Final version submitted to the journal on 19/03/2015

Towards a sociology of the EU: The relationship between socio-economic status and ethnicity and young people's European knowledge, attitudes and identities

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between social backgrounds – socio-economic status and ethnicity – and European knowledge, identities and attitudes to European Union (EU) membership in two member states – the Eastern European newcomer Bulgaria and the Western European notoriously Eurosceptic United Kingdom. It adopts an empirical sociological approach in line with recent calls for more sociological input into EU studies. By drawing on 174 individual interviews with 9/10-year-old primary school pupils, the paper is

focused on young people: a group which 'holds the key' to the future of the EU, yet is entirely neglected by academics and policy-makers. The findings suggest that despite the substantial national differences, the significance of socio-economic status and ethnicity is strong cross-nationally. European identity is largely elite and racialized and those at the margins of society in my sample are not at all involved in the European project. A key theoretical contribution this paper makes is to move beyond mono-causal explanations by providing an account of the intersection of national context, socio-economic status and ethnicity in relation to young people's European identities.

Keywords

Bulgaria, young people, England, European identity, socio-economic status, sociology of EU

The European Union 'has a tremendous impact on the European citizens' lives' (Díez Medrano, 2008: 4) and it plays an important role as an international actor. However, one key problem threatens its future and development: the lack of democratic legitimation, recently exacerbated after the last wave of enlargement towards Eastern and Central Europe and the Eurozone crisis. This democratic legitimation 'depends on the development of a more robust common European identity' (Bache and George, 2006: 66). While a number of authors have looked

at various issues related to European identity development, very few have explored the relationship between European identities and socio-economic status and ethnicity. Yet, as Sanchez (2006: 33) argues, identities are grounded' in 'social structures and realities'. Moreover, as Tolonen (2013: 55) rightfully reminds us in this journal, 'if closer attention is paid to the living circumstances of young people, it is apparent that social, cultural and material structures have a strong presence in their lives.'

This article, therefore, aims to fill an important gap in the literature by comparing the relationship between social backgrounds – socio-economic status and ethnicity – and European knowledge, identities and attitudes to European Union (EU) membership in two member states – the Eastern European newcomer Bulgaria and the Western European notoriously Eurosceptic United Kingdom. It adopts an empirical sociological approach in line with recent calls for more sociological input into EU studies (Favell and Guiraudon, 2009, 2011; Saurugger and Merand, 2010). The study is focused on a group almost entirely neglected by academics and policy-makers, namely young people at the age of 9-10. Young people are very important actors (Jukarainen, 2003) because attitudes towards Europe and European identities start developing from an early age (Barrett, 2007). From the age of 6 children 'select' a national identity and by 9 they attribute considerable significance to it.

Subsequently, by 10 they might endorse a supranational identity such as the European one (Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, identities formed in childhood and adolescence are expected to be less malleable (Jenkins, 1996). As Hooghe and Dassonneville (2013: 2) argue in this journal, 'research suggests quite strongly that even at an early age, adolescents already have well-developed ideas about how they will participate in political life once they are adults.'

Finally, identities do not just develop overnight once a young person becomes "officially" an adult and it is equally impossible to draw a line between children and youth or adolescents because identity formation is an ongoing process whose development should be traced back by focusing attention on younger age groups. Hence, the study will examine whether and to what extent intra-national differences in young people's identifications, knowledge and attitudes can be explained with reference to socio-economic status (SES) and ethnicity. In other words, is the European identity equally endorsed by young people of different backgrounds? By conducting the research in two EU member states - Bulgaria and the UK - the influence of national context will be revealed. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach: it draws on 174 individual semi-structured interviews with 9/10-year-old primary school pupils as well as content analysis of textbooks and national curricula materials and interviews with parents, teachers and head-teachers. The next sections will

outline the theoretical contributions the study aims to make before presenting the methodology and the empirical data.

The Sociology of European Identity: Illusion or Reality?

Even a brief overview suggests that sociology and EU studies rarely go hand-in-hand. Political scientists, economists and historians have much more actively contributed to the subject area. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the reasons for this not least because others have successfully done this (Díez Medrano, 2008; Favell and Guiraudon, 2009; Saurugger and Merand, 2010). Nevertheless, a few arguments are pertinent. First, as Favell and Guiraudon (2009) state, sociology's potential input should not be underestimated. The dominating approach in EU studies, which is a largely top-down one and indeed fixed on 'what lies above water' – 'the *visible* institutions and policies of the EU' (Favell and Guiraudon, 2009: 551) - has numerous advantages. But, this focus on the EU as a 'political construction' should be complemented by 'the study of European Union as an economic and societal *process*' (Favell and Guiraudon, 2009: 552). Moreover, as Díez Medrano (2008: 4) states, it 'makes sense' to conduct sociological research 'now' rather than a few decades ago, because the EU covers 'a whole range' of areas and 'has a tremendous impact on the European citizens' lives.'

