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Moving borders, crossing boundaries: Young peoples' identities in a time of change 2 - Central Europe: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia

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Abstract

This is the second of a series of presentations from 2010 to 2014, based on the development of the project being undertaken under the aegis of the Jean Monnet Professorship. A previous paper (Ross, 2010) reported on the Baltic States and Turkey. This paper reports findings on four central European states. I have held a series of focus groups with pupils (some aged c 12 years old, some c 16 years old) and some of their teachers in four countries that joined the Union seven years ago (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). I am trying to establish the discourses these young people use to construct their sense of identities, particularly with reference to the idea of possibly holding a European identity, or not. The survey is deliberately small scale and discursive, trying to avoid the pre-construction of categories by the researchers, and attempting to make an analysis through 'one pair of eyes', using some forms of discourse analysis that have been adapted to be used in the context of a range of languages. This study of the development of analytic themes should help us explore how young people variously engage with the development of their identities in the context of changing borders and boundaries in Europe.

This paper builds on last year's account of this project (Ross, 2010). In that paper I described the initial findings from the Baltic states and Turkey: this second paper explores some of the issues raised in the Visegrad states of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

This is part of a small-scale qualitative investigation of how young people – about 11 to 19 years old – are constructing their personal identities and becoming aware of their actual or potential European citizenship. The study focuses on two groups of countries: the candidate states of Turkey, Croatia, Iceland, Montenegro and FYR of Macedonia, and ten countries that recently joined the Union: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Czech Rep, Slovakia, Poland, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria.

Social identities are increasingly recognised as being both multiple and constructed contingently, within a context that includes the idea of Europe. Young people are developing identities that include intersecting dimensions, including gender, age, nation and European. A growing number of young people in parts of the Union acknowledge an at least partial sense of European identity alongside their national identity.

In these four states, I visited eleven locations: in each, two or three schools with different social mixes are selected, and in each school focus groups are conducted with two small groups, one of 12-13 year olds, one of 15 to 16 year olds. This is a total of 41 focus groups, and 247 young people. Despite this number, I emphasise I am not attempting a representative sample, but to identify the diversity of views expressed. I'm not concerned with legal nationality or status, but actual residence, so were significant, minorities are included. I also talked to a few teachers in each school.

Focus group discussions are not interviews. I get the young people to discuss issues between themselves, rather than responding to questions as individuals. This helps identify the discourses they use in talking about issues of culture, belonging and identity, rather than simple response to an outsider. The object is to identify their constructions, rather than have them respond to my constructions.

I set out a small number of very general topics – how they define themselves, how they think this compares to other people in the country, and in how they think their views differ from those of their parents. If it has not been raised, I also ask them about the impact of being European, and what 'being a European' might mean. I generally work in their own language, and immediately afterwards go through the recording with a colleague. I transcribe all data, and then use a free-coding system to identify themes, as the basis for analysis. Some of the older young people have sufficient skills and confidence to talk with me in English for most of the time, but I always work alongside someone who will help interpret more complex ideas and thoughts.

The particular approach of this project is that there is a sole researcher. This gives me a complete overview of the research process and the data, and also means that there is only one subjectivity interpreting the data and its meanings. I do not believe that objectivity is possible or meaningful in research of this nature, so by ensuring that all the data is collected and processed by a single pair of eyes (and a single pair of ears) means that it is all subject to the same degree of observer interpretation. I accept that positivists may see this as a weakness – but I see it as a strength.

A significant first impression has been how articulate and thoughtful nearly all the young people have been. They have, after some initial hesitations, generally become involved in serious debate, setting out ideas that reflect interest and reflection of these ideas. Many teachers have seemed surprised at this – and it is a second point that when I have afterwards asked the groups if they discuss these issues with their teachers, they nearly always say they have not.

The initial analysis

This report briefly touches on five broad thematic areas – in each case first generalising across the region, and secondly looking at some differences between each country.

1 How much do these young people identify with their country?

Symbols of national institutions, such as anthems, flags and national days are mentioned, but more frequently national political institutions are criticised as divisive, inefficient, and sometime corrupt.

Erik I The country's flag

Karol Z The Slovakian national symbol; our government

Stanislava S Our location, our territory (*Slovakia, Presov, School 1, Group 2*)

National and regional cultural behaviour is a more frequent example of identity: in all countries history, food and traditional customs and festivals were mentioned.

