables No. 17, No. 18 and No. 19, shed light on the characteristics/differences of intercultural sensitivity of the respondents

16 The differences in religion between Balkan nations have contributed to conflicts or divisions between Balkan societies.



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from the perspective of the Integration Phase of Bennett's model. The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 17, from the perspective of state affiliation (see the diagram above) shows that in all groups of respondents, the factor Economic Cooperation and Exchange is



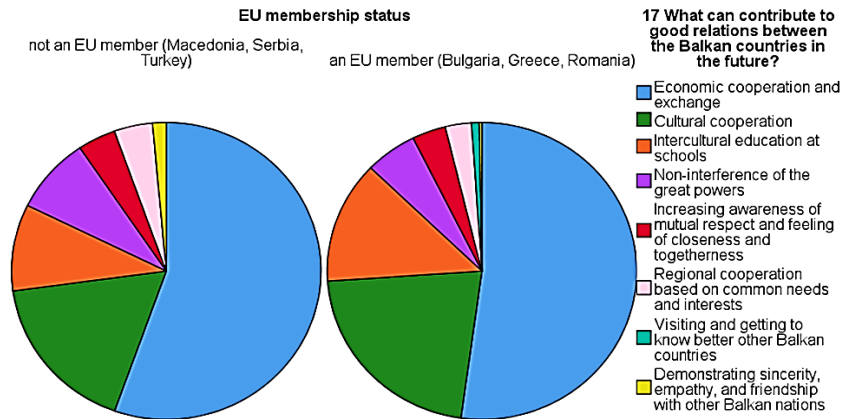
and Exchange is recognized as dominant (Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Turkey) or one of the most important (Romania, North Macedonia) for establishing good interstate relations in the Balkans in the future. The

contribution of the factor Increasing awareness of mutual respect and feeling of closeness and togetherness is also recognized as one of the key factors, with respondents from North Macedonia considering it the most important. The factor Cultural cooperation is recognized as the most important by respondents from Romania, while all other groups of respondents consider it one of the most important. Intercultural education in schools is also highly rated by all groups of respondents, especially those from Turkey and Romania, as a factor in establishing good relations in the Balkans in the future. The factor Demonstrating sincerity, empathy, and friendship with other Balkan nations is recognized by almost all groups of respondents as a very important one for establishing good relations in the Balkans. The factor Non-interference of great powers is recognized by respondents from Serbia and North Macedonia as one of the most important for the future relations between Balkan countries. The importance of the factor Regional association based on common needs and interests is highly rated by respondents from Turkey and Bulgaria, while other respondents also see it as one of the important factors for a common future. The factor Visiting and getting to know better other Balkan countries is most important for respondents from Romania and North Macedonia, followed by respondents from Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey.

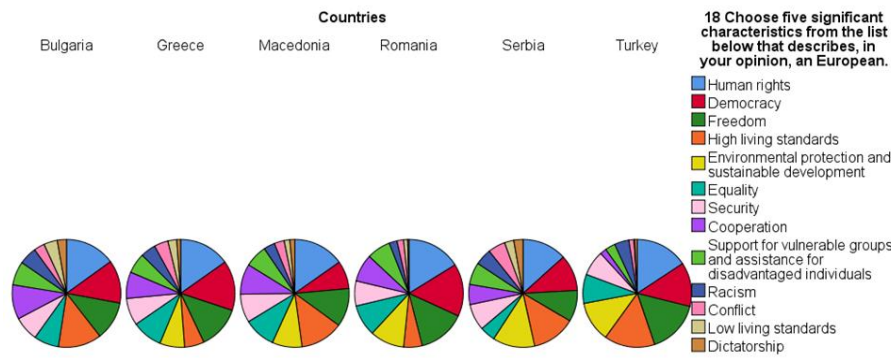
The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 17 from the perspective of EU membership shows that six factors of a common future, namely - (1) Economic cooperation and exchange; (2) Increasing awareness of mutual respect and feeling of closeness and togetherness; (3) Cultural cooperation; (4) Intercultural education in schools; (5) Demonstrating sincerity, empathy, and friendship with other Balkan nations and (6) Visiting

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and getting to know better other Balkan countries, have exactly the same rank of importance for both groups of respondents. This provides an excellent basis for development of joint



activities aimed at enhancing the intercultural sensitivity of young people from the involved countries, the quality of intercultural communication, etc.



