THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND INTERCULTURAL COOPERATION AND THEIR LINK WITH CROSS-BORDER RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS
(The case with Bulgarian-Romanian Cross-border Cooperation)

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Abstract

Purpose:

This paper aims to explore existing attitudes towards intercultural dialogue and cooperation among representatives of Bulgarian and Romanian linguistic and cultural communities in order to prove the hypothesis that the effective cross-border links and relationships in the Bulgarian-Romanian border region depend on the favourableness of these attitudes.

Design:

The review of the principles and components of intercultural cooperation, defined as a tolerant intercultural dialogue laid aside stereotypes and prejudices toward otherness, serves as a theoretical base of the research.

The first part of the research presents the attitudes towards intercultural dialogue of the Bulgarian and Romanian citizens as they are reported in the representative study "Intercultural dialogue in Europe". (Flash Eurobarometer 217-The Gallup Organization, 2007).

In the second part a comparison is made between the Bulgarian and Romanian data obtained through inquiry among Bulgarian and Romanian students on the attitudes towards intercultural cooperation and its linguistic, ethno-cultural, psychological and social aspects.

In the final part conclusions are drawn about the interdependence between the existing attitudes towards intercultural dialogue and intercultural cooperation and the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation in the Bulgarian-Romanian border region.

Findings:

The results from Eurobarometer study regarding Bulgarian and Romanian attitudes towards intercultural dialogue indicate the following trends: low intensity of intercultural contacts among the representatives of the two groups of respondents, low level of agreement with the thesis that cultural diversity enriches the life of society, low level of conviction in the benefits of intercultural dialogue.

The attitudes of the Bulgarian and Romanian students towards intercultural cooperation do not indicate any significant differences. Among the linguistic aspects of intercultural cooperation the young people identify the language as barrier for intercultural understanding but at the same time they declare their readiness to use language-mediator in intercultural interactions. Among the more important ethno-cultural aspects of intercultural cooperation the respondents indicate different beliefs and values and different behaviour which inspire a sense of otherness to the greatest extent. Young people think that the uncertainty and anxiety, experienced in intercultural contacts, are among the psychological obstacles for intercultural cooperation. Getting used to the local rules and procedures is considered by the respondents as the greatest social problem in the process of adaptation to a foreign culture.

As a result of data analysis a conclusion is drawn that the attitudes of young people *at a students' age (their early twenties)* towards intercultural cooperation are more

favourable in comparison with the Bulgarian and Romanian attitudes reported in Eurobarometer study which represents average data rates. As the main participants in cross-border cooperation are typically people from the second group of respondents, their attitudes towards intercultural dialogue, mentioned above, have negative impact on the effectiveness of cross-border links and interactions.

Research limitations/implications:

The two studies, compared in the research, do not apply one and the same instrument of investigation but the closeness in the topic of exploration allows intercultural comparisons.

Practical implications:

The analytical data can be applied in the design of teaching programs for intercultural cooperation in border areas as well as for the purposes of argumentation of project ideas in cross-border program schemes with European funding.

What is original/ what is the value of the paper?

This comparative research is the first of its kind. It can be replicated in other border regions in order to verify its findings.

Keywords: intercultural cooperation, intercultural dialogue, cross-border cooperation, attitudes, Bulgarian-Romanian border region

Introduction

The most salient characteristics of the cultural environment in the era of globalization are the respect and sensitivity towards cultural diversity as inherent peculiarities of multiculturalism. Due to the increasing cross-border migration, the interdependence between the regions in the world and the aspiration of ethnic minorities towards protection of their own cultural identity more and more individuals live in a situation of "multicultural normality" and have to cope with their pluralistic identities. At the same time cultural diversity is connected with the development of some negative processes like xenophobia, discrimination, intolerance which threaten the peaceful existence of human societies. This context increasingly highlights the role of intercultural dialogue and intercultural cooperation for the transformation of cultural diversity in real advantage of the contemporary development of humankind.