National identity is contingent: it is expressed particularly when outside the country, during international sporting events – and, they say, in times of war and conflict – in our parents and grandparents' time, not in ours.

Fabo O I think these days knowing our nationality is really important, but it is most important when there's something that brings the people together, like war, or things like that. But we are lucky that it's peace time, and we don't have to think about fighting for freedom, for our common freedom, or things like that, so we are lucky that we are in this situation (*Hungary, Pecs school 2 group 2*)

POLAND

Polish culture is expressed through its literature, its patriotic history of struggle.

Natalie L I think it's important to remember Polish history, because our ancestors fought for independence, and because of them we have a free country, so I think it's important to know who fought for us, and why. (*Bialystock, School 1, Group 1*)

There is a tension between insisting on the homogeneity of all Poles, and on the sense of regional variations in dialect, customs and outlook, which was also marked.

Jadwiga Z I believe there are regional differences. In Silesia, they have a different accent and language, different from those who live in Krakow and Zakopane....

Basia J Yes, .. but in general we would describe each other very similarly. (*Warsaw, School 2*)

Catholicism was also mentioned by some, more often critically than positively.

CZECH

Czech culture is represented by its musicians, its beer and its sporting achievements, as well as regional festivals and cultural traditions, and also Czech history and language.

Ryba B That we are a country of beer, and won the world ice hockey championships (*Ostrava School 2 Group 2*)

Slovakia is seen more as a sibling than as a foreign country.

Gabi I feel much closer to people from Slovakia than to other countries. I can watch their films in their own language, and I can understand them. I've got more friends in the direction of Moravia – they speak a little bit differently (*Hradec Kralove, School2, Group 1*)

SLOVAKIA

Slovak culture is preserved through language, festivals and history.

There's a particularly strong set of regional cultures, expressed through dialects, and a rural-urban divide.

Dominika S

Well, people from Bratislava think that are something more than the rest of us – but they aren't. Personally, I wouldn't like to live there.

Lenka M In eastern Slovakia, the people are much more modest. Children have to help their parents in their work. (*Banska Bystrica, School1, Group 1*)

The Czech Republic is seen as a foreign country that looks down on Slovakia: only the language is common.

Milan P They are different ... Czech is different, Some of them regard them as something more than the Slovaks. Not all of them – some. 'I'm a Czech, you're a Slovak – you're nothing'. (*Presov, School1, Group 3*)

HUNGARY

Hungarian culture was expressed through its food - *Eros Pista* (Paprika paste), beer, *Unicum* (aperitif) and the Yellow Trams. These often seemed to me media generated images. Football (especially Puskas in the 1950s) is another unifying factor for some, as are dances, festivals and games.

Luca We had a TV advertisement, about beer – and there was a question 'what is the national characteristics of Hungary?', and they has the yellow tram, and things like that.

Reka Famous customs, foods.

Reno Football – the golden football team from the 1950s – Puskas. (*Pecs, School 1, Group 1*)

Ultranationalists ('Greater Hungary', restoring the pre Trianon borders) can make it difficult to show patriotism.

Ferdinand P

I think no, because there are groups in Hungary who feel more proud of being Hungarian.

AR

Who would these groups be?

Flora H It's a kind of group, like Rockers or Punks, we call them *Magyarkodo* ['real Hungarians' – they wear the flag of Hungary ... a nationalist group, I don't know why - they have more interest in Trianon, they care about it more.

Ildiko R I think that most of the people don't feel that proudly of being Hungarian. Most think like we do. (Budapest School 1, Group 2)

2. Do they think their views are different from those of their parents and grandparents?

Most young people feel that their parents, and particularly their grandparents, lived through various forms of oppression in World War II and the period of Soviet domination, and that these experiences have made them more patriotic, prouder of their country, and more resistant to change than young people today.

Reno I think our parents are rather more Hungarians than we are – because we don't have wars, but our parents may have been involved in wars, and in a war situation you can really feel your identity.

Ildiko R I think they are more proud of it than we are – because maybe of the wars in the 50s, and I think because they fought for it, they appreciate it more. (*Hungary, Pecs, School 1, Group 1*)

Older people are more insular and conservative, travelling abroad less, speaking fewer languages, and having a stronger sense of national history and identity – because of the events of WWII and the Soviet period.