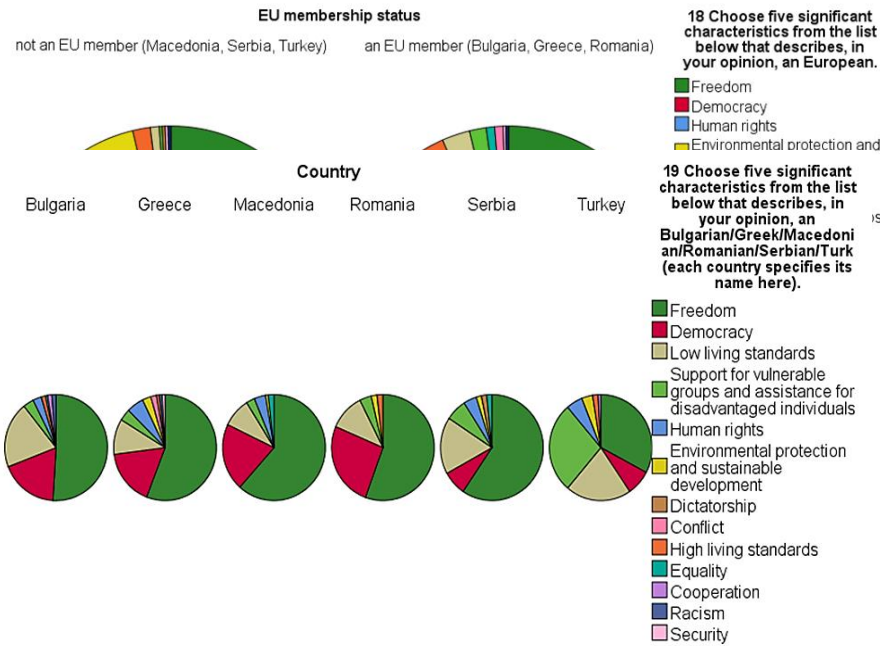
The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 18 from the perspective of state affiliation (see the graph below) shows that the orientation towards human rights, democracy, freedom, a high standard of living and environmental protection best describes a European

according to the assessment of almost all groups of respondents. Certain variations exist among respondents from Romania (they value the concept of equality ahead of the concept of standard of living), Greece (they value the concepts of equality and cooperation ahead of the concept of standard of living and environmental protection) and Bulgaria (they value the concept of cooperation ahead of the concept of environmental protection).

The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 18 from the perspective of EU membership (see the graph below) shows that four out of five chosen characteristics (freedom, democracy, human rights, and high standard of living) have the exact same level of importance for describing a European by both groups of respondents. The difference exists only in the choice of the fifth characteristic, where respondents from non-EU countries chose

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a high standard of living as the fifth characteristic, and respondents from EU countries chose concern for the socially vulnerable.



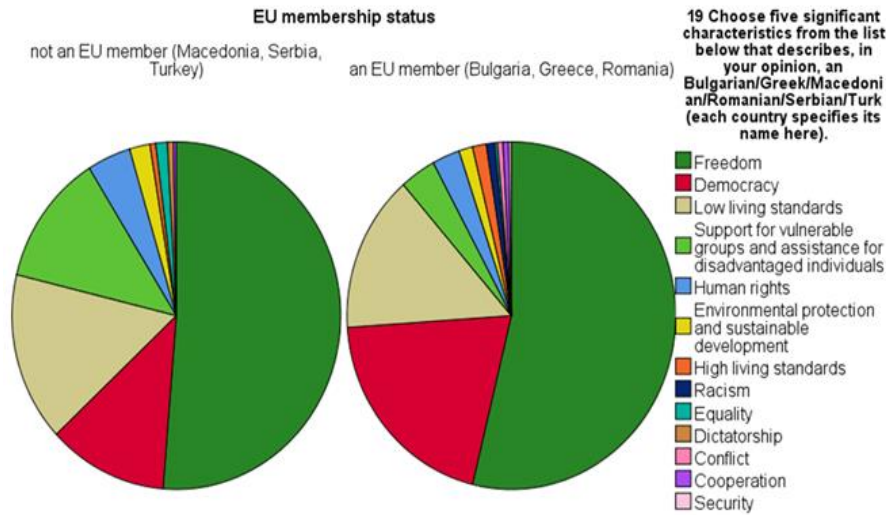
The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 19 from the perspective of state affiliation (see the graph below) shows that the ideal of freedom constitutes the most significant national characteristic according to the assessment of each group of respondents. In this regard, the ideal of freedom is most strongly