The most topical question nowadays is not how to live together but how to live together without losing our identities and our inherent differences. As Yuriy Krasin says: "in the era of globalization the links between countries and civilization areas are so tight that people have to interact with quite different neighbours, not always pleasant and often incompatible. As a result some kind "tolerance of necessity" arises allowing us to familiarize and to understand each other." (Krasin: http://www.ponedelnik.bg/P10_5-6_WEB.pdf)

Since multiculturalism in the era of globalization has no alternative, we have to find the ways and means of achieving a tolerant dialogue between cultures in which distrust is replaced by interest and curiosity and bridging differences through cooperation has become an innate characteristic of intercultural communication.

The current paper is focusing on the general principles of intercultural dialogue and intercultural cooperation and is seeking their practical realization in the communication between neighbours within the frames of a concrete region, namely Bulgarian-Romanian border region along the Danube river.

The paper tries to give answers to the following questions:
- What is the added value of cross-border cooperation except indisputable economic effects for the regions located in the periphery of the nation states?
- How the familiarizing with the cross-border neighbour as well as the shortage of cultural distance encourage the economic and social development in the border regions?

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- How the development of sensitivity toward otherness and the overcoming of ethnocentrism, stereotyping and prejudging lead to intensification of intercultural contacts, establishment of positive attitudes towards intercultural cooperation and hence to acceptance of multiculturalism as an inherent feature of contemporary societies.

The main task of the paper is to check the hypothesis about the link between the favourable attitudes towards intercultural dialogue and the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation.

Theoretical basis of the research

Human societies are in the period of global transformation of the economy, the political and social systems and the set of traditional values. This complex picture of societal development provokes a debate about the social and cultural identification of the individuals as well as about the dialogue between cultures as universal characteristic of multiculturalism. The promotion of the necessity of such dialogue plays an important role among the initiatives of world's intellectual elite and integrates the efforts of international organizations. Here we have in mind the UN initiative "Alliance of Civilizations" in 2005 and the announcement of 2008 as European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The first initiative is in congruence with the approved by the General Assembly of UN "Global Programme for Dialogue between Civilizations" (21st November 2001), aimed at supporting cooperation between religions and engaged with concrete actions for encouraging the culture of peace and dialogue between civilizations on local, national, regional and international level. (http://www.undp.bg/uploads/ File/news/2008/AoC_FastFacts_BG.pdf)

In the spirit of the efforts to formulate coherent and long-term policy for promotion of intercultural dialogue in Europe as well as between Europe and neighbouring regions a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue prepared by the Council of Europe is created. In this document the concept "intercultural dialogue" is defined as open and respectful exchange of points of view between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures which leads to deeper understanding of the global perception of the Other. (White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, Council of Europe, 2008)

Other topical definition of intercultural dialogue is: A set of specific encounters in real space and time between individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic affiliations aiming at exploring, testing and increasing understanding, awareness, empathy and respect. The final purpose of intercultural dialogue is to establish a cooperative and benevolent environment for overcoming the political and social tensions. (http://rainbowpaper.labforculture.org)

Specific articles of *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* (2000) reflect some peculiarities of the intercultural dialogue as: equality, lack of discrimination, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, freedom of speech and movement. This interpretation demonstrates that in the context of intercultural dialogue the abidance of human rights (the rights of the individual) and cultural rights (recognition of specific and/or pluralistic identities) are of equal importance.

The main concept which is used in the description and analysis of the dialogue between cultures is tolerance interpreted as understanding and respect towards a different way of life, different behaviour, customs, beliefs, opinions and ideas. (Bardier, 2007) Tolerance and intercultural dialogue are the main components in the content range of the notion "intercultural cooperation". However when relate intercultural cooperation to its practical realization within the frames of a border region, it is necessary to interpret its content in close connection with the term "border".

The borders typically separate places in terms of politics, economics, culture, history. The role that physical boundaries play in defining territorial identity is a key topic in

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border studies. Borders function as the most apparent means for making sense of the 'outside' world as they feed into the social identity of people by establishing shared values, such as collective images, ideas, and feelings of belonging. (Houtum, 2000).