Zosia T I think that older people – my parents and grandparents - are scared about everything – about me, about themselves. They are not so open towards other people. Our parents are scared of new things – they don't use them, and are closed to new ideas. As younger people we are more open to new things, to people, to new information – we visit other countries – our parents are closed. (*Poland, Krakow, School 1, Group 2*)

But many also say that their parents have made them who they are, and formed their identity – so that they are similar to their parents in beliefs and feelings of identity.

POLAND

‘God, Honour and the Fatherland’ is a slogan of older people, rather than the young.

Some older people remain traumatised by WWII, fear Germans, and talk angrily about the past..

Sergiusz M I think there’s a huge difference between the older and the younger generations. The patriotism of older people has developed into egoism. Patriotism is about caring for the state, developing it, and times are changing. I think there’s xenophobia in Poland, and patriotism of older people isn’t a good patriotism. We had a lot of times in history when people with this kind of very conservative orthodoxy and patriotism have been against the country. (*Krakow, School 1, Group 1*)

Young people see older Poles as more traditionalist Catholics, and themselves as modernists: after the Smolensk air crash ‘the Affair of the Cross’ in Warsaw polarised the young from the old.

Kinga M When they put they put the cross before the presidential palace, the older generation was very pro putting a monument there, to commemorate the deaths, and they wanted the accident to be remembered, and the younger generation just stood there for fun, just to watch the whole cross affair, and to see these people – they weren’t really concerned with commemorating the event, but just wanted to watch what happened.

Beatrycze K I think that the history of our country is connected to God, and I think that one can be a patriot and not believe in God, not be a religious person. (*Warsaw, School 2, Group 2*)

CZECH

Parents and grandparents remain suspicious of Russia and its behaviour. Some are also anxious about Germany.

Ludmila K My grandma blamed the Russians when the ex-Polish President Lech Kaczynski died – she thought it was the Russian’s fault. And afterwards there was a whole discussion in our family on that issue. (*Ostrava, School 2, Group 2*)

But many of them also now talk of their varied mixed national origins: the borders are less important than they were.

Oldrich N I think yes, because in earlier days when people couldn’t travel abroad, they could see the world close. And after opening the borders, they could see the world open – and this makes their answer different from previous times.

Anezka J My grandmother began to travel a lot after the borders were opened, to Malta, and other countries. I think nowadays she would answer the same as we do – a citizen of the Czech Republic, but partly, maybe, even of Europe. Maybe. (*Hradec Kralove, School 1, Group 2*)

SLOVAKIA

Parents and grandparents talk of the hardship and rationing they experienced in the past, and the lack of choice.

Tereza N They didn't have so many things as we have now – televisions and computers. Like my mum didn't have her own clothes – she wore the clothes from her sister.

Ladislav S They lived in a different period. They had much less.

Ignac W They were brought in the socialist time, in a different way – and they did not have as much information as we do. (*Presov, School 1, Group 2*)

Some also think times were better then – there was less crime, more solidarity, more work opportunities: the 'socialist period' was just 'different'.

Ladislava K The older generation complains a lot about the current regime. Life was completely different – now we have everything.

Kludia J They worked harder, they did not have that many goods in the shops, as we do nowadays.

Lenka M There wasn't as much crime as there is now – they had a beautiful childhood, and this generation just sits in front of the computer.

Zuzana L They had less money, but the prices were much lower.

Ladislava K A lot of good in shops were in short supply – many could only get if you had connections in the shop.

Dominika S At that time there were few contrasts – it was more equal. (*Banska Bystrica, School 2, Group 2*)

HUNGARY

Those who experienced Soviet domination in the 1950s have more bitter memories than those who can only recall the 70s and 80s.

Luca R ... my grandmother - she starts to talk about the war. I just sit there and listen – it's like the thousandth time I've heard it. (*Pecs, School 2, Group 1*)

But there are also mixed views on whether the old times were better or not – there was greater security then that must be balanced against the greater freedoms of today.