emphasized as a national characteristic by respondents from Serbia and North Macedonia, Greece and Romania, followed by Bulgaria and Turkey. In addition to this characteristic, democracy and a low standard of living also represent chosen national characteristics of each group of respondents. There are quite a few differences among the respondents when it comes to the selection of the last two national characteristics. For respondents from Turkey, these are care for the vulnerable and human rights; for respondents from Serbia – human rights and environmental protection; for respondents from Romania – human rights and environmental protection; for respondents from Macedonia – care for the vulnerable and human rights; for respondents from Greece – care for the vulnerable and human rights; for respondents from Bulgaria – care for the vulnerable and human rights.

The analysis of the obtained data for dependent variable No. 19 from the perspective of EU membership shows that respondents from both groups have exactly the same choice of national characteristics: (1) freedom; (2) democracy; (3) care for the vulnerable; (4) low standard of living; and (5) human rights. Variations exist in the emphasis of certain national

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determinants, with the note that the ideal of freedom is the dominant characteristic in both groups.




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## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on the analysis of the main problematic areas that lead to hatred and divisions between the participating countries, as well as the representation of mythologies that glorify their own and belittle others, the following can be STATED:

1. School is one of the key factors in the process of socialization of young people according to the principles of the existing value-normative structure of each of the participating countries. Depending on the structure and dynamics of changes in that umbrella, national framework, the school's contribution to enabling young people to perceive

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and experience relevant cultural differences also changes. It is obvious that the school, which functions within more closed or more open social systems, itself becomes a factor of "closing" or "opening" the individual to the cultural differences that come from the environment. The analysis of history curricula, which occupy one of the key places in the basic system of each of the participating countries, shows that what they have in common is that there is a clear emphasis on the concept of the nation. There are certain differences between them regarding their position on the "ethnocentricity-ethnorelativity" continuum. In this sense, it can be stated that the school in the Republic of Turkey is the closest to the position that can be characterized as "dominantly ethnocentric". In relation to that position, the farthest ("the most ethno-relative") one is the school in the Republic of Romania, which is characterized by a good ethno-relative position on the mentioned continuum. Schools from other participating countries are located within that area. The closest position to the school in Turkey is the School in Greece, followed by schools in Serbia and N. Macedonia, while the school in Bulgaria is the closest to the school in Romania.

2. The analysis of the data obtained within the held workshops with young people shows that the participants of these events, in all national variants, showed that they have a clear national consciousness. They demonstrated this in several ways, primarily through: Inclusion of events through which the space-time continuum of national history is built; mutual bonding by identifying the same "promised places", the same community heroes. By the way they visualized their view of the world, they manifested a sense of belonging to their nation, an enviable knowledge of national history and culture, knowledge of national characteristics and an orientation towards national prosperity. At the same time, they clearly distinguish national, Balkan and European identity. A closer look at the visualized representations of these identities shows that the "national glasses" have the "highest diopter" among workshop participants from Turkey. They also connected the appearance of the Cyrillic alphabet in the Balkans with their historical position in these regions. Somewhat less, but still more than others, "national glasses" are also present among young people from Greece. "European glasses" in looking at history are somewhat more used by participants from North Macedonia and Serbia, and significantly more by participants from Bulgaria and Romania.

3. The analysis of the essay on history "as a set of everything that could have been avoided" shows that the cultural differences of young people represent a kind of development resource. When it comes to the value position of its creator, each essay on the topic "Rewrite history" puts peace, truth, justice, responsibility, dialogue, mutual respect, the authority of knowledge and arguments, etc. in the foreground. The special value of such a value position is that it emanates self-motivation to face challenges in the form of existing xenophobic

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prejudices and stereotypes about neighbors. In demonstrating such a position, young people from Serbia, Romania and Greece went the furthest, but they are joined side- by - side by young people from other participating countries.