Oscar Martinez (Martinez, 1994: 1–15) proposed a typology of four types of borderlands based on the border's permeability and on the intensity of cross-border interactions:

- alienated borderlands – in them borders are closed and cross-border contacts are negligible;
- co-existent and interdependent borderlands – they are characterised by higher degree of cross-border contacts.
- integrated borderlands - peaceful relations, economic interdependence and ample cross-border interaction prevail in them.

In the era of globalisation there is talk of the disappearance of borders or their declining significance (Anderson, 1996, Ohmae, 1994 and Shapiro and Alker, 1996). On the other hand, a growing number of scientists analyse borders as socially constructed distinctions between 'us and them' (Berg, 2000: 154–165; Leimgruber, 1991: 43–62).

The cultural aspect of the border is always relative to what is on the other side of it, which implies that it may be represented as cultural or mental distance. (Barth, 1995) For instance, in a study on the determinants of economic cross-border relationships of small and medium sized companies in border regions comprising parts of Belgium and the Netherlands, (Houtum, 2000: 57–83) it was found that people's mental distance towards the other side, as well as their perception of the border's symbolic value, affected the number of such relationships significantly and in a negative fashion. In this sense, interpreting borders merely as physical dividers of space seems inadequate concerning matters of cross-border cooperation and integration.

Through its institutions, the European Union brings to the foreground the importance of cross-border cooperation by turning to its specific instruments. The main objective is preventing the isolation of border areas by promoting cross-border cooperation relations, considering that these neighbouring areas face a similar situation, which strengthens the development of cross-border relations in different fields of interest on both sides of the border. (Toca, 2010: 204-206,211-212)

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) is a key priority of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). It aims at reinforcing cooperation between member states and partner countries along the external border of the European Union.
The European CBC strategy has four key objectives:
- to promote economic and social development in border areas
- to address common challenges
- to ensure efficient and secure borders
- to promote people-to-people cooperation
(http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index_en.htm)

Many West European border regions have been characterised as bridging zones that encourage citizen interaction and exchange. Cross-border contacts between border populations are presented as an avenue towards improved perceptions and good neighbourly relations (Henrikson, 2000: 121–147; Newman, 2003: 13–25).

However in the border regions in South-Eastern Europe the picture is not so optimistic. For example, due to the European funding for programmes for cross-border cooperation between Bulgaria and Romania, the contacts between people of the neigbouring countries in the spheres of business and infrastructure have been intensified. But the intercultural dialogue still suffers from stereotyping, lack of trust, lack of common

identification with border region and as a result the effectiveness in the implementation of the cross-border projects is not sufficient.

We can argue that for these regions is valid one of the paradoxes of globalization – the more compressed network of international and cross-border links and interactions, the more vividly manifested regional and local cultural differences. (http://www.rodon.org/relig-090521123351)

In connection with the interpretation of intercultural cooperation in border regions we can mention two theories: Contact theory of Allport (Allport, 1979) and Cultural familiarity theory (Li and Guisinger, 1991: 209–224; Shenkar, 2001: 519–535; Lee, Shenkar & Li, 2008: 1117-1125).

At the heart of contact theory lies the notion that encounters between members of different social groups improve the relations between these groups.

Cultural familiarity theory holds the statement that people/firms are less likely to invest in culturally distant countries, and that they show poorer performance when they do this. (Li and Guisinger, 1991: 209–224; Shenkar, 2001: 519–535).

If we apply these theories to Bulgarian-Romanian border region along the Danube river we can say that with the accession of the two countries to the European Union and elimination of the internal borders the movement of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens in the two directions has been intensified. The increased number of cross-border contacts leads to positive effects in business development, supported as well by the increasing number of successful cross-border projects with European funding. On the other hand, in spite of the geographical proximity, we can argue that the cultural distance between the two countries retains its high level. The mental barriers still exist and hinder the cooperation and the establishment of perspective and sustainable links and relationships in the border region.

In order to find out the reasons for the mentioned above negative trends as well as to identify some opportunities for the improvement of the situation in the Bulgarian-Romanian border region, the work firstly analyzes the empirical results from Flash Eurobarometer survey about intercultural dialogue in Europe, in which representative data for Bulgaria and Romania are collected (Flash EB No 217. Intercultural dialogue in Europe, The Gallup Organization, 2007), and secondly the data from an inquiry about the attitudes of the Bulgarian and Romanian students towards intercultural dialogue are presented.