Nonetheless, when studying European identities scholars have often endorsed predominantly psychological frameworks, which focus on the individual or largely 'constructivist' ones, utilizing 'soft methods such as discourse analysis and meta-theory' (Favell and Guiraudon, 2009: 569), thus underestimating the role of society. One area in which the societal process can be traced is by investigating whether certain social strata support European integration and endorse European identity more vehemently than others. Is Europeanness a predominantly upper class, elite-driven process? Would it matter if European integration is equally endorsed by people of different backgrounds? The study will address these questions by focusing on young people because it is worth finding out not only whether social backgrounds influence Europeanness, but whether this process starts from an early age.

There are two main ways in which similar issues have been tackled. First, in an innovative fashion Díez Medrano (2008: 10-13) investigates whether people with strong levels of European identification constitute a '"European" middle class'. Unsurprisingly, his conclusions are not optimistic but they might in part be a result of his very minimalistic definition of 'European' - people who 'identify more with Europe than with their nation' (Díez Medrano, 2008: 10). Second, the dominating approach in relation to social backgrounds (overviews

in Carey, 2002 and Gabel, 1998) involves a focus on the role of 'demographics' or 'individual-level' factors on support for European integration.

Integration studies (e.g. Carey, 2002; Clements, 2009; Gabel, 1998) suggest that education and social class/occupation influence attitudes and support for European integration. Those with higher education and social status are more likely to have a positive attitude towards Europe. The impact of age is not that clear (Carey, 2002; Clements, 2009). Ethnicity is also rarely present as an indicator and the results about its impact are contradictory. In Britain Cinnirella and Hamilton (2007: 496) claim that South-Asian ethnic minorities have 'manifested a higher European identity', whereas Clements (2009) says that race 'does not appear to be an important factor in shaping opinions towards the EU.' By contrast, in Convery et al's (1997) study ethnic minority children know less about Europe and feel less European. This article will also look into the role of ethnicity, but instead of merely focusing on attitudes and support for European integration, it will investigate the relationship between social backgrounds and European identity, because support for European integration and European identity are 'different, though related, issues' (Díez Medrano and Gutierrez, 2001: 755).

Why Bulgaria and England?

Two reasons guided the choice of a most different systems design (MDSD), which is about comparing different rather than similar countries. First, Przeworski and Teune (1970: 34) claim it is more suitable than the most similar systems design (MSSD) when the interest is in the 'variation of the observed behaviour at a level lower than that of systems' such as individuals, groups, communities. A good approach is to compare countries 'because of a common democratic structure or institutional membership, such as membership of the EU' (Livingstone, 2012). One of the key advantages of using MSSD is that it allows researchers to "test" the importance of national differences rather than to "presume the nation's importance" (Livingstone, 2011). Moreover, as Beniger (1992: 32) argues 'in fact it is through just such comparison of disparate things that social science has made its greatest advances". Second, the EU encompasses different states and its motto is 'unity in diversity'. By comparing countries with different historical, cultural and political trajectories, a fuller picture about the potential factors that play a role can be drawn. Bulgaria and England are indeed very different from each other. For a number of decades they were part of two blocs on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, 'engaged' in a Cold War. Bulgaria is a representative of the Eastern European bloc. It is an average-sized EU member, one of the newest entrants with the last wave of enlargement and the poorest at present. In general, support for European

integration in the country is among the highest in the Union, though declining with membership. England, on the other hand, is part of the United Kingdom – one of the richest, biggest and oldest EU members, situated in Western Europe. Support for European integration is among the lowest in the UK and England is perhaps the most Eurosceptic of the four nations (Wellings, 2014). To sum up, if the EU is indeed about 'unity in diversity,' and European identity is the unifying characteristic the study is interested in, then it is far better to compare two seemingly quite varied members than similar ones because they will provide a better illustration of the impact of diversity. It will be much easier to conclude on the 'universality' of significance of socio-economic status or ethnicity in relation to young people's European knowledge and identifications if similar trends in regards to these variables/factors are found in two such different countries. In other words, it is highly likely that if certain patterns and influences stand out in spite of all national differences, then they are really important for the process of European identity formation.

The proponents of comparing similar case studies/countries will probably disagree with the above statement and will instead argue that it will be difficult to establish the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable in two countries in which the dependent variables are likely to differ. Scholars (a review in Anckar, 2008: 390) have demonstrated, however, that 'it

will never be possible to keep constant all potential explanatory factors' and that even similar countries are not really that similar and attempts at simplifying and putting together countries in certain groups ("Western Europe", "Arab world", etc.) have often 'obscured altogether what was significant theoretically about those countries' (Teune, 1990: 43). This paper will attempt to achieve a balance between standardization and contextualization by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, thus the importance of national differences will not be assumed but will be probed in the analysis together with the importance of other factors such as socio-economic background and ethnicity.