- Agi V* They said that it was better than now, people were better.
- Edina K* For children it was more safe
- Agi V* Girls were not raped
- Edina K* I agree, it was safer
- Kata P* They could go out late in the evening, and there were no bad people like we have today. (*Pecs, School1, Group 1*)

3. Do young people identify with Europe?

European Union institutions are identified more than are European customs and practices: the Euro, the Schengen agreement, the ability to study and work across the Union are all mentioned:

- Basia J* *I think we in Europe are similar. We have different customs, but we are similar people. We are more open to other countries – like for example in the Schengen area we have access to work and school.*
- Jolanta P* *I feel European – I belong to Europe and to this continent.*
- Basia J* *Physically in appearance, we are not different. When you think about behaviour, you don't find differences. The approach to religion, the approach to patriotism, lifestyle, attitudes to dealing with your money. (Poland, Krakow, School 3, Group 1)*

– as are the political freedoms, similar legal rights, freedoms, peace and the democratic processes of the Union.

- Acedia C* *I think what unites Europe is religion and values and morals – even languages that come from the same family. ... Europe is also very liberal and tolerant. You can try almost anything in Europe – ... it's very good in Europe and America, Africa and Asia are less tolerant. In Human Rights and in Women's rights, the treatment of women, the conditions of work – these are worse in other places than in Europe – it's limited there. (Czech Republic, Ostrava, School 1, Group 1)*

POLAND

Peace, democracy, economic support and NATO are European positives for Polish young people.

- Gosia K* Being in the European Union is to feel free. I feel free in Poland, and in Belarus, they have to change something in the country, because it isn't really fair (*Bilaystok, School 1, Group 2*)

For some, the EU threatens Polish culture and autonomy, and should be resisted.

The Union is divided into east and west: young Poles fear they are in the east, but aspire to affiliate to the lifestyle and attitudes of the west.

Europe is made up of similar people – and for some, this means people who are white, Christian, and should resist the ‘Islamisation’ of Europe.

Klementyna K Europeans are different from Afro-Americans, who live in small villages, without TVs or computers, they are different – for sure, every country is different, and every person is different.

Erek W Europe is different because of Christianity. The main religion of the continent is Christianity. In other places they have Muslims, Buddhists ...

Olesia M Yes, cultures are different because of religion – but also ways of behaving. I have never been to Africa, but I saw it on TV – they have completely different clothes. They still wear clothes like in the bush. (Krakow, School 1, Group 1)

CZECH

Europe brings tolerance, peace and financial support to the Czech Republic. It has helped inter-country cooperation, and spread human rights.

But for some the open borders mean the spread of crime, and of migrants.

Domka B in the past there used to be borders. When we wanted to go abroad – we have Russian passports – it was very difficult to get visas to go to Prague.... Now there are no borders – we are in the EU and we can travel wherever we want, nobody discusses it.

Bozena J I think its good – people from abroad come to the Czech Republic. I think illnesses are on the increase – infectious diseases – I’m not grumbling about open borders, but it’s natural that infectious diseases are on the increase. (Ostrava, School 1, Group 1)

Some see the EU as selfish, not helping poorer countries, and ignoring environmental issues.

Varvara O In Europe, we would be supposed to help Germany, but I think we should not help them because in Africa they are poorer and have little, and they help each other more than Europe does. People in Europe have high living standards, but they help each less than poorer countries. (Hradec Kralove, School 1, Group 2)

SLOVAKIA

There appears to be less positive enthusiasm for the EU among many young Slovaks: fewer mention financial support, or political freedoms.

- Katka B* *We don't feel European. Maybe just the finance we get from the Union, but that's all*
- Josef B* *We've only been in the Union a short time, so we don't feel anything special about being Europeans.*
- Katka B* *We did not feel any change – just maybe in terms of the open borders and not needing a passport to travel – but that's all. There's no such sense of Europeaness in Slovakia – maybe in other countries, but not in Slovakia. ... But I don't feel any pride in being a member of the European Union – I just take it as a fact. (Banska Bystrica, School 2, Group 1)*

European culture is seen as well mannered, polite, Christian and white.

- Hedviga G* *I think a European is one who has a white skin colour, who looks like me.*
- Boleslav P* *Well, in America it's not like Europe. In America, there are a lot of killings, criminality – the mentality is completely different to ours.*
- Erik Z* *They are different in eating habits – American have fast food, African have what they can find, Indians have bamboos and plant roots to eat, and Europeans have normal food. In Europe we have normal food, not like in America where they have fast foods. Things like fries with everything.*
- Hedviga G* *Europeans are more modest, they are well mannered and nice to each other*
- Ctibor V* *Well in Africa, there are cannibals ... (Banska Bystrica, School 2, Group 1)*

There was less awareness of the Union, and of European issues, than in many other countries.