Experimental basis of the research

Flash Eurobarometer survey on Intercultural Dialogue in Europe (No 217), asked citizens to report their patterns of interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds, and tried to find out their general attitude towards cultural diversity.

The survey's fieldwork was carried out between 13 and 17 of November, 2007. The survey included over 27,000 randomly selected citizens aged 15 years and above from the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union. Interviews, approximately 1,000 in each country, were predominantly carried out via fixed telephone,.

The first section of the inquiry was devoted to people's interaction with representatives of different cultures. The citizens who reported the highest ratios of intercultural contacts were from: Luxembourg (82%); Ireland (77%); the UK (76%): and Austria (75%). The countries reporting the lowest level of interaction were Estonia (43%) and Romania (44%). For Bulgaria 48 % of the respondents reported such interactions. About the specificity of intercultural contacts most respondents indicate people of different ethnic origin as those they interact with. Men; younger age groups; those with higher levels of education; city-dwellers; and those who study or work are most likely to report some contact with someone of a different ethnicity, religion or nationality. (Flash EB No 217, 2007)

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In connection of the presented data we could comment the relatively low rates of intercultural contacts, registered for Bulgaria and Romania. It is not so difficult to indicate the reasons for this. The first reason is the short period of membership of the two countries in the EU and the long historical experience of isolation and restrictions in the free movement of people across borders. The regular communication with representatives of other cultures is rather an exception for the Bulgarians and Romanians than a normal everyday practice. Secondly, we have to point out the typical of the Balkan people focus on their in-group (family, relatives, close friends) and some kind of anxiety in the encounters with otherness in all its types: cultural, ethnic, religious, etc. Thirdly, the direction of migration in Bulgaria and Romania – from inside to outside – does not contribute to increasing the cultural diversity in the two countries. In the near future we couldn't expect any changes in the direction of migration. Therefore the indicated above results are due to objective reasons but not to the subjective reluctance of the Bulgarians and Romanians for intercultural contacts.

Another group of questions in the Eurobarometer survey is dedicated to the attitudes towards cultural diversity. The countries with highest ratios on the statement that the presence of people from various backgrounds enriches the cultural life of their nation are: Ireland (84 %), Luxemburg (84 %), France (82 %), Germany (77 %) and Finland (77 %). The highest levels of disagreement with this assumption are found in Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania but even there more than half of the citizens think that people with different cultural backgrounds enrich cultural life of the country (the ratios range from 52% to 57%).

In spite of the positive trends in relation to the attitudes towards cultural diversity, registered for Bulgaria and Romania, the number of the respondents who think that the cultural diversity does not enrich the cultural life of the country is not so small – for Bulgaria rather not enriched 27 %, not enriched – 11 %, for Romania - rather not enriched – 19 %, not enriched – 11 %. The possible reasons for this are the existing prejudices towards the representatives of some ethnic groups in these countries, e.g. the gypsies. These negative perceptions have their impact on the attitudes towards the representatives of other cultures as a whole.

Another interesting question in the Eurobarometer survey is for the benefits of intercultural dialogue. It was seen as particularly beneficial (at least for future generations) in Sweden and Denmark (both 91% overall agreement); Ireland (90%); Hungary, Luxembourg and Portugal (all 89%). The option "*very much agree*" with the benefits of intercultural dialogue was chosen by 45 % from the Irish and Austrian respondents, 43 % from the German respondents and 40 % from the Czech respondents. Even in the countries where the general agreement levels were the lowest, most people agreed that such exchanges could be beneficial for young people (Romania 63%; Malta and Bulgaria: both 70%).) At the same time Bulgarian respondents were the most likely to agree, by far, that young people should continue to respect family traditions (74% were in *total agreement* and another 21% agreed *more modestly*, 95% overall). This is a very indicative phenomenon for the Bulgarian respondents. Their value hierarchy is dominated by traditional values like family. They rely on younger generations for the acquisition and distribution of contemporary values like respect towards cultural diversity. Here we can find the main difference between the old and the new member states of the EU. The first can estimate the benefit of intercultural dialogue on the basis of existing intercultural experience, while the second give their assessments on the basis of future expectations.

Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the data about the attitudes towards intercultural dialogue among the respondents in the inquiry. The *cosmopolitan* mindset is more typical of the EU-15 (and especially in: Denmark 56%; Sweden 48%; and the

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Netherlands 47%). On the other hand, citizens of the new Member States tend to be less cosmopolitan and more pro diversity in their attitudes, this being most characteristic of the Polish (76%), and Cypriot (74%) respondents. Only 3 % from the Bulgarian respondents declare a cosmopolitan attitude towards intercultural dialogue, while for the Romanians this percent is 30. At the same time 66 % from the Bulgarians argue that their choice is *pro diversity and keep roots*, while for the Romanians this percent is 32. This difference between Bulgarians and Romanians in relation to cosmopoliteness can be explained with the cited above adherence of the Bulgarians to family traditions and their affiliation to the local community.

The Eurobarometer survey also gives an answer to the question: "What is the meaning of intercultural dialogue for the people (EU27)". Most common answers are, as follows:

Communication among different communities – 23 %
Cooperation, exchange, transnational mobility – 13 %
Living together, knowing and understanding different cultures – 11 %
Cultural events and access to culture – 10 %
Coexistence and cultural diversity – 9%
Shared European culture – 8%
Dealing with linguistic diversity - 5
Tolerance, equal rights - 4
Education, exchange of information and ideas - 3
Dialogue in the sphere of politics and economics -3
Immigration/minorities - 3
Preserving traditions - 1
Other – 8 % (Flash EB No 217, 2007)

The notions of the European citizens about intercultural dialogue cover the whole content range of the concept. It is connected mostly with the communication, cooperation and understanding between the representatives of different cultures. This way the communicative dimension of the intercultural dialogue can be identified. Apart from this we can point out its value dimension, connected with respect towards cultural and linguistic diversity, tolerance and equal rights and shared values of the European culture.

As a whole the Eurobarometer survey supports the theses of the current research in the following directions:

- It identifies the attitudes of the representative part of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens towards intercultural dialogue. These attitudes indicate insufficient openness of the societies, affiliation to local and traditional values, lack of sufficient intercultural experience;
- The societal expectations for changes in the attitudes towards cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are concentrated in the younger generations of Bulgaria and Romania. As we will see bellow, this conclusion is supported by the results from an inquiry, conducted among 60 Bulgarian and 60 Romanian students. The study is not a representative one, but it gives information about the main trends in the attitudes of the young people from the two countries towards intercultural cooperation.

A specifically designed questionnaire is used in the inquiry. It consists of 40 questions. 36 of which are close- ended, 1 is open ended and 3 are passport questions. The questions in the questionnaire are divided in four groups related to the linguistic, ethno-cultural, psychological and social aspects of intercultural cooperation. After simple

statistical processing of the data using the formula for percentage part/whole = %/100, the following observations on the results can be presented:

Linguistic aspects of intercultural cooperation

- The Bulgarian and Romanian respondents are almost equally divided in their answers to the question if speaking different languages in different cultures is a barrier for intercultural cooperation. At the same time the majority of participants in the inquiry think that the usage of language-mediator, e.g. English, facilitates the intercultural cooperation.

- The Bulgarian respondents pay almost equal attention to verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication (42,9 % against 36,5 %), while the prevailing part of the Romanian respondents (61,9%) focus their attention on verbal communication. We can find the possible explanation to this difference in the concept "context of culture" according to Hall. (Hall and Hall, 1990) Although the Bulgarian and Romanian cultures are characterized with high context, its levels are more visible in the Bulgarian culture which means that for the Bulgarians not only words are important in the exchange of messages, but also non-verbal signal and the contextual information.

- Both groups of respondents need more time to think out the message before its transfer to a partner from different culture but the percent of the Bulgarians who do this is greater (76,2% BG against 53,9% RO).