Socio-economic status, ethnicity and school: Cross-national differences

Bulgaria and England are two very different countries and it is important to see what the potential impact of social backgrounds is. Social inequality is perhaps higher in England than in Bulgaria, given that 'one of the largest-scale destratification experiments in the history of the human race' (Ganzeboom and Nieuwbeerta, 1999: 340) took place during communism. A UNDP report (2007: 5) claims that if there is a middle class in Bulgaria, it is virtually incomparable to the traditional middle classes of Western Europe because of low income levels.

Three indicators will measure SES. The most one is occupation, but 'there are some occupational categories whose status appears incongruent with

their income or education' (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007: 1099). This is certainly true in Bulgaria where higher occupational status is not necessarily a reflection of higher education. Estimates (Raichev and Stoychev, 2008: 50) show that roughly 30% of Bulgarians work in jobs not equivalent to their qualifications.

Another measure of SES, especially when researching young people, is the schools they attend. But school will not be a sufficient indicator because of the different segregation patterns. English schools are 'highly socially segregated' (Smithers and Robinson, 2010: i). There are also instances of ethnic clustering but mainly as a result of parents' choice. By contrast, schools in Bulgaria are segregated primarily along ethnic lines – although these sometimes coincide with SES. Bulgaria has been widely criticised for the segregation of its Roma minority. '70% of the Roma children of school age are currently educated in the Roma ghetto schools' (Ivanov, 2006). Although allegedly a process of desegregation (Nounev, 2006) is under way, one of the schools in this sample was 100% Roma. On the level of SES, however, school does not play the same role in perpetuating inequalities as in England mainly because during communism the strategies of 'destratification' of society were concentrated in and executed through school (Ganzeboom and Nieuwbeerta, 1999: 340).

Finally, although the focus of this paper is on SES and ethnicity rather than socialisation as a process, the above outline demonstrates that the role of a key socialization agent such as school should also be explored. Farrell (2010: 107-108) argues that school is 'the primary site of the creation of identity' and 'education is used as the field to habituate a European identity.' There have been a few policy steps in that respect from the 1970s onwards. The emphasis has been on promoting cross-national exchanges and mobility but most initiatives target older adolescents or young adults. While there is some value in incorporating teaching about the EU in national curricula, sociologists (Farrell, 2010) believe that the most effective way is by providing more opportunities for everyday life interaction through exchange trips. It will also be interesting to see whether travelling to other European countries plays a role in relation to young people's European knowledge and identifications.

Beyond Mono-Causal Explanations: the Intersection of National context, SES and Ethnicity

It became clear that a number of factors are likely to influence young people's European identities. The first one is national context. Second, socio-economic and ethnic differences are also likely to play a role. The expectation is that inequality is more significant along socio-economic lines in England and ethnic ones in Bulgaria. But what is the relationship between national context,

SES and ethnicity? Clements (2009: 54) offers a model of an assumed causal ordering of variables. 'Explanatory factors' are 'grouped into blocs containing variables of a similar type' arranged according to their relationship with the dependent variable. Thus, 'fixed personal characteristics' such as age, gender and race are in the first bloc and 'cause' at least partially education (second bloc) and then all 'acquired social characteristics'. Making claims about causality in the social sciences is problematic but even more so in our case. What is the relationship between education and social class or in fact between national identity and education in Bulgaria? Is national identity 'caused' by education or is it the other way round? How do we compare two countries? Moreover, as Slavtcheva-Petkova (2013) argues, social structures work in conjunction with socialisation as a process and it is neither feasible nor desirable to look for causal relationships between factors that do not interplay in a linear fashion. The sample is fairly small and not representative and it is much better to endorse Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality (Rasmussen, 2010; Tolonen, 2013), which is a qualitative approach. National differences are closely intertwined with socio-economic and ethnic differences and we are likely to observe a mutual reinforcement of inequalities, or 'intersectionality'. We might find that some young people are 'hit' by 'multiple forms of exclusion' (Crenshaw, 2004). Thus, a Bulgarian Roma child from a poor background is considerably

more likely to feel excluded from the European project than an English majority child from a privileged background. McCall's (2005) intracategorical complexity approach is adopted - we start with pre-conceived categories and then explore relationships when trends of intersectionality are apparent. A key contribution this study makes, therefore, is to move beyond mono-causal explanations by showing the intersection of national context, SES and ethnicity in relation to young people's European identities. This analysis will be conducted in a predominantly qualitative way by closely exploring the relationships between the different factors rather than conducting any form of multivariate quantitative analysis.