HUNGARY

Europe was sometimes contrasted with Hungary – it is seen as more open and optimistic. But there was also much stress on the values and structures of Europe, and of the benefit to Hungary.

- Ildiko R* *[Europeans] are more open – I like them rather than the Hungarian people, because I think they [Hungarians] are too passive, and they are usually unhappy!*
- Flora H* *Italians are very loud, and they are happy, but Hungarians are nervous and it's a very different morality*
- Domonkos O* *I think a lot of people see the bad side of things, and there is a better side – but Hungarians usually see the worst*

Ferdinand P I think the same as Domonkos O: in Hungary it's true that we always see the bad side of things

Ildiko R I think they [Europeans] have another life style, and it's better than ours. (*Budapest School 1 Group 1*)

There were also criticisms of how Europe acted to homogenise cultures, how its trade policy undermined local producers, and for other missed opportunities.

Roman K Countries are getting more and more similar to each other in the European Union. I haven't been abroad many times, but when I go abroad there are many things similar to what we have here.

Jolanka H There are good opportunities, but there are some bad things – there are more and more products coming from abroad – we should prefer Hungarian products, so our money is used by Hungarians within the country. (*Pecs, School 1, Group 2*)

4. Did young people express multiple identities?

While a few young people expressed a singular national identity, the great majority were happy to express a variety of identities – national and European were most frequent, but there were also town, regional, religious and ethnic identities.

Maciej W Well, as for me, it goes from being the smallest one, that's from the town, So if I was asked to define my identity I would start from the town which I from, Olsztyn, and then the region Warmia and Mazuria, then Poland, and after that, well, maybe Europe as well. In this direction, and in this order (*Poland, Olsztyn, School 2, Group 1*)

Some Czechs, Slovaks and Poles also said they sometimes felt Slav.

Acedia C I live with my grandma, and I know she perceives it completely differently. They understand themselves to be Czechoslovakians, they don't feel themselves to be Czechs, but to be Slavs. As Slavic nations, they see themselves to be together with Poland and other Slavic nations. (*Czech Republic, Ostrava, School 1, Group 1*)

POLAND

Regional identities were evident, but sometimes they were expressed as though this challenged Polish homogeneity.

Nelek S I think that I'm from Krakow. This is most important for me – it's my little ojczyzná [homeland/mother country]. The next is then Małopolska, and then the whole of Poland. I am Polish, I come from Poland. (*Krakow, School 1, Group 2*)

Augustyn Z In Silesia, they think of themselves as Silesian Poles, not just Poles. They speak in a dialect very characteristic of that region. --
- No, they're not less Polish. They're just more connected to their region. Also the Gdansk [region]. After the war most people who lived in the Gdansk area felt German – this was due to history – but this is now less and less important. (*Warsaw, School 2, Group 2*)

Young people felt that they were more European, more cosmopolitan, and more citizens of the world than their parents.

Malwina K I think older people feel more connected to Poland and feel they are more Polish, but not always.

Kinga M I think that the younger generation doesn't care if its Polish or something else – it doesn't feel a bond with the nation – the older people who fought for our independence feel more strongly the statement 'I am a Pole'.

Beatrycze K I feel that the younger generation feel more and more European than the older generations. The world is more and more open, everything is more unified and no country is on its own, but it's more and more said that we live in one Europe, and cultural differences are blending. (*Warsaw, School2, Group 2*)

CZECH

There were several young people of mixed national origins, who were able to discuss their multiple loyalties.

Ctirad L I have some Bulgarian and Russian ancestors – also Poland and Greece – I am not a full Czech - a little bit of Slovak and a little bit of German as well! Which do I feel closest to? I think all of the countries are good, and I think Bulgaria is closest to my heart. But I'd describe myself as a Czech person. As far as I know my grandparents fled from that Bulgaria to Czechoslovakia, and my grandfather met my grandma, and they started this family. And my grandma also has some relatives in Poland, so it's quite complicated. I only speak Czech.