- The prevailing part of the Bulgarian and Romanian respondents seek the confirmation of the partner from the other culture that the message is understood. For feedback most Bulgarians rely on non-verbal signals, while most Romanians require non-verbal and verbal confirmation that the message is understood.

- Both groups of respondents use simpler sentences when communicating with partners from other cultures.

- In relation to the used words and phrases which eventually would complicate communication with a partner from another culture (proverbs, sexist and improper words, etc.), 52,4 % from the Bulgarians declare that they don't use similar linguistic forms. The same percent of Romanians argue that they use jokes in the process of communication and another 36,5 % don't use similar words and phrases.

- The importance of non-verbal communication in the national culture is evaluated differently by the two groups of respondents. According to 78,9 % from the Bulgarians it has great importance for the representatives of the Bulgarian linguistic and cultural community. The significance of non-verbal communication is underlined by 58,8 % from the Romanian respondents, while another 30,2 % consider its neutral importance in their culture. These results support the statement above about the different role which the context of communication plays in the two cultures. (Hall and Hall, 1990)

Ethno-cultural aspects of intercultural cooperation

- The representatives of both groups would communicate in different ways with a partner from Western Europe and a partner from Africa but this is a more valid approach for Romanian students (38,1 % BG – 50,8 % RO). As the main reason for their behaviour the respondents indicate the difference in values.

- In communication with a partner from another culture a great number of the respondents from the two groups (69,8 % BG – 63,5 % RO) compare his/her behaviour with the behaviour of the representatives of their own culture. This fact is relatively unfavourable because it is connected with the ethnocentrism of the

respondents which causes a number of negative phenomena like prejudices, discrimination, xenophobia, etc.

- The prevailing part of the representatives of the two cultures need little time to establish friendly relationships with a foreigner. Young people think that the sharing of personal information is a factor for familiarizing with the representative of another culture. In this case more Bulgarian respondents are convinced in this statement (49,2 % BG – 31,7 % RO). A great number of the representatives of the two cultures consider the existing of preliminary information for the partner's culture a necessary condition for successful communication with him/her.

- Bulgarians qualify a person as different, firstly on the basis of the difference in values and beliefs, and secondly – on the basis of different behaviour. For Romanian the first distinctive feature is the difference in traditions, and the second – values and beliefs. A very positive fact for the two groups of respondents is that an insignificant percentage of them identify the difference on the basis of external physical features. Another favourable prerequisite for intercultural cooperation is that the prevailing part of the respondents approaches the Others with interest and curiosity and not with avoidance or keeping distance.

Psychological aspects of intercultural cooperation

- Almost equal percent of the respondents from Bulgaria and Romania initiate contacts and long-term relationships with representatives from other cultures (50,8 % BG – 47,6 % RO).

- More Romanians than Bulgarians react verbally or non-verbally in the appearance of intercultural differences but the reaction of both groups of respondents is rather of curiosity than of hostility or surprise.

- In the appearance of a psychological barrier in the communication process the Bulgarian and the Romanian respondents use different tools for breaking the ice. Firstly, they use jokes (57,1 % RO – 38,1 %BG) and secondly – self-disclosure, the sharing of personal information with the partner with the expectation that he/she will do the same (38,1 % BG – 25,4 % RO).

- In an unpleasant conversation with a partner from a different culture a great percentage of the Bulgarian and Romanian respondents (44,4) will continue the talk because of politeness. But also a large percentage of them (47,6 % RO – 39,7 %BG) will apologize and will promise to continue the conversation later. This reaction indicates a level of intolerance demonstrated by the respondents.

- The prevailing part of the respondents report about excitement in the communication with a partner from different culture (65,1 % BG – 49,2 % RO) but another 33,3 % from the Bulgarians and Romanians experience uncertainty.