The research questions are:

RQ1: What is the relationship between SES and ethnicity and young people's European knowledge, identifications and support for EU membership?

RQ2: To what extent is the importance of SES and ethnicity contingent on national context?

RQ3: What is the relationship between SES, ethnicity and national context in relation to young people's European identities?

Methodology

Sampling

Recruitment of participants took place through theoretical sampling. Samples were ethnically boosted (32.7% in Bulgaria and 35.8% in the UK), so that conclusions can be drawn about ethnicity. The focus was on two minority groups – Roma in Bulgaria and Asian young people, mainly from India, in England. Given the sample size, it was not possible to include representatives of a variety of ethnic groups or indeed of all four nations in the UK. Therefore, the label 'ethnic minority' is hardly telling given that the two minority groups are different from each other: historically and culturally but also in relation to Europe and potentially the EU. These differences undoubtedly have repercussions on the level of European identities. Attempts are consistently made not only to report on the role of ethnicity but also to account for the possible reasons that explain that role. However, it is still important to preserve the ethnic minority label because both the respective member states and the EU institutions use similar labels and if despite the differences common trends are found, then we can argue with greater certainty that ethnicity is an important factor.

All 174 participants (67 in England and 107 in Bulgaria) were recruited through schools after parental consent. The head teachers of schools whose catchment areas cover different socio-economic characteristics (as determined by Ofsted reports in England and local council statistics in Bulgaria) were

approached to ensure a fair representation. The main aim was to achieve some variation along socio-economic and gender lines and representatives from at least two ethnic groups from each country. Initially, two towns of fairly similar size and distance from the capital cities were included. Nearly all schools in both towns were approached but while in Bulgaria all head teachers agreed to participate, in England only 50% agreed. Due to the lack of representation of schools from more deprived neighbourhoods and with ethnic minority children, additional schools in a nearby town, village and city were approached. The further recruitment of participants was strictly based on the principles of theoretical sampling to ensure fair representation of different socio-economic and at least two ethnic groups. Once a school was selected all pupils in the respective year group were invited to participate. The response rate was 35% – 46% in Bulgaria and 25% in England. One parent questionnaire per household was distributed and 67.2% were returned (79.4% in Bulgaria and 48% in England). Teachers and headteachers were also interviewed and the educational curricula and relevant textbooks were analysed.

Given the size of the total pupil population in that age group and the guiding principle of theoretical saturation, the study did not aim for representativeness and generalisation. Table 1 shows how the sample deviated from the national average. The gender ratios were fairly similar but the samples

were ethnically boosted. The data was also subjected to negative case analysis so any findings that appeared to contradict the main emerging trends were thoroughly investigated (Slavtcheva-Petkova and Mihelj, 2013).

Table 1

Measures

Young people's views were researched through semi-structured individual interviews, conducted between February 2009 and February 2010. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. The European questions were closed- and open-ended. Cards and photographs were also used. Data on social backgrounds was gathered. In the interviews young people were asked a range of questions, but this article focuses on a few fairly representative of the respective topics. On knowledge, the questions are: 'Do you know what Europe is?', 'Do you know what the EU is?' and two card questions in which young people were asked whether they recognised the EU flag and the euro. On identity, one quantitative question and its follow-up qualitative question are discussed: 'Are you European?' and 'Why did you say you are not European?' if the answer to the first question was 'no'. Some open-ended questions are also used: 'What does it mean to be European?', 'What do you think Europe is?' and 'What do you think the EU is?' On support for EU

membership, the question is: 'Do you think Bulgaria/Britain should be part of the EU?' Extracts from the interviews will be used to illustrate some trends and as examples of answers to the qualitative questions.

European Identities between Class and Ethnicity

The sample indicates some national differences between the two countries in the levels of European identification and awareness and knowledge of the EU (table 2). The socio-economic and ethnic structures of the two countries also differ significantly, and it is reasonable to expect that their impact on young people's European identifications and knowledge will differ accordingly. To assess whether that is the case in my sample, the data from Bulgaria and England are reviewed separately.

Table 2

SES

Regardless of which indicator of SES is examined, the results imply that young people from poorer backgrounds in my sample know less about Europe and the EU, are less likely to identify as European, and are less in support of their country's EU membership than their wealthier peers. In Bulgaria, this applies most fully to the young people from the school, located in a district with the

lowest SES. Both the EU flag and the euro look familiar to considerably fewer pupils in this school: only 60.6% have seen the EU flag[1] (Table 3) and 45.5% the euro coin as opposed to an average of 94.9% and 76.7%, respectively. These pupils are also predominantly against EU membership. The most notable distinction is, however, in the level of European identification, where only 6.1% in the school located in the poorest neighbourhood define themselves as European as opposed to an average 51.4%.