Rostislav G At my grandparents they use a few Bulgarian words from time to time, for example, my grandma uses some special expressions.

Viera M I think I'm a one-eighth Polish person on my father's side, and on my mother's side I have one uncle married a Polish woman – but that Aunt speaks Czech as well, so I speak Czech with her. I

think that I'm half and half. If I represented a sports team – I don't know. I think that these cultures are very close to each other, so it's difficult for me to say. (*Ostrava, School 2, Group 1*)

Regional identities were common (sometimes transcending national borders), and were often described as weakening (in favour on a national identity) as they travelled abroad.

Nadezda S I am a Silesian person. I wouldn't say there is much difference from Moravia – but at the same time, it has a slightly different culture. But for me, Silesia is often forgotten, but it is a part of the Czech Republic, but Czech Republic is frequently only divided into Bohemia and Moravia, so that's why I am reminded about it. It has a different dialect – in Moravia cultural customs are older than Silesia, but in another way Silesia is differently connected

Zuzana T I have lived for six years in Ostrava, and for ten – eleven years in Moravia. I used to experience Moravian culture a lot – we used to dance Moravian dances in dancing groups with Hradistan – and the level of culture cannot be compared. Everything is being reconstructed, cultural dress and dancing groups, and you can't see that in Ostrava that much.

Nadezda S In Ostrava it's not as well preserved as in Moravia, Traditions are kept, but in Moravia they are kept far more. (*Ostrava, School 1, Group 1*)

SLOVAKIA

While many Slovakian young people said they had a European element in their identity, this was usually qualified as partial and subordinate to their Slovak identity.

Lenka M I don't think that Slovaks are proud of who they are – they are not very happy about being Slovaks

Dominika S Other countries may be proud of who they are, but not Slovaks (*Banska Bystrica, School 2, Group 2*)

There were several young people of mixed origin, who were well able to explain this.

Kludia K *Iný kraj, iný mrav* [Another region, another morality]. Some western Slovaks people think they're special because they live in the capital (*Presov, School 1, Group 1*)

HUNGARY

Several young people of mixed origin were explicit in discussing their various identities.

Julianna H It's not easy for me, because my mother is – not Croatian, but *Magyarországi Horvát* [the Croatian minority in Hungary], and my grandpa is too – so it's not easy – he's Croatian, and I'm

Hungarian and Croatian – I have to be proud of Hungary, and of Croatia – and my father is from the German minority – so I'm Croatian and Hungarian and German – so what?, and I speak English and Russian – I am from Hungary yes.

Izsak H I think that I have similar views on Hungarian identity as my parents, and my family is a Jewish family, so I have a Jewish identity also – and it's a hard question, whether Judaism is a religion or an ethnic – I don't know what. It's not an easy thing to identify who I am. (*Budapest, School 2, Group 1*)

Many young Hungarians expressed a feeling of 'being European', although some also contrasted Hungarian and European behaviours.

Lujza B I think yes, but not now – but after a hundred years or something. It will get worse and worse – and it's so important: OK, European Union, but not one country. And it's important for me.

Fabo O Well, yes – because in places that are very far from Europe, in places like Asia and the USA – well, if they don't really know where Hungary is, you say 'Europe', and then yes, they know where Europe is – they will say 'Yes, yes' and they will recognise you as a European.

Lujza B Yes, I think I'm European, but Hungarian too. (*Szeged, School 1, Group 1*)

5. Who is 'the other'? Where should the borders of Europe be set?

Asked about possible EU expansion, some young people in all four countries said, in essence, 'Why not?', and thought that any (European) country that wanted to should be allowed to join the EU.

Hedviga G Well, if they're in Europe, then why not?

Erik Z It depends on them – whether they would like to be a part or not. Well most probably yes. But it's their decision. (*Slovakia, Banska Bystrica, School 1, Group 2*)

More respondents were cautious, and responded on a case-by-case basis, sometimes referring to the democratic criteria of the Treaty of Amsterdam, but more often expressing reservations about Russian and Belorussian autocracy, power and aggression, to Turkey being 'different' (sometime explicitly Islamophobic).

Dominik E Russia is a poor country in respect of morality.

Olgiard L They still have fewer rights and freedoms than in Europe – I think the government sets everything and the people have to live

to their orders. In the European Union there is a democratic system. (*Poland, Bialystok, School 2, Group 2*)

The Roma were often singled out as ‘others’, being non- or partial-citizens. Although they were aware that stereotyping was wrong, a substantial number were prepared to do so about the Roma.