- The respondents from the two cultures agree on the statement that in a conversation with a partner from a different culture they would avoid politics as a topic (47,4 % BG – 50,8 % RO). This result is in congruence with the dominating trend among young people in the whole of Europe to keep aside from political life. Secondly, the respondents would avoid the family as a topic of conversation and here more Romanians would do this (25,4 % RO – 15,8 % BG). If we remind the question above about the sharing of personal information, we can draw a conclusion that the Romanians more strongly protect their personal territory which means that their individualistic values are more strongly expressed. (Hofstede, 1991)

Social aspects of intercultural cooperation

- According to the respondents from both cultures the social characteristics of the foreign partner (age, education, social status) are not so important in the communication with him/her while finding the language of communication is the most significant factor.
- The young people from both cultures would provide access for the representative of a foreign culture to their closest circle (90,5 % BG – 73 % RO).
- Another positive characteristic of the reported results is that in their adaptation to a foreign culture the young people from Bulgaria and Romania look for contacts and friendships with the representatives of this culture (71,4 % BG – 73 % RO).
- According to the prevailing part of the respondents the most serious challenge in their adaptation to a foreign culture is to get accustomed to local rules of behaviour and everyday routine activities.

Conclusions

On the basis of the empirical results above the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The attitudes of the young people from Bulgaria and Romania towards intercultural cooperation are favourable and would contribute to its intensification.
- The respondents from the two countries have intercultural experience which allows them to overcome communication barriers. The young people realize that it is necessary to adapt their communication messages to the partner from other culture, e.g. to think out better their messages, to seek feedback of the understanding, etc.
- The young people identify intercultural differences mainly in the sphere of values, beliefs and traditions. The external physical features are an insignificant factor for intercultural cooperation for them which means that discrimination and racism are not typical of this age group.
- The respondents from the two countries demonstrate an attitude towards Otherness which is mature and free of prejudices. They react with interest and curiosity to the appearance of intercultural differences. Most common associations of the concept "Other" among them are *different, unknown, interesting* and *new*, which means that they perceive the encounters with Otherness as a challenge and tool for familiarizing with and bridging differences.
- On the other hand together with the underlined positive attitudes towards intercultural cooperation the results indicate some relatively unfavourable trends as well. Firstly, the identified ethnocentrism among the prevailing part of the respondents has to be discussed. Although the focus on one's own cultural group is a universal characteristic of human societies, young people have to be aware of its negative consequences and to exclude stereotyping and prejudices from their behaviour. This can be achieved mainly through education and training in intercultural communication. Furthermore, the communication with a foreign partner of a small part from the respondents hides a danger of conflict (e.g. they use sexist and improper words in their conversation). This can be avoided also in the study of intercultural communication which must be included in all forms and levels of education in the two countries. And last but not least we have to mention the identified tendency towards intolerant behaviour among some of the respondents. Probably their communication with partners from their own culture is also intolerant which imposes the requirements concerning the establishment of communication skills as a whole.

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- On the basis of the reported results some **insignificant differences** between Bulgarian and Romanian respondents can be pointed out. They are due to the specificity in value orientation and mental programming of the two societies. These differences are reflected in the table bellow:

Table 1

Intercultural differences between Bulgarian and Romanian participants in the students' study

Bulgarians	Romanians
More strongly expressed high context of the culture. Examples: - the young people focus on verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication - they need more time to think out the communication message sent to a partner from another culture - for feedback showing that the message was understood young people from Bulgaria rely mainly on non-verbal signals - non-verbal communication has great importance in the Bulgarian culture	**More weakly expressed high context of the culture.** Examples: - the young people focus mainly on verbal aspects of communication - they need shorter time to think out the communication message sent to a partner from another culture - for feedback showing that the message was understood young people from Romania rely both on verbal and non-verbal signals - non-verbal communication has less importance in the Romanian culture
Weaker individualism - A greater percentage of the Bulgarians think that sharing personal information is a factor for familiarizing with the representative of a foreign culture; - A greater percentage of the Bulgarians use self-disclosure (sharing personal information) for breaking the ice in case of a communication problem - A smaller percentage of the Bulgarians would avoid family as a topic for conversation with the representative of a foreign culture - A greater percentage of the Bulgarians would incorporate the representative of a foreign culture into their closest circle - A greater percentage of the Bulgarians would look for their compatriots in order to communicate with them in a long stay in the foreign culture.	**Stronger individualism** - A smaller percentage of the Romanians think that sharing personal information is a factor for familiarizing with the representative of a foreign culture - A smaller percentage of the Romanians use self-disclosure (sharing personal information) for breaking the ice in case of a communication problem - A greater percentage of the Romanians would avoid family as a topic for conversation with the representative of a foreign culture - A smaller percentage of the Romanians would incorporate the representative of a foreign culture into their closest circle - A smaller percentage of the Romanians would look for their compatriots in order to communicate with them in a long stay in the foreign culture
More assertive communicative style and greater tolerance toward the foreign partner - Young people from Bulgaria demonstrate stronger interest in the understanding of their message on behalf of the foreign partner	**More aggressive communicative style and smaller tolerance toward the foreign partner** - Young people from Romania demonstrate weaker interest in the understanding of their message on behalf of the foreign partner – they expect asking questions in case of non-understanding