4. The analysis of the results of interviews with teachers in the fields of history and literature indicates that the answers obtained open up new essential questions, rather than pointing to solutions for improving intercultural sensitivity as a way to suppress, eliminate and overcome xenophobic prejudices and stereotypes about neighbors. At the root of everything is a discrepancy in the perception of teachers and young people about how much young people read, how much they know about national and general history, how much they are interested in learning about the past. Teachers believe that young people are not interested enough in history and in learning history in a scientifically based way, but are more informed through the Internet, social networks and the media. But young people, in fact, have shown a great interest in finding out what really happened in history, in order to understand the times they live in today and in which direction they should move forward. This was mostly expressed in the example of Serbia, but it is also present to a greater or lesser extent in all other participating countries. The objectively large exposure of young people to the influence of social media and the existence of a great responsibility of the family for the development of intercultural sensitivity of young people, should by no means turn into an alibi of schools and teachers for inadequate contribution to adequately confronting young people with relevant cultural differences.

5. The implementation of the questionnaire "I and Europe" included 718 respondents from 6 countries - project partners who included: 149 respondents from the Republic of Bulgaria; 121 respondents from the Republic of Serbia; 116 respondents from the Republic of Turkey; 113 respondents from the Republic of North Macedonia; 111 respondents from the Republic of Greece; 108 respondents from the Republic of Romania. The study involved 427 women (59.4%), 274 men (38.16%) and 15 individuals (2.37%) who did not declare themselves. Of the total number of respondents, 384 or 53.48% were young people aged 19 to 30 (students), and 334, or 40.68% were young people aged 14 to 18 (students). Respondents answered 19 questions based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and thematically developed within the framework of 19 dependent variables.

6. The analysis of the obtained data and interpretation of the results were conducted within the framework of 3 analytical-interpretative segments, where the subject matter was treated according to (1) the respondent's affiliation with the country, (2) the respondent's affiliation with the EU, and (3) the respondent's affiliation with the country and the EU. During

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the survey, certain inconsistencies were expressed, which were assessed as not having a significant impact on the nature of the results obtained.

7. The research results that were treated in Chapter II.1. Intercultural Sensitivity with regard to affiliation to the country indicate the following:

- The Denial phase is characterized by: a) A good position of respondents from Romania on the "ethnocentric-ethnorelative" (EER) continuum; b) an unsatisfactory position of all other groups of respondents on EER; c) The existence of a significant difference between the best (Romania) and the last positioned (Turkey) group of respondents.
- The Defense phase is characterized by: a) A good position of respondents from Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey on EER; b) a poor position of respondents from Greece, Serbia, and North Macedonia on EER; c) The existence of a large difference between the best (Romania) and the last placed (North Macedonia) group of respondents.
- The Minimization phase is characterized by: a) A good position of respondents from Romania, Greece, and North Macedonia on EER; b) a poor position of respondents from Serbia, Turkey, and Bulgaria on EER; c) The existence of a significant difference between the best (Greece) and the last placed (Turkey) group of respondents.
- The Acceptance phase is characterized by: a) the good position of respondents from Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece on EER; b) the poor position of respondents from North Macedonia and Serbia on EER; c) a small difference between the best (Romania, Greece) and the last placed (North Macedonia) group of respondents.
- The Adaptation phase is characterized by: a) the good position of respondents from Romania on EER; b) the ambivalent position of all other groups of respondents on EER.
- The Integration phase is characterized by: a) the good position of respondents from Romania on EER; b) the poor position of respondents from Turkey on EER; c) the ambivalent positions of North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Turkey on EER.

8. The research results that were treated in Chapter III.2. Intercultural Sensitivity with regard to EU affiliation indicate that the group of respondents from EU countries takes a good position on the "Ethnocentric-Ethnorelative" continuum in all developmental phases of intercultural sensitivity, i.e., the group of respondents from non-EU countries takes a poor position on this continuum.