Table 3

Similar patterns of association appear when examining links with parental occupation. There is a clear association with European knowledge and especially identification: 76% of young people whose parents are in highest-paid jobs say they are European as opposed to only 9.5% of those whose parents are in lowest-paid jobs. Also, all young people whose parents' jobs are in grades AB have seen the EU flag in contrast to 61.9% in grades DE. The degree of support for membership is also higher among young people whose parents are in highest job occupations (76%) than in lowest job grades (33.3%). These tendencies are supported by the comparison on the basis of parents' education. Young people in my sample whose parents have higher education tend to feel more European. Similarly, the percentage of supporters of EU

membership is highest among children whose parents have completed at least secondary school.

The findings are interesting indeed because they run against some academic arguments. Despite the allegedly less significant stratification in Bulgaria and high percentage of people who work in jobs not equivalent to their qualifications, my study suggests that European identity is stronger among young people whose parents are in better-paid jobs that require higher qualifications. Even in this seemingly less socially stratified society, European identity is class-dependent.

Are the social divisions in the European project even stronger in my English sample then? The data seem to support this expectation. Young people differ in their levels of European identification and EU knowledge. The lowest level of knowledge of Europe is in the school situated in the most deprived area of the county. Differences are even more notable when it comes to EU knowledge, where no one in the poorest area school knows what the EU is. Similarly, 90% and 75%, respectively, of the pupils from the two schools situated in the most advantaged areas recognise the EU flag, in contrast to only 12.5% of pupils in the school in the poorest area. The same trend is repeated in terms of European identification and support for EU membership. Thus, no one in the most disadvantaged area school says s/he is European. Moreover, only the

young people from this school think Britain should not be part of the EU (62.5% vs. 5% on average).

Parents' occupational status implies a similar conclusion. Young people whose parents are in better-paid jobs know more about Europe and the EU and feel more European but there is no clear trend in support of EU membership. The association seems to be the strongest for European identity – stronger than in Bulgaria, which is likely a result of more substantial class differences in England. In reality, these tendencies are probably stronger: due to missing data results do not include the young people from the school in the most deprived area.

The relationship between parents' education and European knowledge and identification in my English sample is less clear-cut. Young people whose parents have attended higher education seem to feel European but these findings should be approached with caution due to missing data and the significance tests.

Ethnicity

The results suggest that the class-related divisions in part coincide with or are reinforced by ethnic ones. The recognition of the EU flag is considerably higher among ethnic Bulgarians in my sample than Roma. Moreover, twice as many

ethnic Bulgarians say Bulgaria should be part of the EU and 4 times more Roma are against membership. The most significant difference, however, is in the level of European identification: only two Roma define themselves as European in contrast to more than a half of ethnic Bulgarian in my sample. Evidently, the most recent attempts to integrate the Roma minority, boldly labelled 'the decade of Roma inclusion', have not yet succeeded. The results support Ivanov's (2006) claim that ethnic segregation in schools is still evident and imply that this segregation has repercussions in the realm of European identifications. In Bulgaria feeling European is not only a class-bound identity, but also a racialized one.

In line with our expectations, the impact of ethnicity in my English sample is not as significant. Ethnic majority and minority young people are equally knowledgeable about Europe, but slightly differ in their knowledge about the EU as well as in their ability to recognise the EU flag and the euro. As many as 92.9% and 57.1% of ethnic majority pupils in my sample recognise the currency and the flag as opposed to 80% and 36% of minority pupils. As in Bulgaria, the most considerable discrepancy is in European identification: 66.7% of the ethnic British in my sample define themselves as European in contrast to 28% of the minority. However, unlike in Bulgaria, there are no ethnicity-based differences in young people's attitudes towards Europe in my sample.

Intersections between class and ethnicity and the role of national context

To better explain the findings, it is now important to look at the interrelationship between class, ethnicity and national context, including the educational system. There appear to be trends of intersectionality in both countries but stronger in my Bulgarian sample, which partially explains the notable difference in European knowledge (albeit not necessarily identity) between Roma and Indian-origin children. There is a link between ethnicity and SES in Bulgaria: none of the parents from the ethnic minority school are in highest-paid occupations (AB) as opposed to 40% on average. In contrast, as many as 42.4% of parents in the Roma school are in categories DE compared to 9.5% on average. In the UK, 22.7% of parents from the ethnic minority school are in AB jobs as opposed to 65% on average. Similarly, 27.3% are in DE jobs in contrast to 5.4% on average (missing data for school 2).