- A greater percentage of the Bulgarians don't use in their communication with a foreign partner words and phrases which would complicate the understanding	- A smaller percentage of the Romanians don't use in their communication with a foreign partner words and phrases which would complicate the understanding
- A smaller percentage of the Bulgarians would communicate in a different way with a partner from Western Europe and a partner from Africa	- A greater percentage of the Romanians would communicate in a different way with a partner from Western Europe and a partner from Africa
- A smaller percentage of the Bulgarians would react verbally or non-verbally in the appearance of intercultural differences	- A greater percentage of the Romanians would react verbally or non-verbally in the appearance of intercultural differences

While the first two groups of differences between Bulgarian and Romanian young people are culture-specific, determined by the value orientation of the societies and difficult to be changed, the last group contains characteristics which are an object of study and development. We can argue that the reported results in favour of Bulgarians are due to the fact that the latter have studied the module "Intercultural communication" in their period of higher education and as a result of this they have developed a greater empathy and tolerance in the intercultural dialogue. Therefore we have a confirmation of our conclusion concerning the establishment of competencies for successful intercultural cooperation through purposeful intercultural education and training.

In accordance with the contact theory of Allport, cited in the theoretical part of this paper our expectation is that the attitudes of the young people from Bulgaria and Romania towards intercultural dialogue and intercultural cooperation will become more and more favourable because of the sustainable trends of mobility, an increasing number of contacts with the representatives of other cultures and the enriched intercultural experience. This will have a positive impact on the cross-border cooperation in the region.

In relation to the older generations, as it was indicated in the average data of Eurobarometer survey, their attitudes towards intercultural cooperation are not so positive and in this sense do not encourage sufficiently the intercultural cooperation. The reasons for these attitudes were already discussed and was concluded that they have mainly objective character. If we remind the cultural familiarity theory, we can argue that the necessary condition for the improvement of the business and investment climate in the Bulgarian-Romanian border region is the shortage of the cultural distance between the two countries. In spite of the geographical proximity, the mental barriers still exist because of stereotypes and not knowing the neighbour. One of the possible instruments for positive changes in the cross-border situation are the so called "soft" projects with European funding, that is projects which include "people-to-people" actions in the sphere of education and culture. They can contribute to the creation of common identity in the Bulgarian-Romanian border region and in this way encourage the fruitful intercultural dialogue. Another possible instrument is the state policy of the two countries. For example, the existing bridge tax on the Bulgarian-Romanian border is an obstacle for the free movement of citizens from the two countries. From 1st July 2011 the Bulgarian government decreased the amount of the tax, but the same steps have to be undertaken by the Romanian side as well.

Anyway, we have many optimistic signals about the opportunities for the development of Bulgarian-Romanian intercultural cooperation in the border regions, namely:

- the increasing number of business partnership between Bulgarian and Romanian firms;
- the increasing number of joint European funded projects;
- the increasing tourist flow in both directions;
- the increasing number of people from both sides of the Danube, who want to study the language of the neighbour.

The authorities on national, regional and local level in the two countries have to transform these positive signals in a purposeful policy in order to encourage the economic and social development of the border regions in Bulgaria and Romania.

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