9. The research results that were treated in Chapter II.3. Intercultural Sensitivity with regard to affiliation to both the country and the EU show that:

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- There is a high degree of agreement among all groups of respondents (with regard to affiliation to the country) around the key factors of establishing good interstate relations in the future;
- There is complete agreement between the group of respondents from EU countries and the group of respondents from non-EU countries, even in terms of assessing the importance of basic factors for establishing good interstate relations in the future;
- There is a high degree of agreement among all groups of respondents (with regard to affiliation to the country) around what best describes a European (orientation towards human rights, democracy, freedom, high living standard, and environmental protection);
- There is a high degree of agreement between the group of respondents from EU countries and the group of respondents from non-EU countries regarding 4 out of 5 chosen main characteristics of a European (orientation towards human rights, democracy, freedom, high living standard);
- There is a high degree of agreement among all groups of respondents (with regard to affiliation to the country) regarding 3 out of 5 defining national characteristics (freedom, democracy, low living standard);
- There is complete agreement between the group of respondents from EU countries and the group of respondents from non-EU countries regarding all 5 defining national characteristics (freedom, democracy, care for the vulnerable, low living standards, and human rights).

Based on the results of the desk top analysis and Focus desk top analysis, as well as the analysis of essays and the results of the research conducted according to the "I and Europe" questionnaire, as well as previous findings, with the aim of improving the intercultural sensitivity of young people from Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania, North Macedonia, Greece and of Serbia, the following is RECOMMENDED:

I. When it comes to history curricula, educational authorities in the participating countries, as well as all relevant educational actors, need to keep in mind that:

- Negative images of Balkan neighbors in history textbooks can contribute to tensions and conflicts in the region, because they strengthen stereotypes and encourage nationalist feelings;
- Overemphasizing ethnocentric content in history curricula, and in general, creating an imbalance on the "ethnocentric-ethnorelative" continuum, deprives users of the opportunity to learn about other important aspects of historical processes, such as cultural and intellectual achievements, etc.

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- Overemphasizing the nationalist and patriotic view of history can lead to a sense of one's own superiority in relation to other cultures, as well as to the exclusion of other ethnic groups.

- Disconnection from the historical consciousness of the 21st century can lead to a repetition of history on a dramatic scale.

II. The results of the application of a coordinated, multinational, interactive and innovative approach in the study of the main problem areas that lead to inter-national hatred and divisions point to the need for better mutual cooperation of educational authorities in the Balkans, and above all better coordination in all stages of the development of history curricula. Successful intercultural interaction of young people and successful intercultural interaction of representatives of educational authorities function according to the law of merged courts. Both imply reciprocity, a process of mutual enrichment and critical review of one's own values and norms.

III. The building of the ability to perceive relevant cultural differences and the development of positive feelings towards cultural differences among young people from Bulgaria, Serbia, Turkey, Romania, Greece, and North Macedonia should be facilitated by a comprehensive and consistent application of the principles of interculturality, which include:

- openness to others;
- active respect for diversity;
- mutual understanding;
- active tolerance;
- appreciation of other cultures;
- provision of equal opportunities and
- combating discrimination.

IV. Promoting and developing the capacity of learners for interaction and communication with the world around them should be ensured by applying the following educational approaches:

- Building mutual trust and respect;
- Experiencing one's own identity as a starting point in fostering intercultural sensitivity;
- Moving within different worldviews;
- Placing the "other" at the center of understanding;
- Experiencing the experience of constant change;
- Comprehensive inclusion of knowledge, emotions, and behavior;

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- Searching for constructive elements and opportunities that conflict opens up for us.

V. Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity development should be the key support for considering educational interventions that make us sensitive to the idea that people have naturally developed different ways of life, customs, and worldviews, and that this diversity of human life enriches us. On that basis, intercultural education should aim at promoting and developing:

- better understanding of cultures in modern society
- increased ability to communicate between people from different cultures
- a much more flexible attitude towards cultural differences in society
- greater readiness of people to actively engage in social interaction with people of other cultural origins, as well as recognition of the basic characteristics of human nature as something common.

VI. Intercultural educational intervention based on the results of this research should ensure changes that occur when evolving through each step of Bennett's model, namely:

(1) From denial to defense: a person becomes aware of differences among cultures.

(2) From defense to minimizing: negative judgments are suppressed, and the person is introduced to similarities among cultures.

(3) From minimizing to acceptance: the subject realizes the importance of intercultural differences.