A variety of reasons explain the differences between the minority groups, not least of which is their different social standing. Roma youth are marginalized whereas Indian-origin children in the UK are a relatively advantaged minority in comparison with other minorities, which is not to say that they do not suffer from a degree of social exclusion. A key explanatory factor seems to be the different degree of endorsement of their national identities. 60% of the ethnic minority pupils in my English sample define themselves as English and 68% as British

as opposed to 40% of Roma in my Bulgarian sample who define themselves as Bulgarian. The qualitative data show that for the majority of Indian children who neither define themselves as European nor as British or English, this is not due to lack of knowledge but a more subtle conflict between their geographical origins and current addresses. The following two replies to the 'Why did you say you are not European?' question are telling:

- I live from Asia, I go to Asia. I am Asian British, not British.
- *Are British people European?*
- Yes, they would be, because they are part of Europe.

- I don't know. I asked my Mum 'Am I European?' No, I am not European. I am either British or English or Hindu. That's what my Mum says. I say what she says.

These young people do not feel European not because they do not know that Britain is part of Europe but because their ethnic geographical origin is in conflict with European identity. This is where the notable difference with the Bulgarian ethnic minority children lies – for the majority of Roma, it is their lack

of knowledge about Europe and weak or no national identity that prevents them from identifying as European:

- *Are you European?*

- From Europe?

- *Do you feel European?*

- No.

- *What does it mean to be European?*

- To be like – I don't know.

- *Why did you say you are not European?*

- Because I am Bulgarian, Gypsy ("циганин") actually.

- *Are Gypsies and Bulgarians European?*

- I don't know.

Quite tellingly, most Roma who reply to the 'What does it mean to be European?' question say Europeans are an out-group. 61.1% do not know what the EU is and among those who answer the open question, the majority says that the EU is about (rich) people gathering and talking. When asked what Europe is, a quarter of ethnic Bulgarians define it as continent while only one Roma uses the geographical depiction. More than a third define Europe as a state – different from Bulgaria. A description present only in the majority group

is a union. Evidently, Roma children's perceptions of Europe and European-ness partially explain why they do not feel Europe – the majority of the Roma children in my sample does not even know what Europe is, and those who do, associate it with an exclusive club and/or a foreign country. Again a range of factors intersect – their lower SES coupled with little exploration of Europe as a topic on the educational curriculum and weaker parental mediation (Author A, 2013). The above answers also clearly show that identity is an ongoing process and pupils' attempts to come to grips with some of the concepts used by the interviewer are indicative of some of the issues they encounter. Needless to say, research interviews are only one potential method of gauging pupils' ideas and the wider study utilises other approaches to capture different aspects of the identity formation process (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013; Slavtcheva-Petkova and Mihelj, 2013; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2014).

The analysis of the open-ended questions reveals not only ethnic but also socio-economic differences. Children's social status influences their ideas of Europe, the EU and what it means to be European. The pupils from more advantaged backgrounds in Bulgaria tend to define Europe as both a political and a geographical entity. Similarly, in England the word continent dominates the accounts of middle-class pupils in my sample and is hardly ever used by the children attending the school in the most deprived area of the county. Children

of parents in lower-paid jobs tend to define Europe as a state – different to their own. Overall, the lower children's position in the social structure is, the more likely they are either not to know what Europe is or to perceive it as a foreign country or a rather exclusive, elite-led political entity – and hence something they do not belong to. Needless to say, my sample is not representative so it would be worth exploring these trends on a wider scale.

Finally, it is worth further investigating the role of school as well as the importance of travel. A closer look at table 2 reveals some notable national differences in the levels of European knowledge. 91% in England report they know what Europe is as opposed to only 62% in Bulgaria. A reverse trend, albeit not that strong, is evident in relation to the EU but also quite clearly in the recognition of the EU flag – 84% of Bulgarian children recognise it as opposed to 49% in England. The analysis of the school curriculum and the interviews conducted with teachers and headteachers provide a few possible explanations. In England most teachers in my sample report they have had Europe as a geography topic on the curriculum. In the geography curriculum for key stage 2, Europe is part of 'locational knowledge' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). Europe is studied as a continent and as part of a theme with the aim 'to study a range of places and environments in different parts of the world, including the UK and the EU' (Department for Education and

Employment, 1999). Although the term "EU" is used, pupils do not learn about the EU as an organisation but about the three countries in the EU with the highest populations and largest areas as well as about the largest mountain range, the longest river and the two largest seas. All teachers say they have not covered the EU as an organisation and even if they mentioned the EU, it was part of a geography topic or as one headteacher summarised, 'learning about different countries in the EU, but not much more'. In one school the majority of children reported they were taught about the EU but their head teacher clarified they had a topic about the UN. 'There may be a major confusion between the EU and the UN", she said. The only example of teacher's initiative was a French teacher who was actively promoting the personality of the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy as well as some national symbols of France. There was a photo of Sarkozy in one of the classrooms and most children knew who he was.