Verushka V I mind the Roma being here, because they moved here.

Eliska S I wouldn’t mind them here if they didn’t cause that much trouble.

Rostislava K I wouldn’t mind them if they didn’t move here in such great numbers.

Eliska S Well, they steal often, they damage civic property

Verushka V The city councils move them to the outskirts of the city, then it’s better – but then the city has to build these houses for them –

Eliska S And they needn’t work! They just rake the leaves, they don’t do anything, and they get money for it.

Vincenc L And they are still fat.

Verushka V And they have a lot of children, because they get welfare for them.

Zora P They are different from us, and they are vulgar! (*Czech Republic, Ostrava, School 1, Group 2*)

Similar fears were expressed against generalised ‘immigrants’, although there appeared to be good personal relationships with all their classmates who were of foreign or partially foreign origin.

Gazsi S The others [minorities] are like Chinese people here, but they can usually work, so they live there as well, and I don’t really know how they feel about the country (*Hungary, Pecs, School 2, Group 2*)

POLAND

There were many strong reservations about Russia, particularly about perceived aggressive tendencies. A few said ‘why not?’

Rather more were against Turkish membership than were in favour. Islam and other prejudices were cited.

Tomas S About Turkey, no, I don’t think that is a good idea, because of the aggressive Muslims – they can conquer and fight for the rights of religion – it’s not good for Turkey to join.

Olgierd L Muslims too – because they are coming from other countries and they are fighting for their rights – and many times they are lazy and they want money and help from governments.. So I think

when Turkey joins the European Union, then the Islamisation of Europe go further and further.

Tomas S Turkey joining will not bring any good. (*Bialystock, School 2, Group 2*)

Also 'othered' were Africans, Germans and those with different skin colour.

One group, with a Roma class in their school, discussed the Roma situation with understanding and sensitivity.

CZECH

While a few saw Europe as stretching to the Urals, the majority did not favour Russian membership of Europe, though there were some in favour.

Most were against Turkish membership, claiming that they stoned people, would force headscarves on other states, and would build mosques everywhere.

Verushka V It's partly in Asia, and partly in Europe, so ...but the habits are different

Vincenc L Everyone wears scarves on their face and they stone people to death.

Verushka V There's a different religion, and there are different rituals and customs. (*Ostrava, School 1, Group 2*)

The Roma were described with consistently hostile stereotypes, as troublemakers, 'not like us', law-breakers and as 'not being white'.

SLOVAKIA

Opinion was equally divided on Russian membership of the EU.

Turkish membership of Europe was strongly opposed: they were described as killing for their faith, and as non-European Islamics.

Racial stereotyping was evident in several instances: skin colour was mentioned, Africans were described as cannibals, and Americans as fat, lazy and immodest.

Hedviga G Well, Europeans are more modest, they are well mannered and nice to each other

Ctibor V Well in Africa, there are cannibals ...

Erik Z It needs a lot of thinking to answer these questions

Hedviga G The way it's divided now is good. Europe isn't connected to Africa, and it's good. (*Banska Bystrika, School 1, Group 2*)

HUNGARY

There was a strong consensus against Russian membership of the EU: Russians were described as inflexible, dictatorial and ‘too east’

Imre T It depends [on the Russian] influence within the European Parliament – if the proportion is too high, they will influence the life of Europe. But it could be good - a much easier position for the negotiation of oils and gas.

Fabian N They could help us quite a lot.

Imre T There are people who really dislike Russia because of the socialist communist past of the country. And they were not very happy about this. I’m not happy, I’m not sure ... (*Pecs, School 1, Group 2*)

There was some division on Turkish membership: reservations were expressed in generally more moderate terms than elsewhere.

This has been an all too brief summary of the very diverse and thoughtful comments of 250 young people. I shall be providing much fuller and more elaborate findings: this has just been a first scratch at the surface of a very rich and fertile field of data.

References

- Ross, A. (2010) Border crossings: Young people’s identities in a time of change 1 – the Baltic states and Turkey. In Cunningham, P. and Fretwell, N. (2010) *Lifelong Learning and Active Citizenship*. pp 189 - 201