(4) From acceptance to adaptation: the search and exploration of another culture begins

(5) From adaptation to integration: the subject develops empathy for another culture.

VII. The choice, creation, and adaptation of methods that achieve the user's motivation to notice, understand, appreciate, and accept cultural differences and express a desire to achieve positive outcomes in intercultural relations should result from relying on relevant theoretical and methodological knowledge, examples of good practice, and the findings of this research. By intersecting these elements from the perspective of intercultural sensitivity development, it is necessary to create an educational intervention that contains the following elements:

1) Denial of differences

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- General initial position - The education participant is convinced that he/she can be successful in any culture without any adaptation.
- Initial positions of participants: Romania - developmental movement; Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and North Macedonia - developmental potential;
- Educational intervention goal - Increase interest in cultural differences and awareness of the existence of cultural differences.
- How? History lectures. Getting to know the products of material culture: music, dance, customs, dishes, traditional costumes, jewelry, etc. Books and movies depicting other cultures. Works by authors from different cultures. Provide participants with culture-specific information that will arouse curiosity about another culture.

## 2) Defense of differences

- General initial position – Why don't these people speak my language? These people could learn from us!
- Initial positions of participants - Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey – developmental movement; Serbia, North Macedonia, and Greece – developmental potential.
- Educational intervention goal - Overcome the polarization on "us-them" when observing differences.
- How? Noticing similarities between cultures and common characteristics of cultures; Noticing similarities between individuals from one's own culture and individuals from other cultures; Emphasizing traits that are positively connoted in all cultures; Realizing differences among individuals from one's own culture; Building group cohesion; Cooperative learning.

## 3) Minimizing differences

- General initial position - Regardless of culture, people are motivated by the same things. We all are born, live, and die.
- Initial positions of participants: Romania, Greece, and North Macedonia – Developmental movement; Serbia, Bulgaria, and Turkey – Developmental potential.
- Educational intervention goal – Forming a framework for noticing and considering cultural differences (Considering one's own norms, values, and basic assumptions within a broader context; Realizing that norms and values are not universal, but vary from culture to culture)
- How? Realizing that awareness of cultural differences has practical significance for intercultural communication (e.g., getting to know models that explain cultural differences). Participants need to develop cultural self-awareness and experience

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differences. Improvement of listening skills, open-mindedness, and working on the ability to accurately perceive others.

#### 4) Acceptance of differences

- General initial position – The more different we are, the better! It would be boring if we were all the same.
- Initial positions of participants: Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece – developmental movement; Serbia and North Macedonia – developmental potential.
- Educational intervention goals - increase the complexity of categories used for analyzing differences; Develop the ability to change the reference frame; Encouraging empathy and decentralization (displacement from the center).
- How? Experiential learning; Role-playing; Simulations. Participants need to acquire culture-specific knowledge. Participants must respect others' values and beliefs and maintain tolerance to ambiguity.
- Challenge: Understand the context and meaning of certain cultural practices in other countries while retaining the standards of one's own culture (Women's rights).

#### 5) Adaptation to differences

- General initial position – I am beginning to feel like a member of this culture!
- Initial positions of participants: Romania - developmental movement; Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Serbia, and North Macedonia - developmental potential.
- Educational intervention goal - Stepping into "someone else's shoes."
- How? Conversations with partners from other cultures. Multicultural group discussions. Participants must be able to experience empathy towards other cultures. Participants need to master skills of taking on and solving problems. Participants need flexibility in relation to other cultures.

#### 6) Integration of Differences

- General initial position – Everywhere is home, if you know enough about how things work there. I feel most comfortable when I bridge the differences between the cultures I know.
- Initial positions of participants: Romania - developmental movement; Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and North Macedonia - Developmental potential.
- Educational intervention goal – navigate through different cultural frames.
- How? Familiarization with different ethical systems. Constructing an ethical system that will guide one's own choices and actions.

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- Challenge: Navigate through different cultural frames based on a well-founded ethical system.

VIII. Utilize the enormous developmental potential for developing an intercultural educational intervention, i.e., promoting intercultural sensitivity, which lies in the high degree of agreement of young people from Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Serbia, and North Macedonia regarding key value orientations and national characteristics.

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