In Bulgaria, on the other hand, pupils in my sample have not studied about Europe as a continent. The focus of the national curriculum is on developing knowledge about their nation state and the national symbols and the target is for children to 'identify themselves through the national symbols' (Ministry of Education and Science, 2003). Teachers are required to nurture a 'patriotic feeling' (Ministry of Education and Science, 2003). Europe is mentioned only

once in year three when children learn that Bulgaria is situated in Southern Europe. The EU is introduced as a topic in the last lesson at the end of year four but all children in the sample had not yet reached that point. Moreover, teachers admitted that they rarely had the time to cover the very last lesson in the textbooks. The only lessons in which they can potentially initiate discussions about Europe are the so-called class-teachers' lessons. 'We were given a CD about the EU when Bulgaria entered the EU in 2007. It is a very nice CD but I haven't used it because in these class-teacher lessons we mainly deal with housekeeping issues', a teacher explained. Only one of the seven teachers interviewed actually showed initiative and repeatedly sent emails with information about the EU to her pupils and put up a poster about the EU in their classrooms. The children in her class appeared to be more knowledgeable about the EU than their peers. It is worth pointing out as well that both the EU and the national flags are waved on top of most schools in Bulgaria. Moreover, both flags are raised during official celebrations and ceremonies in school.

Therefore, school appears to be an important socialisation agent when it comes to instilling knowledge about Europe but knowledge in itself, although a prerequisite for identification, does not necessarily lead to European identities (Slavtcheva-Petkova and Mihelj, 2013). Do trips to Europe make a difference then? None of the children interviewed had participated in any organised trips or

exchange visits but 16.8% of the Bulgarian children and 65.7% of the English children have travelled on holiday to Europe. Most of these children (83.4% in Bulgaria and 93.2% in England) claim they know what Europe is, but European holidays seem to imply stronger European identification for English children only. Two-thirds of the pupils in my study define themselves as European whereas in Bulgaria only half do. Bulgarian children probably see a disjuncture between the Europe they live in and the one abroad, which they define as a 'better place'. Exchange and study trips are likely to play a more positive role because of the guided opportunities for learning.

To sum up, the answer to RQ1 is that factors of social structuration are related to young people's European knowledge, identifications and support for EU membership. In both my English and Bulgarian samples, identifications with and knowledge about Europe and the EU vary significantly with SES and ethnicity. An ethnic majority child from a privileged background is more likely to feel European than an ethnic minority one from a low socio-economic background. The answer to RQ2 is not that clear-cut, though it seems that the relative weight of these factors is contingent on the national context, and by and large, the results are in line with some of the existing literature: in Bulgaria, ethnic segregation seems to be stronger than social segregation (Ivanov, 2006; Nounev, 2006), whereas in England a reverse pattern is noted (Smithers and

Robinson, 2010). A word of caution is due. Different minority groups are studied and the trends might vary among other minorities and nations. SES exerts considerable influence on support for membership, whereas ethnicity seems to be important only in Bulgaria. These results could be interpreted as additional evidence of the relatively stronger impact of socio-economic differences in the UK, and comparatively higher levels of ethnic segregation in Bulgaria.

The answer to RQ3 is: trends of intersectionality are evident in my samples in both countries but more so in Bulgaria. Ethnic minority pupils are much more likely to be of poorer SES. Some young people are indeed hit by multiple waves of exclusion and this applies fully to Bulgarian Roma. National context is of importance as well because the direction and degree of social inequalities as well as the role school plays depends on it but this not a linear relationship.

Conclusion

The findings show that even among the youngest Europeans there are patterns of a social and partially ethnic segregation of the European project. In line with prevalent results in studies on the impact of education and occupation on attitudes towards Europe among adults, the young people whose parents have higher social status and education are more likely to be in support of their country's EU membership. The influence of ethnicity depends on the national

context (and potentially on the ethnic minority group). Thus, the Roma ethnic minorities in my Bulgarian sample are much more excluded from the European project than the Asian ethnic minorities, mainly with family origins in India, in my English sample.

The main contribution this article makes, however, is in relation to the sociology of European identity formation. Social and ethnic inequalities matter in this process. European identity is predominantly elite and racialized and this is perhaps largely due to the fact that young people's knowledge is very much sifted through their social backgrounds. Knowledge in itself does not necessarily lead to identification, as the example of the Indian children shows, but in general there is no identification without knowledge (Slavtcheva-Petkova and Mihelj, 2013). Hence, for the time being it still seems to be the case that the upper classes are much more engaged with the EU.

Identity is indeed 'grounded' in 'social structures and realities' (Sanchez, 2006: 33) and the implications of this social division of European identities are worrying not least because a significant proportion of the European population is potentially left out. Furthermore, these happen to be the most socially disadvantaged groups. Even more troublesome is that the exclusion starts from an early age and is already evident among 9-10-year-old children in my sample. If top-down strategies are to be implemented for the dissemination of

information about Europe and/or the EU and the potential promotion of European identity and positive attitudes towards the EU, then attention should be paid to more actively engaging the people at the margins of society. It goes without saying that social backgrounds are not the only factors that influence these processes. The qualitative questions provide further insights into the significance of other indicators. Young people's definition of Europe is very important for their identification with it (Slavtcheva-Petkova and Mihelj, 2013). Socialisation agents such as parents, school and the mass media also play a significant role (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013). The study shows that the more pupils study about Europe at school, the more they know about it but this in itself does not lead to them identifying themselves as European. Travel provides further opportunities in that respect but again only the more affluent children, mainly in England, benefit from these opportunities. To better account for the role of national context, other countries should be compared and the relationship with national identities should be established. Large-scale surveys could potentially reveal whether the trends evident in this sample are representative. Comparisons with Eurobarometer studies might also be useful. Finally, this study is not without limitations. The sample is not representative and the study looks at two specific ethnic minority groups in the two national contexts. It is, therefore, difficult to make claims about the general role of

ethnicity, given that each ethnic minority group has different history and status. It is also worth making further use of the qualitative data. Finally, a full sociological enquiry should involve an investigation of the EU's presence in the everyday life of children – a further task for researchers.

Notes

1. The results of all tests of statistical significance on relationships between variables reported in the text are presented in table 3.

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Table 1. Sample

Country	Boys		Girls		White British / Ethnic Bulgarian		Ethnic minority	
	National average	Sample	National average	Sample	National average	Sample	National average	Sample
Bulgaria	51.5%	51.4%	51%	47.8%	N/A	67.3%	14.5% -45%	32.7%
England	48.5%	48.6%	49%	52.2%	73.8%	64.2%	25.5%	35.8%

Note: The data for England is retrieved from the Department for Education January 2010 statistical release. The gender ratio applies to all 9-year-old pupils (age as at 31 August 2009). The ethnicity ratio applies to all maintained primary, state-funded secondary and special schools. The gender data for Bulgaria is retrieved from the Ministry of Education statistical release for 2009/2010 and includes all pupils in years 1-4. The Ministry of Education does not release data on ethnicity so the data is retrieved from two NGO reports. There are significant differences in the reported percentages. 45% is the reported figure for year 1 Roma pupils for the county included in the sample. In the last available report (2002) the national average of Roma pupils in primary schools was between 14.5% and 20.6%.

Table 2. Knowledge, identities and support for EU membership by nationality

School	Know Europe	Know EU	European	Support EU membership
Bulgaria (N=107)	62%	34.6%	37.4%	53.3%
England (N=67)	91%	27%	52.2%	73%

Table 3. Statistically significant relationships between variables

Variables	Relationship and tests	
	England	Bulgaria
School and European knowledge	χ^2 = 11.190, d.f. = 5, p = .048	
School and EU knowledge	χ^2 = 22.116, d.f. = 5, p < .001	
School and recognition of EU flag	χ^2 = 19.084, d.f. = 5, p=.002	χ^2 = 20.413, d.f. = 3, p<.001
School and recognition of euro coin		χ^2 = 10.868, d.f. = 3, p=.012
School and support for EU membership	χ^2 = 25.299, d.f. = 10, p=.005	χ^2 = 21.698, d.f. = 6, p<.001
School and European identification	χ^2 = 41.637, d.f. = 5, p < .001	χ^2 = 22.456, d.f. = 3, p < .001
Occupation and European knowledge	ρ = .333, p = .012	ρ = .327, p < .001

Occupation and EU knowledge	$\rho = .373$, $p = .005$	
Occupation and European identification	$\rho = .529$, $p < .001$	$\rho = .404$, $p < .001$
Occupation and recognition of EU flag	$\rho = .403$, $p = .002$	$\rho = .328$, $p < .001$
Occupation and EU membership support		$\chi^2 = 23.995$, d.f. = 6, $p < .001$
Education and EU knowledge	$\rho = .362$, $p = .025$	
Education and European identification	$\rho = .386$, $p = .015$	$\rho = .410$, $p < .001$
Education and EU membership support		$\chi^2 = 21.399$, d.f. = 10, $p =018$
Ethnicity and EU flag recognition		$\chi^2 = 22.629$, d.f. = 1, $p < .001$
Ethnicity and EU membership support		$\chi^2 = 15.705$, d.f. = 2, $p < .001$
Ethnicity and European identification	$\chi^2 = 9.391$, d.f. = 1, $p = .002$ $\varphi = .374$, p	$\chi^2 = 22.285$, d.f. = 1, p

	= .002	< .001
		$\varphi = .456$, p < .001

Note: These relationships are discussed in the text and this table shows the results of the tests of statistical significance